



On Thursday and Friday of this week, I was at a Willow Creek's Leadership Summit video conference for Christian leaders with some of our staff from CPC. I've been going to this conference for years and I never leave disappointed. There is something special that God seems to do in my heart when I surround myself with other leaders and listen to some of the top communicators in the world. I always leave encouraged, challenged, "filled up" and ready to tackle another season of ministry. As a husband, father, and pastor I constantly seek to grow as leader. Romans 12:8 says that, *"Whoever has the gift of leadership should lead diligently."* This morning, we are going to look at one of the most famous and wise leaders to have ever lived—King Solomon. The question his prayer answers is this: What should leaders be praying for?

You may not think you are a leader, but my guess is that at some level you are. Leadership is about influence. All of us, in some capacity, have influence over others. It doesn't matter if you are a stay-at-home mother, software engineer, school teacher, realtor, barista, pastor or contractor, you have influence and you are a leader. As we eavesdrop on Solomon's prayer, what we are going to see is that this is the kind of prayer leaders need to be praying.

Make no mistake about it, Solomon was an incredible leader. His wisdom, riches, and kingdom knew no bounds. He, like every leader, was also flawed. He became seduced by power, fame, and lust. Like his father, Solomon's path to the throne was not an easy one. We learn from the early chapters of 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles that Solomon had major political and religious problems to deal with. He struggled with his brother who tried to take the throne from him; he had to reprimand one of his father's key military officers, Shimei; he even had to banish Abiathar the priest from Jerusalem. Solomon was also busy building himself a sweet palace to live in. To top it all off, he married Pharaoh's daughter, and secured an alliance with Egypt. Even though some of these decisions would contribute to Solomon's downfall, 1 Kings 3:3 makes it clear that, *"Solomon loved the Lord."* Solomon, like us, made some big mistakes but loved the Lord. Solomon's leadership would further be tested in a dream by the Lord. This leadership test came in the form of a question.

### **God Speaks to Solomon in a Dream**

**At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall**

**give you." 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. 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. 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 (1 Kings 3:5–8).**

After things settle down in Solomon's kingdom, we find him in the city of Gibeon, at a "high place," sacrificing a thousand burnt offerings to the Lord. Because the temple was not yet built, Solomon traveled about six miles northwest from Jerusalem to worship God. At Gibeon, Solomon's worship was extravagant; a thousand burnt offerings is what I would call "off the hook!" Gibeon was a significant place to his father David and it was the site where the tabernacle and the altar of burnt-offerings were once held. It was here that the Lord appears to Solomon in a dream. This was not like any other dream Solomon would have. This was a royal dream, a significant dream. In this dream Solomon has a conversation with the Lord. This is a dream and a prayer.

Let's stop for a moment and pretend that God came to you and said, "Ask for anything you want and I'll give it to you." What would you ask for? If you could ask for anything in the world, honestly, what would it be? Riches? Fame? Health? World peace? The end to poverty and hunger? For the Giants to win the World Series? God, of course, is not a genie in a bottle, but amazingly enough he comes to Solomon in a dream and asked him that exact question, *"Ask for whatever you want me to give you."* This was a test of Solomon's leadership. God wasn't trying to play games with him, but he wanted to see what was really in his heart.

Solomon doesn't immediately answer, does he? Instead, he reminds God of the great love He has poured out to his father David and of the promises God gave to him. We've said before that prayer is reminding God about God. It is also reminding ourselves about God and His promises. That is what Solomon does here. He recalls God's faithfulness to his father and to himself. Then Solomon makes a humble confession. In verse 7 he says that

*"I am but a little child."* We know from history that Solomon was probably about 20 years old when he became king of Israel. When I was 20, I thought I knew everything! Not Solomon. Can you imagine the pressure and responsibility Solomon felt?

He continues in prayer, *"Lord, your people are too numerous to count...who is able to lead them?"* The answer is no one! Israel has always been a stubborn and rebellious nation. But, in humility and honesty, Solomon tells the Lord, "I am just a child." In other words, "I don't know what I'm doing and I need help!" The wonderful thing about prayer is that we can honestly come before God admitting our weaknesses, shortcomings and failures. The first thing Solomon's prayer teaches us is that wise leaders understand their limitations.

Leaders that lead best know their strengths and their limitations. They recognize that their own abilities, strengths, and knowledge just aren't enough to lead well. Solomon's prayer was marked with honesty and humility. Isn't that what we want from all our leaders? As a husband, father, and pastor there is not a day that goes by where I am not hit with the truth that what I offer and bring to the table in my own flesh and strength is just not enough. I need the Lord in every area of my leadership. Without His power, I just won't make it. Solomon knew that the king's primary duties were to be the military leader and judge for Israel. His father David was a great king and Solomon got to view good leadership in action. He also saw firsthand many of the problems and failures of his father. Solomon knew that he was young and inexperienced. In prayer, he recognizes his dependence and need. Even though he has already displayed great wisdom and leadership, he knew that for him to lead Israel effectively, he needed to go outside himself. He needed the Lord's wisdom. Solomon knew his limitations and in prayer confesses them to God. Wise leaders understand their limitations. Do you know yours? We come next to his single request in verse 9 and his answer to God's question should surprise us all.

### **Solomon's Request for a "Listening Heart"**

**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? (3:9).**

There are several things I want you to notice about Solomon's request. First, unlike what most have concluded and heard elsewhere, Solomon does not ask for wisdom. Do you see that? In no English translation nor in the original language does Solomon ask for wisdom. Literally, Solomon requests a "hearing heart" or a "listening heart." The Hebrew word translated "heart" often refers to our mental faculties. The heart in the Hebrew mind was the seat of our will and emotions. It is the location where decisions are made. That is why some translations say that Solomon

asked for an "understanding mind" or a "discerning heart." The word for "listening" in Hebrew is *shema*. Does that sound familiar to anyone? In Deuteronomy 6:4 we read what Jews today call the Shema, *"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."* Solomon needed a listening heart to both **hear** the requests of his people and also to **understand** the voice of the Lord found in His word, the Torah.

Second, I want you to see that the one thing Solomon asks for is not for himself. Solomon is solely focused on his responsibility as king and does not ask anything for himself. The reason he wants a listening heart is so that he can "discern" between good and evil and "govern" and "judge" God's people well. Israel was God's chosen nation. She had to be led in accordance with God's word if the people were to experience His blessing. This listening heart will help him be a great leader for Israel. Solomon did not ask anything for himself, only what would benefit his people who were God's people.

Solomon could have asked for anything in the world and the one thing he asks for is a listening heart. Wise leaders pray for listening hearts. I don't fully understand all that it means to have a listening heart, but I know when leaders have one. Leaders who have listening hearts usually spend more time listening to others and less time doing all the talking. They are also very teachable and even encourage input into their lives from others. They understand their limitations. They are life-long learners who are constantly seeking to grow and improve. Christian leaders with listening hearts spend a lot of time in prayer and in the Word seeking to hear God's voice. They lead out of the overflow of their relationship with God.

One of the best examples I can give is from our own elders. If you've been around here long enough, you know that we are lead, not by a senior pastor, but by a board of elders. These are biblically qualified men who have served Jesus and CPC for many years. This is one of the things that I love about CPC. We are under the leadership of godly men who truly seek to know God and His will for our church body. Some have wondered and asked me about what the process looks like for adding new elders to the board. One of the things that they do is take a potential elder, affectionally called an "elderette," and that man is asked to attend every elder meeting for six months without speaking!

Think about that for a moment. Can you imagine attending a long bi-weekly meeting for six months and never saying a word? Why would our elders want potential new elders to attend meetings for six months without ever joining the discussions? One of the reasons is for them to cultivate a listening heart. That doesn't happen by osmosis. James 1:19 encourages us to *"be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger."* I need to take that ad-

vice more, don't you? After Solomon's request for a listening heart, the Lord responds with great delight.

### God's Delight at Solomon's Answer

**It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. 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, 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. 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. 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" (3:10–14).**

Luis Palau, the famous evangelist and disciple of Ray Stedman, said once that God answers prayer in five ways:

1. No, I love you too much.
2. Yes, but you'll have to wait.
3. "Yes, but quite different from how you thought I would answer."
4. Yes, and here's more!
5. Yes, I thought you'd never ask!

God's answer to Solomon's prayer was a definite, "Yes, and here's more!" God was pleased that Solomon didn't ask anything for himself. He didn't ask for a long life, riches, or protection from his enemies which were all things that Solomon could have really used as the new king. God was delighted in Solomon's selfless and humble request and gives him more than what he asked. Notice that God not only gave him riches and honor, but He gave Solomon a **wise** and listening heart. Wisdom and a listening heart go hand in hand. A wise heart is a listening heart and a listening heart is a wise one. This is the God of grace giving Solomon both what He asked for and even more. God even promises to give Solomon a long life if he continues to walk with Him.

Here is yet another amazing truth about God and about prayer: God delights in giving us more than we ask. This is the God we pray to and another reason to pray. Jesus, in His famous sermon, told us a key to His kingdom in Matthew 6:33, "***But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.***" Like Solomon, when we put God first, when we seek to build His Kingdom and not our own kingdom, "***all these things***" will be added. What are "all these things"? For Solomon, "these things" were wealth, honor, wisdom and long life. In context of Matthew 6, Jesus is teaching His followers to not worry about money, housing, food, and clothing. Jesus encourages us to put Him first and He will take care of the rest—"all these things." He did that for Solomon and He will do that for us.

The point here is that we pray to a generous God. As a father of two children, I love giving my kids gifts and things they don't ask for. I enjoy going to Toys-R-Us just as much as they do! Sometimes I'll surprise them with a visit to Toys-R-Us or I'll take them out to ice cream. How much more so does our heavenly Father delight in giving us more than we ask? Just to be clear, God is not a sugar daddy nor does this mean that we won't struggle to pay the bills. But, when we pray according to His will, He responds. The key here is that we need to be seeking to build His kingdom first. Is Jesus first in your life?

### Solomon's Joyful Response

**And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. Then he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants (3:15).**

Solomon wakes up for this amazing dream-prayer and heads back to Jerusalem. While in Jerusalem he does two things: he worships God and throws a massive party. His private dream became a public worship service and celebration. In light of his new heart and promises of God, his response is one of adoration and celebration. Here finally is the last thought on leadership and prayer this text teaches and that is: worship and celebration should be our response to answered prayer. Part of the reason we are asking each of you to keep and write in this prayer journal is so you can see answers to prayer. One of the joys of being a Christian is the great privilege we have to go to God in prayer trusting that He will answer. Over the years I've kept various journals with prayer requests. It is a huge encouragement to me to look through those journals and see how many times God answered my prayers. We serve a God who loves to answer prayer. Our response should be worship and celebration. When we gather to worship do you come with a sense of gratitude, thankfulness, joy and celebration?

### Conclusion

The question I asked this morning was this, what should leaders be praying for? Solomon's answer is a listening heart. We live in a society that doesn't do listening very well. Did you know that experts have concluded that we are bombarded with roughly 35,000 messages every day? Everywhere we turn people are talking to us. Our families, politicians, advertisers, journalists and friends. Everyday we read emails, talk on the phone, text, see billboards, watch the television, see movies, listen to the radio, tweet, post our status on Facebook, and read blogs. There is a whole lot of talking! In fact, you are listening to me talk; it's what I do for a living. John Maxwell in his book, *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect*, says that, "Most people speak about sixteen thousand words a day. If you transcribed those words, they'd fill a three-hundred page book every week. At the end of a year, you would have an entire bookcase full of words. In a

lifetime, you'd fill a library." George Bernard Shaw knew about this issue, "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." We talk but don't listen well. As you think about last week, how much time did you spend truly listening instead of talking? If you are like me, not much. Most of us are terrible at listening. That is one of the reasons we pay good counselors—just to have someone listen to us!

Wise leaders pray for listening hearts. We all need a listening heart in our marriages, parenting, at our places of work, in our friendships, and in our particular life circumstances. A listening heart is what wisdom is all about. Wisdom is the ability to listen. Only a wisdom that God alone could give was needed for Solomon's rule and reign. Solomon, who would later write the book of Proverbs, learned this truth, "***For the LORD gives wisdom, from his mouth come knowledge and understanding***" (Prov. 2:6). Through prayer, we open up our hearts to the pres-

ence of God. We listen to Him through His word and over time we are given His wisdom.

There is no secret for getting and keeping a listening heart. James 1:5 says, "***If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without fault, and it will be given him.***" Do you want a listening heart? Do you want wisdom? All you need to do is ask. I want to encourage you this week to do one thing—make time to sit in silence for a period of time and listen to the Lord. Take your Bible, read this passage again, and then sit and listen. Simple, yet hard to do.

Tom Brokaw once asked Mother Teresa what she says to God in prayer. Her response was amazing, "I don't say anything when I pray, I just listen." That is what a listening heart is all about. That is wisdom. Wise leaders pray for listening hearts.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*