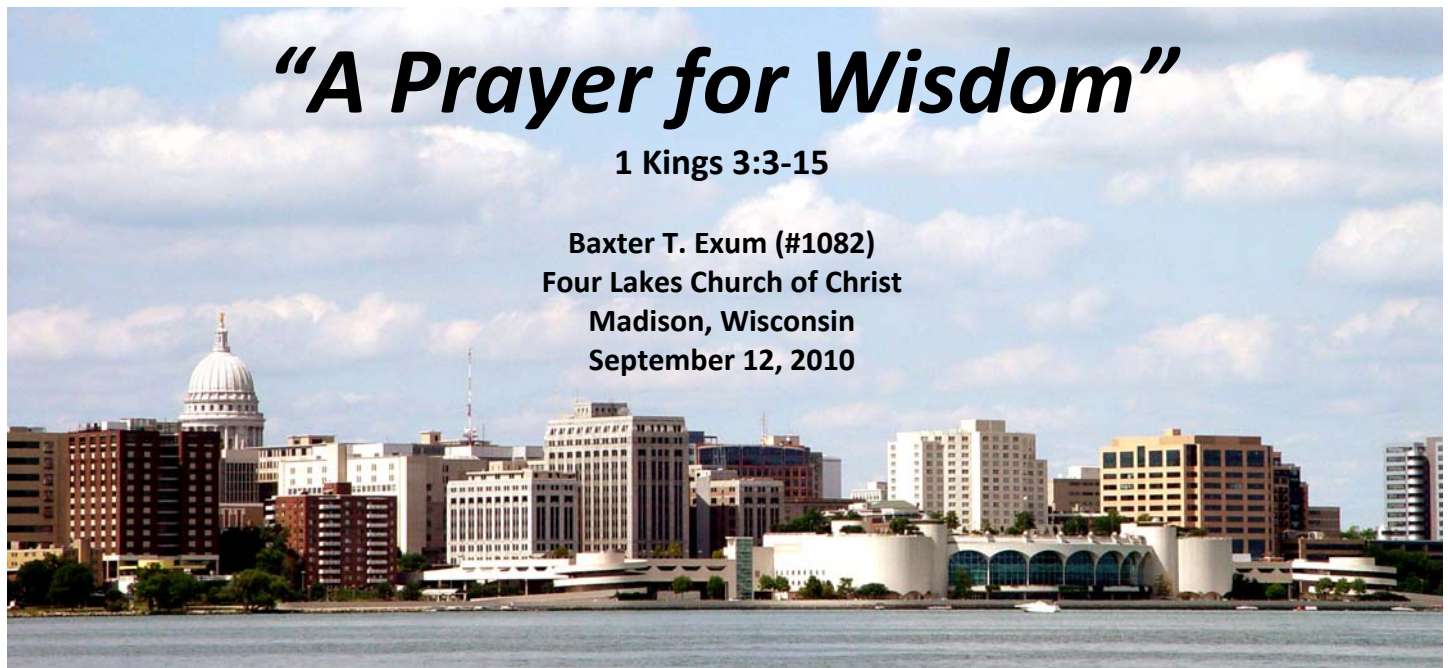


# *“A Prayer for Wisdom”*

1 Kings 3:3-15

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## **Introduction:**

This morning I would like for us to at least briefly consider what our answer would be if God personally told us that we could have absolutely anything. In other words, if God were to give us a blank check, what would we ask for? Now I realize that for some people, that can be a paralyzing question. Perhaps we could compare it to walking in to the Old Country Buffet on a Saturday morning. We go in there, and the choices are almost too much to bear. We look around, and there are almost too many options. Not only are there twenty choices of what to drink, but there is so much food—pancakes, and bacon, and biscuits, and sausage, and bacon, and fruit, and French toast, and bacon, and cinnamon rolls, and grits, and bacon, and ham, and hash browns, and all of the various kinds of eggs, and then of course there is the bacon! And so we are standing there almost paralyzed by the choices, and perhaps somewhere in the back of our minds we can remember something that the doctor might have said, but we look around a little bit, and it is so difficult to make a wise decision.

And this morning perhaps we can try to apply this to our situation with God. There are so many things we can ask for that sometimes it is difficult to ask for what is truly good. James, the Lord's brother, addressed this concern in our Scripture reading this morning (James 4:1-10). There are times when some of us may ask for what is wrong, because (as James said) it is so tempting for us to approach God with selfish or improper motives. This morning, then, as we think about the challenge of filling out a blank check from God, I would like for us to consider an amazing example of wisdom and restraint by looking together at a scene from the life of King Solomon in the Old Testament. Last Sunday morning, one of our members asked for a lesson on the "wisdom of Solomon." This morning, therefore, I would like for us to consider how Solomon got his wisdom, and then next Sunday morning, Lord willing, I would like for us to consider one of the most famous examples of King Solomon's wisdom.

This morning, though, I would invite you to turn with me to the book of 1 Kings 3 as God, the Creator of the Universe, appears to King Solomon in a dream and personally invites him to ask for absolutely anything. Now most of us can hardly imagine this. At least with our own earthly parents, most of us had some limits. Most of us had to be a little creative to try to get our parents to get us what we wanted. Perhaps we went to mom, and she would say, "If it's okay with your dad, then it's fine with me." We would then go to our dad, and he would say, "Well, if it's okay with your mom, then it's fine with me." And so maybe we said, "Yep, mom said it

was fine with her!" Several years ago, my sociologist wife happened to tell me about the results of a recent study where researchers found that most people are more likely to say "yes" to a request if you nod your head affirmatively while you ask the question. Well, someone in our family must have overheard that conversation, because a short time later, one of our children came to us with a question, "Can I go downstairs and play a video game?" You see, he was using the latest sociological research (nodding his head) to get what he wanted! And of course, most parents want to do what is right for their children, most parents want to be able to say "Yes" to various requests, but there are times when we may not be able to say "Yes."

But in contrast, we are about to find in 1 Kings 3 that God approaches Solomon, and in a dream, God invites King Solomon to ask for absolutely anything. Solomon, then, did not need to nod his head, but the Lord moved first, and the Lord gave him that blank check. And at that point, Solomon was standing there in front of the buffet. If you will, please look with me at 1 Kings 3 as Solomon first takes over as king after the death of David, his father, 1 Kings 3:3-15...

***<sup>3</sup> Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. <sup>4</sup> The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. <sup>5</sup> In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you." <sup>6</sup> Then Solomon said, "You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. <sup>7</sup> "Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup> "Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup> "So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"***

***<sup>10</sup> It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. <sup>11</sup> God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, <sup>12</sup> behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. <sup>13</sup> "I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days. <sup>14</sup> "If you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days." <sup>15</sup> Then Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and made peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.***

As we think back over this passage, as we think about Solomon's answer to God's invitation, and as we think about the content of our own prayers, I would invite all of us to consider what it was that allowed King Solomon to make such a wise decision in asking for more wisdom. In other words, what are some qualities King Solomon had that we can try to follow in our lives today? And as we consider that question, I would suggest several very basic ideas.

I. **And first of all, I would simply point out what the Bible points out in 1 Kings 3:3, “Now Solomon LOVED THE LORD...”**

And certainly this needs to be the basis of any request that we ever make of God. Before we approach God in prayer we must love God. In fact, this basic idea is first stated in the Law of Moses and is repeated for us by the Lord Himself in Matthew 22. You may remember that when Jesus silenced the Saducees, the Pharisees got together and set up one of their own lawyers to challenge the Lord with a question, “**Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?**” We don’t know what they expected the Lord to say, but we know that the question was a trap, and yet in Matthew 22:37, the Lord responded to the attorney by saying, “**YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.**” And with that, the Lord turned the tables on the Pharisees, and by the end of the chapter, the Bible says that, “**No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question**” (Matthew 22:46). In other words, it is hard to argue with the command that we are to love the Lord, because it is one of the most basic ideas anywhere in the Bible. And here we find in 1 Kings 3 that Solomon “**loved the Lord,**” the greatest commandment. As we look at this passage, then, I would suggest that this remains one of the great “secrets” in approaching God in prayer as we should. Above all, we are to love the Lord.

II. **There is a second basic concept in this passage, a second factor in Solomon’s life that allowed him to make such a wise decision, and that is, SOLOMON ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE INFLUENCED BY THE GODLY EXAMPLE OF HIS FATHER, KING DAVID.**

In verse 3, we find that King Solomon was, “**...walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.**” Obviously, there are at least two lessons here. First of all, we notice that Solomon followed David’s good example. We know from the Scriptures that David had been loyal to God, that David was a man after God’s own heart. In fact, for further encouragement, we can look back to the previous chapter, and we find that King David gave his son Solomon a solemn charge right before he died. In 1 Kings 2:1-3, the Bible says that, “**As David’s time to die drew near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, ‘I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man. Keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn.’**” And for many of us, we can also look to our own earthly fathers, and like Solomon, we can also say that our fathers have left us a legacy of faith and honor. For many of us, our parents have given us advice similar to the advice that David gave to Solomon. And so the question for us this morning is: Are we molding our lives according to the pattern that our parents left for us? If our parents were good, then hopefully the answer is “Yes.” And hopefully we can pass along that same legacy to our own children. As parents, we learn from this passage that we can have a tremendous influence on our children—teaching them how to pray, teaching them to love and respect the word of God, teaching them to love the Lord, teaching them to put God’s kingdom first, teaching them that church comes before grades, and school, and sports, and everything else, a legacy that will continue long after they leave home.

But while we’re on this subject, we obviously need to point out a danger here. The Bible also says that King Solomon was, “**...walking in the statutes of his father David, except...**” In other words, Solomon was good, but he was not perfect. He loved God, but he allowed himself to be influenced by the world around him. He loved God, but he compromised his faith—maybe just a little bit here and there, but it grew over time. We did not read it, but up in verse 1 of this chapter, we find that, “**...Solomon formed a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh’s daughter...**” There it is! Solomon might have loved God, but he

started drifting, he started taking foreign wives, something that the word of God had warned about. Of course, based merely on human reasoning, a marriage alliance with Pharaoh might have seemed like a pretty good idea. After all, at that point in history, no king wanted to be enemies with Egypt, and yet we find that over time, Solomon kept on slipping. In fact, we can turn over a few chapters to 1 Kings 11:4, and we find that Solomon's apostasy grew much worse over time. In 1 Kings 11:1-4, the Bible says...

***<sup>1</sup> Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, <sup>2</sup> from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. <sup>3</sup> He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. <sup>4</sup> For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been.***

You see, at the beginning of his reign, Solomon followed the example of his father, but over time he slipped and eventually failed to follow David's example at all. There is an obvious lesson here concerning who we choose to marry. Our parents may teach us well, they may leave us a great example, but as our teens and young adults start to date and as you come closer to making a decision concerning marriage, we would encourage you to remember what happened to King Solomon. The Bible teaches in 2 Corinthians 6:14 that we are not to be ***"unequally yoked together with unbelievers."*** In other words, we are not to put ourselves in a situation where we allow ourselves to be dragged along by the neck. The picture I get is of a Chihuahua harnessed side by side with a Great Dane trying to pull a dog sled. That little Chihuahua is going to have a rough time. In the same way, Paul gives a warning that we are not to put ourselves in that situation.

Nevertheless, back in 1 Kings 3, one positive lesson we can learn is that Solomon knew enough to ask God for wisdom, because 1.) He loved the Lord and, 2.) He followed in the footsteps of his father, even if he did allow himself to drift over time.

**III. There is a third very basic lesson for us to consider from Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 3, and that is, Solomon managed to ask for wisdom and God answered that prayer because of SOLOMON'S GREAT HUMILITY.**

It starts in verse 4 as we find that Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings to God. In other words, although he was a king, Solomon very clearly understood who was really in charge. But we really start to see Solomon's humility in the prayer that he offers. We find in verse 6, for example, how Solomon acknowledges that he is king only because God made him king. We remember that Solomon being king was not a foregone conclusion. Remember: David was not the son of Saul, the first king; but instead, God made David king. The kingship was not necessarily passed down from father to son. In fact, even if it were, Solomon was not the oldest son, Solomon was not a military leader, the choice of Solomon did not make sense from any earthly point of view, but it was all God's doing, and in verses 6-7, Solomon acknowledges this.

Solomon's great humility also comes through in the middle of verse 7 as Solomon refers to himself as God's ***"servant."*** How amazing, that the king of such a powerful nation would refer to himself as a ***"servant"***! And then on top of this, we find in the last part of verse 7 that King Solomon says in his prayer to God, ***"I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in."*** In other words, Solomon was expressing his complete dependence on God.

Something else that indicates Solomon's great humility is the fact that Solomon made a request that would benefit others instead of asking for something for his own good. Instead of asking for riches, or fame, or power, or for a long life, or for the death of his enemies, King Solomon asked for wisdom so that he would be able to rule God's kingdom well. And then also notice that several times throughout this prayer, Solomon refers to "God's people," not his people. In other words, Solomon knew that he was not the supreme power in this situation.

And so we find that Solomon approached God with great humility, and certainly this is an attitude that we need to express to God more often in our own prayers—taking our concerns to God, admitting that whatever situation we are facing is beyond our ability to handle it. And so instead of telling God what to do, Solomon's example reminds us to admit that we do not have all the answers, to admit that we are God's children, and to admit that God knows what is best for us.

As I was growing up, I remember my dad buying me my very first cassette tape. And this was a big deal for me. Stuff like that was a luxury, I was pretty sure we couldn't afford it, but I was so excited, and I played it over and over and over again. But after several weeks, the tape itself suddenly broke, and I was devastated. I was too nervous to tell my dad about it, I didn't want to bother him with this, so I took the cassette apart and I actually tied that tape in a little knot. You see, I knew what I was doing! I knew I could fix that thing. But you know what happened. I put the cassette in the player, and then it really went bad! The whole thing got tangled up when that knot tried to go through all the wheels and rollers. Well, I finally admitted defeat and took the whole mess to my dad. And to my surprise he was not mad at all, but he taught me how to splice a tape. I learned something that day! I learned how to splice, but more importantly, I learned that my dad knew more than I did! And in a similar way, sometimes we need to remind ourselves that God knows more than we do, that we are servants of the one true King, that we are God's children.

Solomon, then, took his concerns to God with humility. And whether we are teaching a Bible class for the first time, or whether we are facing challenges as parents, or whether we are unsure which way to go as we are making a life-changing decision, we can also go to God in prayer with humility.

### **Conclusion:**

This morning I hope we have been able to learn something from King Solomon's example. We have learned that King Solomon was basically given a blank check from God. He was standing there in front of the buffet. He could have asked for anything. But Solomon, based on his love for God, based on the godly influence of King David, his father, and based on the fact that King Solomon was humble to begin with, King Solomon asked God for wisdom. We may be amazed that God would make such an open-ended offer, and yet when we read the New Testament, we find that offer basically repeated. In Matthew 7:7, Jesus said to His disciples, ***"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."*** A similar statement is also made by the Lord's own brother in James 1:5, ***"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."*** Like King Solomon, we can also ask God for wisdom.

This morning we have studied King Solomon's prayer for wisdom. Lord willing, we can come together again next Sunday morning to study one of the most famous examples of King Solomon's wisdom as we continue to learn from this great hero of the Old Testament.

The most important appeal we can ever make to God is the appeal that we make through the act of baptism. Some people may not realize this, but the Bible says in 1 Peter 3:21 that, “***...baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.***” Baptism, then, is how we accept God’s free offer of salvation. Baptism is our way of saying “Yes” to God. If you have any questions, we would love to study the Bible with you sometime this week, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)