

A few years ago, I was doing a home improvement project and decided I needed to rewire the lights and outlets in my basement. I worked for hours on this project. At the end, I turned on the switch and—nothing! I double checked my work. I went over it again and again. I scoured YouTube, but I wasn't getting anywhere. I was so frustrated. And then it dawned on me, "Hey Dan! Your dad is an electrician. Why don't you call him and ask for some help?" After a few minutes on the phone I had everything I needed. I thought to myself, "Why didn't I call him before I started this whole project?" How many times in life could we all say the same thing about our heavenly Father? How many headaches and frustrations and disappointments could we avoid, how much wasted energy could we save, if we began by asking God for guidance?

We are in a series this summer on prayer called *Teach Us to Pray*. Every Christian I know wants to grow in their prayer life, to pray more often, to pray with greater power, to hear God's voice when they pray. Last week we learned from Hannah how to come to God with our desperate needs. Today, we are going to learn from Solomon how to come to God and ask for guidance, how to seek wisdom. We have entire industries that are focused on providing us wisdom: counselors give us wisdom on self-care and relationship, financial advisors give us wisdom on money, accountants give us wisdom with taxes, consultants give us wisdom on strategies. Although it is wonderful to have professionals who can help us in all of those fields, isn't it incredible that God—the wisest being in the universe, the one who made the world and understands it perfectly, the one who sees the past, the present, and the future completely, the one who knows us better than we know ourselves, the one who searches hearts, the one from whom nothing is hidden—that God, our heavenly father, allows us to come to him, any time we want or need, and ask him for wisdom? He doesn't charge \$150 an hour; he gives wisdom freely because he loves us. What a gift!

If you have your Bible, turn with me to 1 Kings 3. Solomon, the young son of King David, has just become king of Israel at about twenty years old. David's forty-year reign brought spiritual revival, economic prosperity, and military strength. Now, Solomon steps into this massive role, with the nation looking to him for leadership. Here's what we read: "The Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you'" (1 Kings 3:5). Imagine the God of the universe saying, "You can ask me for anything and I'll give it to you." A blank check with God's signature on it—what a proposition presented to Solomon! Listen to Solomon's request:

Solomon answered, "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. 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?" (1 Kings 3:7-9)

He asks for God to guide him, to give him wisdom and understanding!

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.” (1 Kings 3:10-14)

God has such a generous response to Solomon! He says, “Because you asked for wisdom to serve other people rather than just blessing on yourself, I am not only going to give you the wisdom you asked for, but I am also going to bless you in every other area as well.” It’s remarkable how often blessings appear in the lives of those who earnestly seek wisdom. Some people’s only focus is on getting blessings. They end up trampling over wisdom trying to get those blessings and the blessings are ever-elusive. Other people’s primary focus is on gaining wisdom; those are the people who usually end up with more blessings than they can count.

We want to learn from Solomon not only how to pray for wisdom, but also how to open our hands to receive it, and how to put it into practice in our lives.

### **Asking for Wisdom**

Of all the things that Solomon could have asked for, why did he ask for wisdom? The answer is a combination of self-awareness and humility. He said, “I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties” (1 Kings 3:7). If you think you already know it all, you’ll never ask for help; if you have humility, you will. The Bible says, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought” (Romans 12:3). Self-awareness and humility are the game-changers. What’s truly remarkable about this is that Solomon was only twenty years old. Late teenage years and early twenties are typically the absolute peak in a person’s life for thinking they know everything, that they have it all figured out, that they don’t need any help or guidance. But Solomon had the humility to know he needed help, so he asked for it. If you are young like Solomon—do what Solomon did and ask for wisdom!

I also want to speak to another group of people who might struggle with asking for wisdom: those with a lot of experience—CEOs, senior citizens, PhDs, medical doctors, wealthy people. Those who are at the top of the org chart, those who have passed a lot of exams, or been very successful, or those who have lived long enough to have seen a few things—each of those positions can incline you to think you are an expert, to think that you have it all figured out! But I want to encourage you, it is more important now than ever that you have the humility to earnestly seek wisdom. “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:12). Because of the position you are in, there is more riding on your decisions than ever. Never get to the place where your humility has faded and you lose your desire for feedback, counsel, and wisdom. If you do, sooner or later, there will be a fall.

We must stay humble! Can I tell you one way this hits me on a regular basis? Nearly every week I write a sermon. I have been writing sermons weekly for over twenty years. I have four degrees in my area of work. I have taken classes on preaching. I have taught classes on preaching. It is entirely possible for me to sit down during the week with my computer, a Bible, and a few good books, and write a sermon based on what I think would be helpful for you to hear. I could use my mind and my training and my experience to put together a decent message. Or, before I begin my sermon, before I open my computer or open any books, I can get down on my knees and call out to God and say, “God, no amount of knowledge, or training, or experience, or degrees are sufficient to help me bring your word to your people. On my own, I am helpless and entirely incapable of bringing anything in this message that will make a difference. I gladly acknowledge that I am 100% dependent on you to show me what to say and how to say it. On my own, I can do nothing. Please, I am desperate for you God, speak to me and guide me as I prepare this message.” Let me ask you, what kind of sermon do you want to hear: one where I only used my experience, or one where in true humility I desperately sought the Lord?

What's true for me in preaching is true for you in every area of life. When it comes to your marriage, when it comes to your parenting, when it comes to your job, when it comes to how to reconcile a broken relationship, when it comes to how you spend and invest your time, how you spend and invest your money, come with humility and beg God for wisdom! James 1:5 gives us an incredible promise: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

## **Acquiring Wisdom**

It begins with asking for wisdom, but asking itself is not enough. We must know the process for acquiring wisdom. If you ask for it, how do you get it? Is God going to zap it into your brain? I remember studying for a math test in high school. I wished so badly I could just lay down, put the book over my head, fall asleep, and wake up with all that information in there. But it doesn't work like that. Just because we pray for guidance doesn't mean we'll instantly have the wisdom to know who to date, who to marry, how to raise our kids, how to deal with conflict, when to leave our job, what house to buy. That's not how it works! It requires participation on our part! Don't just ask for wisdom. Be willing to do whatever it takes to find wisdom. Proverbs 4:7-8 says, "Get wisdom! Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Cherish wisdom, and she will exalt you; embrace wisdom, and she will honor you." In other words, do whatever it takes, pay any price to acquire wisdom!

How do we do that? There are three sources that deliver a continual supply of wisdom for those who are seeking it.

### *God's Son*

1 Corinthians 1:30 says, "Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God," and Colossians 2:3 says, "All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ." Wisdom isn't an idea; it's a person. Jesus is the very embodiment of wisdom, so if you are looking for wisdom, Jesus is the first and best place to look. But when you look to Jesus, be prepared for wisdom to come in unexpected ways. The world says that greatness is assigned to those who have the most power and influence. Jesus says that greatness is assigned to the one who serves. The world says when people wrong you, cut them off, and make them feel the pain. Jesus says blessed are the merciful and the peacemakers. The world says your net worth reflects your personal worth. Jesus says a man's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions, that it's more blessed to give than to receive, that real joy is found in loving God and loving others. The world says that we should take the path of upward mobility. Jesus says we should take the path to the cross. Look to Jesus for wisdom but be prepared for wisdom to come in an unexpected form.

### *God's Word*

Psalms 19:7-8 says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple." 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." If you want to become wise and be equipped and trained by God on how to live a righteous life, this is the manual! Trying to build a life of wisdom without the Scriptures would be like trying to assemble IKEA furniture without the instructions. You could have a thousand years; it will never happen! God has given us what we need, but we must consult his Word.

### *God's people*

"Victory is won through many advisers" (Proverbs 11:14). "Walk with the wise and become wise" (Proverbs 13:20). If you want wisdom, yes, look to Jesus. Yes, look to God's Word. But also look to

God's people. You will become wise if you surround yourself with wise people. An old adage says that you become the average of your closest friends and most trusted advisors. I can't tell you how often I am picking up the phone and seeking counsel from pastors who lead churches who are further along than ours, from leaders who are more visionary and organizationally minded than I am, from husbands who have thriving marriages, from fathers who have healthy children, from men and women who have vibrant prayer lives. I want to learn, I want to grow. I am constantly asking questions.

We are not limited to the contact lists on our phones. Some of the greatest wisdom I've received in the last few months came from a man who lived three centuries ago. Reading biographies can change your life. There are podcasts where the smartest, most successful people in the world gladly and freely share what they know. These days, suffering from a lack of wisdom is like starving in a grocery store. There is literally no excuse! Choose godly people, wise people, and soak in all the wisdom you possibly can.

## Applying Wisdom

Like Solomon, we must ask for wisdom and we must know how to acquire wisdom, but perhaps the most crucial part of the entire process is applying wisdom. If there is anything we learn from Solomon's prayer and life it is that it's not enough to ask for wisdom and acquire wisdom; what really matters is that we do something with it! His story has a sobering twist. God gave Solomon a lot of wisdom. Kings and queens came from far and wide to listen to him. He wrote about animals and plants. He wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,000 songs. He had so much wisdom, but it didn't consistently apply it in his life. He broke God's laws, he built a harem with hundreds of women, and he bowed before idols and worshiped the gods his wives imported from foreign lands, which sent the entire nation in a downward tailspin. He had access to all the wisdom in the world, but in the book of Ecclesiastes, he says that his life became empty and meaningless; it was like chasing after the wind. "The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel...Solomon did not keep the Lord's command. So the Lord said to Solomon, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you" (1 Kings 11:9-11). He had an incredible life, but it all came crashing down, because he didn't apply wisdom. When push comes to shove, when the rubber meets the road, what matters most is not having wisdom, but applying wisdom.

I have a big decision to make in the coming months. There are two options in front of me, and I must decide on one or the other. There are pros and cons to both. I've been thinking about it since the start of the year and have been leaning one way. Over the last few weeks, I had conversations with two men in this church who are both about 25 years older than me, who have a track record of making very wise decisions. They are living the sort of lives I would like to live one day. Independently, they both advised me toward the option I was leaning away from. This is where the rubber meets the road! Am I going to keep with my initial plan, or, having received wisdom, do I have the humility to take their advice? I literally said this week to my life group that after receiving these men's wisdom, I would be a fool not to change my mind. Your doctor can tell you to eat healthily and exercise, but knowing that isn't enough—applying it is what matters. Your financial advisor can tell you to save 15% of your salary for retirement, but knowing that isn't enough—applying it is what matters. Your counselor can tell you to be more respectful to your husband or more loving to your wife, but knowing that isn't enough—applying it is what matters. Like he did with Solomon, God could make you wisest person ever to live, but having all that understanding isn't enough. It's what you do with it that matters!

So how do we do that? You've had the humility to know you need wisdom, you've prayed earnestly and asked God to guide you, you have chased after wisdom like gold and silver, you have looked to God's Son, God's Word, and God's people. What's next? Here's the playbook.

1. **Be committed to God's best.** Once you know the right thing, don't settle for anything less than God's best. If your marriage is on the rocks, don't settle for a peaceful and amicable divorce and

good co-parenting. Be committed to unity and reconciliation! If you need to lose eighty pounds to be healthy, don't settle for losing twenty. Be 100% committed to what is best.

2. **Start where you are.** A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Every one of us should want to be financially secure when we retire. That starts with one deposit at a time. The same is true in every area of life. Take that first step. Zechariah 4:10 says don't despise the day of small things! Start where you are.
3. **Stay diligent.** A week of eating salads isn't going to do anything for your cholesterol. A week of going to the gym isn't going to do anything for your muscle mass. It requires staying power. Start where you are, but don't stay there. Keep with it! For years. For decades. I asked a guy in my life group this week who is very strong, "How long have you been doing heavy lifting?" He said, "Twenty-seven years." It shows. Stick with it! Romans 12 says, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor." Keep it up!
4. **Realize what is at stake.** I was with a group of friends a few months ago, and one of the guys has a health condition that he was not taking seriously. He was joking about it, brushing it off. Another friend who was with us is in the medical field and he said, "Do you know the conversation I don't want to have? I don't want to have to tell your children at your funeral that you didn't love them enough, that you were not committed enough to being in their lives, to go to the doctor and come up with a plan." Three weeks later we all got a text, not only thanking us for the conversation but also showing us that he had been to the doctor and was taking ground. Realize what's at stake—maybe it's your expected lifespan, or the vitality of your marriage, or the health of your kids and family, your legacy, someone else's eternity. Realize what's at stake!!
5. **Rely on others.** We need people pushing us along. People giving us feedback. People holding us accountable. People on the race chasing after the same goals as we are. People to pick us up when we fall. People to pray for us. The Bible says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor."

Solomon asked for wisdom—and when he followed it, he flourished. But when he ignored it, he fell. What will you do with the wisdom God is offering you? If you run *this* playbook, you will have all the blessings that come with wisdom. If you are broken down on the road and you have a membership to AAA, they will come and help you; they will rescue you and get you where you need to go. The same is true in life. No matter what journey you are on, if you ask God for wisdom, you acquire wisdom, and you apply wisdom, wisdom will rescue you and take you where you need to go. The Bible says wisdom will exalt you, honor you, and be a crown on your head.

Let's pray: Father, we are desperate for your wisdom. In our families, our decisions, our leadership—every area of our lives. Make us humble enough to ask for it, diligent enough to pursue it, and courageous enough to apply it. For your glory, and our good.