



What if God came to you and said, “Ask for anything you want and I’ll give it to you.” What would you ask for? For me right now, with a new baby in the house, I’d ask that my wife and I would be able to sleep through the night for an entire month! If you could ask for anything in the world, what would it be? Riches? Fame? Health? World peace? The end to poverty and hunger? For the Giants to win the World Series again? We know that God is not a genie in a bottle, but he reveals himself to Solomon in a dream and asks him that question, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” This was an important test of Solomon’s leadership and his answer is not what you think.

This morning we are going to continue our study of the life of one of the most famous and wise leaders to have ever lived—King Solomon. Like his father, King David, Solomon’s path to the throne was not easy. Solomon had major political and religious problems to deal with early on in his kingdom. His brother, Adonijah, crowned himself as king. But thankfully Bathsheba and Jonathan intervene and David makes things right by crowning Solomon as the rightful king. Solomon then had to reprimand one of his father’s key military officers, Shimei. Next, he was forced to banish Abiathar the priest from Jerusalem. During all this, Solomon was busy building for himself a magnificent palace and a temple for the Lord. In the midst of Solomon’s reign being clearly established, one thing becomes clear—Solomon loved the Lord.

Solomon Loved the Lord

Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar (1 Kings 3:3–4).

As far as I know, Solomon is the only person in the entire Bible that is said to have, “loved the Lord.” I can’t think of a better statement to be made about anybody. I want more than anything to be remembered as a man who loved the Lord. Solomon not only loved the Lord, but showed his love by walking in obedience to God’s commands. Love is more than a feeling. Love for the Lord should be expressed in real and tangible ways. Solomon proved his love for God with an enormous sacrifice. Because the temple was not yet built, Solomon traveled six miles northwest

from Jerusalem to worship God at the “high place” in the city of Gibeon. There he sacrificed 1,000 burnt offerings to the Lord.

I can only imagine the great expense and labor involved in sacrificing 1,000 animals on the altar of God. Solomon’s worship was extravagant because he loved the Lord. He gave to God 1,000 of the best animals he could find in worship. As much as he loved the Lord, there were several warning signs that Solomon’s love was divided. Solomon’s kingdom will completely unravel in 1 Kings 11, but it began with several small decisions.

Warning Signs

Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the Lord, and the wall around Jerusalem. The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the Lord (verses 1–2).

The first warning sign was Solomon’s choice of a wife. Wanting to secure an alliance with Egypt, he married Pharaoh’s daughter. Remember, Egypt was once a place of slavery and bondage for Israel. Instead of trusting in God for security and power, Solomon aligns Israel with a nation that is anti-Israel in every way. We also have no reason to believe that Pharaoh’s daughter had faith in the God of Israel. This wasn’t an issue of her ethnicity but of her spirituality. Solomon was what we call “unequally yoked.”

That’s what happens when a follower of Christ marries someone outside the faith. Solomon married a pagan woman and she wouldn’t be the last. The Bible condemns the marriage of a believer to an unbeliever (Ex. 34:15–16, Deut. 7:3–4) for many different reasons. Several of you are in marriages where one spouse loves God and wants to walk with him while the other does not. It’s a hard place to be; I know that from talking to so many of you. What I often encourage the believing spouse to do is pray and to be a light of God’s love and grace in the home. I’ve seen many marriages turned around as the husband or wife comes to know Jesus personally. Tragically, Solomon’s decision to marry someone outside of the faith eventually contributed to his downfall. There would be many other foreign women that will lead Solomon’s heart away from God.

There was another warning sign in the location Solomon chose to worship. The term, “high place” in the Old Testament holds

a ton of baggage. The high places were elevated locations where people came to worship foreign gods and pagan deities. Instead of worshipping at the high places, the people of God were commanded by him to worship at the chosen place, the Temple in Jerusalem. The problem was the Temple was not built yet. Why? Because it wasn't Solomon's top priority. As he was building a Temple for the Lord, Solomon was also building a palace for himself. We'll discover later that he spent more time and money on his own house than God's house. His priorities were misguided.

Like Solomon, there are always warning signs in our lives that we need to pay careful attention to. Solomon did not wake up one day and decide to throw away his kingdom and ruin his relationship with God. It was a series of small and evil choices that he made over time. He ignored the warning signs as they blinked on the dashboard of his life. We do the same thing too, don't we? We ignore godly and trusted counsel. We flirt with temptation thinking it's harmless. We miss reading the Bible for a few days and it turns into several weeks where we are not in God's Word. We skip church one week to do something fun, and before we know it, a month goes by.

C.S. Lewis in his book, *Mere Christianity*, puts it this way: "Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible."

What are the warning signs in your life that you need to pay attention to this morning? In spite of these warning signs, the God of grace takes initiative and appears to Solomon in a dream. In this dream Solomon has a conversation with the Lord in prayer.

God Speaks to Solomon in a Dream

Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number" (verses 6–8).

God appears to Solomon and says, "*Ask for whatever you want me to give you.*" Did you notice that Solomon doesn't immediately answer God? Instead, he reminds God of the great love he has poured out to his father, David, and of the promises God gave to his father. Solomon reminds God about God. That is a

good way to begin our prayers. Reminding God of his faithfulness and goodness. Solomon tells God who he knows him to be. Solomon then makes a humble confession, "*I am but a little child.*" Solomon was probably about 20 years old when he became king of Israel. When I was 20, I thought I knew everything! You did too, but not Solomon.

None of us will ever be a king, prime minister or president of a nation (most likely) so it is hard for us to imagine the pressure and responsibility Solomon felt as the leader of the nation of Israel. Israel had a long history of being stubborn, complainers and being very difficult to lead. They were a rebellious nation who constantly walked away from God. Even though Solomon has already shown wisdom in several key decisions already, it wasn't enough. Solomon's natural gifts and wisdom were just not enough to lead Israel well. With humility and honesty, Solomon confesses to the Lord, "I don't know what I'm doing and I need help!" The King of Israel in humility confesses his weaknesses to the King of Kings. There's also a good chance he was complaining too, but I had to make an interpretive decision!

Even though we'll never be a king, we can sure pray like one. Solomon's prayer teaches us that wise leaders understand their limitations. Leaders that lead best know their strengths and their weaknesses. They recognize that their own abilities, talents, 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'll fail. Solomon understood that. Do you? Let's look at what Solomon finally asks for.

Solomon Requests a "Listening Heart"

So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (v. 9).

There are several things I want you to notice about Solomon's request. First I want you to see that Solomon does not ask for wisdom. I said this in a sermon a few years ago on prayer. In no English translation nor in the original language does Solomon ask for wisdom. Solomon requests a "discerning heart." The word for *discerning* in Hebrew literally means "hearing" or "listening." The heart in the Hebrew mind was the center of our will and emotions. It is the location where decisions are made. Solomon requests a listening heart. A listening heart would help Solomon to hear the requests of his people and discern good and evil.

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. The reason he wants a listening heart is so that he can

"govern" God's people well and "distinguish" between right and wrong. Israel was God's chosen nation. She had to be led in accordance with God's will if the people were to experience God's blessing. This listening heart will help Solomon become a great king for Israel.

Wise leaders pray for listening hearts. I don't fully understand all that it means to have a listening heart, but I know when a leader has one. Leaders who have listening hearts usually spend more time actually listening to others and less time doing all the talking. People with listening hearts are teachable and even seek constructive feedback from others. Leaders with listening hearts are humble and servant leaders. They are lifelong learners, constantly seeking to grow and improve. Leaders with listening hearts spend a good amount of time in prayer and in God's Word seeking to hear God's voice. They lead out of the overflow of their relationship with God. Those are just a few things that come to mind. After Solomon's request for a listening heart, the Lord responds with great delight.

God's Delight at Solomon's Answer

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court (verses 10–15).

Sometimes God answers our prayer with "no." Sometimes he tells us to wait. But often he says yes and amen! God's answer to Solomon's prayer was, "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 by the way 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 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 what he didn't ask for. God even promises to give Solomon a long life if he continues to walk with him.

Here is yet another amazing truth about God. God delights in giving us more than we ask! God is generous! Jesus, in his famous Sermon on the Mount, 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 the 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. God is generous to his children. When we pray according to his will, God responds. The key here is that we need to be seeking to build his kingdom first, not our own. God is not a "sugar daddy" nor does this mean that we won't struggle to pay the bills. Even in our suffering and pain, God is right there. He is able. We can trust him. He hears our prayers. What do you need to ask God for this morning?

"Ask for anything you want and I'll give it to you." Solomon passed God's test with flying colors by asking for a listening heart. We live in a society that doesn't do listening very well. I read that every day we are bombarded with 35,000 different messages. Everywhere we turn people are talking to us. Our families, politicians, advertisers, journalists and friends. We read emails, talk on the phone, text, see ads, watch television, see movies, listen to the radio, tweet, post our status on Facebook, and read blogs. There is a whole lot of talking going on and very little listening. George Bernard Shaw knew about this issue when he wrote, "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

Do you ever feel that way? Like no one is listening? I sure do. I know my wife often feels that way about me! As you think about last week, how much time did you spend truly listening to others or to God? Most of us are terrible at listening. That is one of the reasons we pay good counselors, just to have someone listen to us! One of the reasons why we come church is so that we can slow down and listen to the quiet voice of God in our songs and in our preaching.

Solomon's prayer teaches us that wise people pray for listening hearts. We all need a listening heart and God's wisdom in our lives. A listening heart is what wisdom is all about. People who have listening hearts have wisdom. People with wisdom have listening hearts. Wisdom is the ability to listen. Solomon, who would later write the book of Proverbs, said this, **"For the LORD gives wisdom, from his mouth come knowledge and understanding"** (Prov. 2:6). Only God can give you the wisdom we all need so badly. He did it for Solomon but will he do it for us?

How do we get a listening heart? It's not a secret. You don't have to earn it or buy it. You don't need a degree. The Bible says, "***If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without fault, and it will be given him***" (James 1:5). Do you want a listening heart? Do you want wisdom? All you need to do is ask God in prayer. What's going on in your life that is overwhelming, difficult or hard? Is there something that you are desperate to have God's wisdom about? Do you need wisdom in your marriage? In your parenting? In a particular situation?

In your prayers this week, ask God for a listening heart and like Solomon, he'll give it to you because you are his child. If you are not a Christian, the wisest thing for you to do right now is to give your life over to Jesus Christ, who is the wisdom of God.

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

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