

THE MESSAGE for July 24, 2011

1 Kings 3:5-12

Solomon... Wisdom for Living

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If you were granted one wish, what would it be? And of course, it can't be for more wishes. I'm guessing we all have at least one wish, one thing we dream to see come true. As you are thinking about that consider this, there are many dream stories in the Bible. God uses dreams for at least three purposes; warning, prophecy, encouragement.

First – dreams serve as a warning. In Matthew's Gospel, the wise men are warned in a dream not to return to Herod, but to choose another route. In the next verse, Joseph is warned in a dream to flee to Egypt with Mary and the baby Jesus.

Second – dreams serve to reveal prophecy. Through dreams God explains what's going to happen in the future. In Genesis, Joseph the youngest of 12 dreams that his brothers will bow down to him, and his dream comes true.

Third – dreams serve to encourage. That's what we find in today's Bible reading. God appears to Solomon in a dream and asks him, *what do you wish for?*

Some background. Solomon is the son of David and Bathsheba. He succeeds David as king, and rules Israel for about 40 years (960 to 922 B.C.). Solomon is known for building a magnificent temple and having hundreds of wives. He is credited with writing the Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. He was a busy guy.

Solomon's wisdom is usually recalled in the famous story of two women who come before him with a baby, each claiming to be the mother. Solomon orders the child be cut in half and given to both women, by watching how the women react, he determines which one is the true mother.

In today's story, God offers Solomon a wish, an answer to his prayer. Solomon does not ask for worldly success or riches. He asks for wisdom for a discerning and listening heart.

What an awesome example of a faithful leader who sees the importance of putting God's kingdom first. Every faithful leader puts God's mission first. Every godly leader asks the question – *will I make it about me or the mission?* Faithful leaders focus on fulfilling God's mission and not our own.

(Read Text: 1 Kings 3:5-12)

Solomon shows humility by admitting that he is “only a little child and does not know how to carry out his duties.” I always pictured Solomon as a wise, old king. I forget he was young once. In our story for today, he is only about 20 years old and just

beginning to lead. He lacks experience and he knows it. There is wisdom in admitting that. Can you imagine being responsible for leading a nation at the age of 20?

Solomon asks God for wisdom – wisdom for living and for leading. Oddly enough he didn't always make wise decisions. He didn't always listen to God's voice or follow God's direction. Instead, he listened to his own selfish desires at times. Truth is, all leaders, no matter how wise, can make poor decisions.

Knowing this, I have a little reminder taped on the wall in my office. It's a quote from Paul "Bear" Bryant, *"When you make a mistake, there are only three things you should ever do about it: admit it, learn from it, and do not repeat it."*

That's great advice. Every one of us makes mistakes. Every one of us is a mixed bag of good and bad intentions. Every one of us is a leader of some kind with the power to influence and shape the lives of others for good or bad: as a parent, a spouse, a neighbor, an employee, a boss, a friend, an enemy. We all have the power to influence and shape the lives of others. That power, given to us by God, is both a gift and a responsibility.

I love how God comes to Solomon in a dream and offers him support. I love how Solomon asks for wisdom in living, discernment to do what is good and right and acceptable. Solomon wishes for a listening heart.

I wonder how we can develop a listening heart for "discerning" God's will in our lives. As baptized Christians, that's our #1 goal in life to live according to God's will and not our own. We pray that Landon, Cooper, and Ben will live according to God's will. And we pray that God will use us to support them in this new life of faith that we share in Christ Jesus.

I strive to live according to God's will for my life as a godly leader. And yet, I find it hard sometimes to discern between my will and God's will. So here is what I've learned about doing God's and developing a listening heart. I strive...

- To see myself and others as God's servants,
- To assume an attitude of gratitude,
- To have ears that hear with humility.

These are all things that Solomon does in the beginning, but as he gained more experience and gets more success he also gets less faithful. He forgets about his life-changing dream encounter with God. He forgets about his servant stance. He loses track of his humility and gratitude, and he spends less and less time listening to God.

In our world things like servant, gratitude, and humility are seen as signs of weakness – not success. And yet for those who call themselves Christian it isn't about being successful. It's about being faithful. We are to be faithful to Jesus and his way of life.

The cross is our constant reminder that Jesus is the ultimate example of servanthood, and gratitude, and humility. Jesus spent as much time in prayer, listening and discerning God's will and God's guidance for his life, than he did anything else.

As many of you know I'm into T-Shirts that capture our calling as disciples of Jesus. So here is my latest design,

On the front: *Living life the Jesus way...*

On the back: *are you? (Romans 12)*



We'll get to Romans 12 in a minute. Would you be willing to wear a shirt like that? And if someone came up and tapped you on the shoulder and asked "are you what?" Would you be able to give an answer?

Consider this question: **What prevents us from living life the Jesus way?** I believe many things can prevent us from living life the Jesus way but nothing creates a bigger stumbling block than EGO. So I want to redefine EGO for us here this morning.

EGO is defined in so many ways. Let's say that EGO is *the thinking, feeling, acting part of oneself in relationship to self and others usually putting the self above or before anyone or anything else.*

When you're talking with someone, do you find yourself thinking about what you want to say rather than concentrating on what they're saying? That's our EGO, wrapped up in our own wants. Likewise our EGO can prevent us from listening to God and God's will for us.

When we stay busy in order to avoid our sinful thoughts, feelings, or actions towards others, that's our EGO driving us to stay in a protection mode and avoid being held accountable. I'm not saying that busyness is a bad thing, but when busyness becomes an escape from growing in our relationships and working out our differences, it can be detrimental.

Solomon asks for a listening heart, but somewhere along the journey he stopped listening to God. Listening is a skill. Like any skill, we have to practice it to get good at it. Then next time you are with someone listen to understand them.

I want to redefine EGO for us here this morning. Consider EGO as an acronym for Edge God Out or Exalting God Only.

Often, when our EGO drives us, we Edge God Out of our lives. We reject God and God's will for our lives and we become unfaithful. But what if, EGO was a way to remind us to Exalt God Only? What if, we lived everyday to please God, giving God all the thanks and praise, seeing our lives as a blessing and living our lives as a blessing to others? That's the Jesus' way.

Exalting God Only begins when we practice listening to God's word. That brings us to Romans 12. I invite you to read Romans 12 everyday this week. Let God speak to you through it.

Find a time when you can be free from interruption for at least half an hour to practice this. Schedule time for it and make it a priority this week. Read Romans 12 and write down whatever is in your heart: your feelings, hurts, struggles, questions. Then close your eyes and listen for God to speak to you through this text. Listen for the words that come to your mind and write them down too. At the end of the week read over what you've written. You might be surprised at what you hear God is saying to you.

And if you are so moved, I would love to hear your story. Email me or call me. Or share your story with your LIFE Group or with some other trusted friend.

Here's my one wish and I hope it's yours too. Here's my dream or is it God's dream, hopefully it's your dream too – that we not Edge God Out of our lives this week but that we Exalt God Only with everything we say and everything we do. In other words, let's put a smile on God's face. Now that's wisdom for living. Amen.