

**“Touching Heaven:
A PRAYER FOR WISDOM”**

I Kings 3:5-15

Wisdom means asking for the right things.

A sermon preached by
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As we gather on this weekend before the July 4th holiday, I continue to marvel at the wisdom of our American forefathers. In the 18th century, democracy was a radical idea. But they figured out a way to put the government in the hands of the people. An executive, legislative, and judicial branch of government. A bicameral legislative branch. Checks and balances. A Bill of Rights. It's truly amazing that they thought of all that stuff, and that it has lasted over 230 years. Sure, we have had struggles and tragedies and stupidities along the way, and we are facing immense challenges today. But we are still standing. America is still a good idea, and I am still glad to be a part of this wise endeavor.

As the people of God, we like wisdom, even if we're always very good at it. We want to be wise in spiritual things, to be aware of the truth of God and how to apply it in our everyday lives. The unfortunate thing about our human condition is that we have to learn wisdom. We are not naturally wise. Wisdom is more than just knowledge or expertise or skill. It is all of those things, combined with experience that gives good judgment. Wisdom means we have discernment and understanding of life's situations so we can decide the right thing to do and say and be in any circumstance. Wisdom comes through study, prayer, and walking the way of faith.

But we continually stray from the way by asking God for things that will not make us wise. Even if we don't come right out and ask God for these things, our lifestyle shows what is most important to us. Wealth, status, luxurious possessions, power, career advancement, pleasure, recreation—these are the things we strive for. But they are not the things that will get us where we truly want to be—happy, fulfilled, satisfied, confident, truly successful. We show our lack of wisdom by asking for the wrong things.

Wisdom knows to ask for the right things—not for wealth or power or political success, but for the things of God, the spiritual things that will make a difference for all eternity.

King Solomon knew how to ask for the right thing, and God blessed him and granted his request and gave him even more than he asked. The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and offered to do whatever he asked for. But even though Solomon was only about twenty years old when this happened, and he felt woefully inadequate to govern his father's kingdom, he was already wise beyond his years. He did not ask for a huge army or more conquests or great wealth or many wives. He simply asked for an understanding mind that could discern between good and evil. That would be enough, if he could just govern his people well and follow the commandments of God. Then everything else would fall into place.

That was all he asked for, but Solomon's request pleased God. It pleased God so much that God gave Solomon wisdom, plus what he didn't ask for—wealth and fame and power. It's like asking for a cheeseburger, and God gives you the McDonald's Corporation.

If we were to ask God for anything today, what do you think would please him? To be wise, to receive a blessing from God, to know the abundant gift of life—what would it take? What do we ask for? Let me suggest three requests we can make.

First, **we ask to know God's will.** I think this is what Solomon means by an understanding mind. We want to be able to discern between good and evil, to tell the difference between right and wrong, to be able to make good judgments. If we know the will of God, these things should become clear to us. It's not so much that we want God to bless what we are doing, as we want to find out what God is blessing, and that's what we will do.

I think we hesitate to put ourselves completely under God's will because, one, it takes us out of control of our lives, and, two, we fear the constraints that God's will might put on our freedom. We're afraid that if we always do what God wants us to do, then we'll never get to do what we want to do.

That kind of freedom is like the skydiver who jumped out of the plane one day, and halfway down, he decided he wanted to be free.

He managed to wriggle free of the parachute and backpack he was wearing. As he let go of the harness, he shouted “Ah! Freedom!” Of course, he also plunged to his death.

The will of God is not a prison for our soul, but a fence that allows us to live the way God created us to live. In God is perfect freedom. In God is perfect pleasure. In God is real wealth and real success and real power—all the things we run away from God to acquire. God’s rules, God’s commandments, God’s principles are all intended for our own good. As the Lord spoke through the prophet Jeremiah, “*Surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.*”¹ If we want to be wise, we will ask to know the will of God, then to live in it.

Second, **we ask for strength in trials.** It doesn’t take a very wise person to know that we will encounter challenges along the way. We want to have wisdom and grace when the road is difficult.

Wouldn’t it be wise to prepare ourselves spiritually so that when the tough times come, we have the strength to stand the trial? One of the things that breaks my pastor’s heart is to see people just sort of dabble in Christianity for years, and then when some tragedy or trouble hits their lives—an illness, a death, an accident—their props are totally knocked out from under them. Inevitably they end up questioning their faith and their God. “Where is God?” they cry. I want to say, “God hasn’t moved! He’s right where you left him, in the closet of neglect, on the shelf of indifference. He’s just kind of hard to find when you’ve put everything else on top of him.”

Jesus told a parable about two builders, one who built his house on the rock, and one who built his house on the sand.² When the storms came and the winds blew, the house built on sand was washed away, and the house built on rock stood firm. We are wise to build our life on the Rock of God, and to prepare ourselves to withstand the storms.

Do you remember the great tsunami that struck right after Christmas in 2004? It devastated the nations around the Indian Ocean. It was one of the worst natural disasters in history, taking almost

230,000 lives. While many cities and villages along the Indian Ocean suffered catastrophic losses, the port city of Pondicherry, India, and its 300,000 inhabitants were spared. Just outside the city limits, 600 people were killed by the devastating tidal wave, but Pondicherry withstood the tsunami with no loss of life. Why were they protected?

The answer began 250 years ago when France colonized the city. The French built a massive stone seawall. Year after year, the French continued to strengthen the wall, piling huge boulders along a mile and a quarter of the seashore.

The French stopped building the Pondicherry seawall when the colony was transferred to the Indian government. The last stone was laid in 1957. But their preparation helped them withstand a disaster that would occur five decades later.³

Prayer builds a wall against the destructive forces of the world. Faith sets up battlements against the attacks of despair and hopelessness. Our relationship with God gives us a foundation to stand on in the midst of our trials and troubles. You need to be ready because sooner or later, the waves are going to come crashing in. The storms will come. Ask God for strength to stand.

Phillips Brooks, the great preacher of the 19th century, had these wise words of advice: “Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger people. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be a miracle. Every day you shall wonder at the richness of life which has come to you by the grace of God.”⁴

If you want to be wise like Solomon, ask to know the will of God; ask to have strength for your trials; and third, **ask for the joy of the inner life.** One of my favorite Bible verses is Nehemiah 8:10: “*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*” Our happiness, our fulfillment, our meaning in life is not ultimately dependent on anything at all that is external to us. It is all internal. It is all spiritual. It has little to do with the outward circumstances of your life. That’s why missionaries to third-world countries always report that the people there, living in

direst, abject poverty, are some of the happiest folks they had ever seen. And the wealthiest people you know may also be the most miserable.

Bob Reccord is a writer who suffered a sudden and severe cervical spine (neck) injury. His pain was so intense, the medical personnel couldn't get him still enough for an MRI without sedating him. The doctor, unintentionally poetic, told him, "Bob, your neck is a wreck." He had to sleep in a recliner on bags of ice, and then only for an hour at a time. Part of his left side was numb, and in the other part he experienced excruciating, sharp waves of pain.

About three weeks into his recovery, which included wearing a neck brace 24/7 and missing work, Bob struggled to go outside on his back porch, just for a change of scenery. Sitting there on a cold and blustery day, Bob was surprised by a bird that flew up, landed on the porch rail, and began to sing. It was rainy and dreary; no creature had a reason to sing that day. Bob fantasized about shooting the bird off the rail. But the blasted bird continued to sing.

The next day dawned sunny and bright and warm—a beautiful day. Bob inched painfully out to the porch again, only to be joined in a few minutes by the same bird, warbling louder and brighter than ever. How he wished for his shotgun! But instead Bob had this incredible thought: "An amazing truth hit me head on: the bird sang in the cold rain as well as the sunny warmth. His song was not altered by outward circumstances, but it was held constant by an internal condition. It was as though God quietly said to me, 'You've got the same choice, Bob. You will either let external circumstances mold your attitude, or your attitude will rise above the external circumstances. You choose!'"⁵

We can choose today what to ask God to do for us, and if we choose wisely, he will bless us far over and above what we even asked for. When Solomon prayed and asked for an understanding mind, God was pleased with his request, and he promised to give Solomon not only one of the world's wisest minds, but also the other things he

did not ask for—riches and honor and length of life. Isn't that just like God? Isn't God good—all the time?

Doesn't it make you hungry? When Solomon woke up from his dream, he went immediately to the house of the Lord, and he stood before the ark of God's presence. He gave his offerings to God, and then he provided a feast for all his servants.

Following Solomon's great prayer today, we want to make a trip to the communion rail. As we come to the Lord's Table, we come into his presence. I want you to come today with an offering of prayer on your lips. Let it be a prayer to know God's will for your life. Let it be a prayer to be strong for your time of trial. Let it be a prayer to enjoy the spiritual life God wants to give you. Come and pray wisely, and God will bless you abundantly, and you will share in the feast.

¹ Jeremiah 29:11.

² Matthew 7:24-27.

³ Chris Tomlinson, *Associated Press*, January 4, 2005.

⁴ *Leadership*, Vol. 12, No. 2, cited on *PreachingToday.com*.

⁵ Bob Reccord, *Forged By Fire: How God Shapes Those He Loves* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), p. 112.