

LESSONS FROM KING SOLOMON: Wisdom Is Not Enough

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*Wisdom is a shelter
as money is a shelter,
but the advantage of knowledge is this:
that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.*
Ecclesiastes 7:12

The task was daunting, far too great for one so young and inexperienced. Son of a legendary father; mother first brought to the royal palace to satisfy the king's lust; younger than many of his siblings who aspired to the same position he was handed by an aging father with failing faculties. At the very moment he was named successor to his father's 'estate', an older brother was leading an uprising against him.

None of that prevented God from raising Solomon up as successor to the mighty King David.

David knew that Solomon by himself could not long survive the intrigue within and the enemies without their borders. So he gave his son explicit instructions: *observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may succeed in all you do and wherever you go and that the LORD may keep his promise to me... (1 Kings 2:3 – 4).*

The first lesson we learn from Solomon is this: **We do not exist for ourselves:** we live, work, and play in a continuum. We are as dependent on those who have gone before us, as those who succeed us are dependent on us.

David knew that the ultimate success of his life would be determined by his descendents, extending into many generations. God had told him many years before, *'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'* (1 Kings 2:4) Solomon was the first of those descendants, but he would not be the last. As the descendants went, so went David's legacy – and so went the kingdom.

Solomon needed to learn that lesson quickly, if the kingdom of Israel was to survive. He had to learn that his own legacy would be determined by his descendants, not solely by

himself. Both he and his father were in the same situation. If their descendants failed, so did they.

It is no different for us today. We may not be heirs to a kingdom, but we are keepers of our forefathers (and foremothers) legacy, just as surely as our own descendants are co-determinants with us of our legacy.

Of course, there were also direct benefits to Solomon if he observed what the Lord required. He would succeed in all he did and wherever he went. His own kingdom would be secure, and his family and his subjects would live in peace. Not a bad return for honouring God!

There was, of course, the problem of Solomon's youthfulness and lack of experience. Time would take care of his age, but experience is not always a good teacher. Unexamined experience leads only to repetition of the past, not to a better future.

The second lesson we learn from Solomon is this: **we need wisdom if we are to learn from experience.**

To his credit, Solomon came very close to recognizing that. Some time after becoming king of Israel, Solomon was engaged by God in a dream: "*Ask for whatever you want me to give you.*" Having by now recognized that one requires more than the title to be an effective leader, Solomon asked for the thing he believed he needed most: "*a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.*"

God delighted in Solomon's request, but improved on it: "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 riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."

God knew, as Solomon had to learn, that a discerning heart is insufficient. One can discern that something is amiss, or that a particular course of action may be desirable, but it takes wisdom to successfully chart the course and determine the most successful way to follow it. So God added the essential ingredient: wisdom.

And then, out of His great pleasure, He added riches and honour for Solomon's lifetime (note that this is not part of the legacy for Solomon's descendants – it is time-limited and

exclusive to Solomon. God gives to others what He considers appropriate; He was not, and is not, bound by a commitment made solely to Solomon.)

The third lesson we learn from Solomon is that, as essential as it is, even **wisdom is not enough**. Wisdom needs to be complemented by remaining in right relationship with God.

Throughout the entire story of Solomon (1 Kings 1 – 11), conditions are attached to God's promises. Fulfilment of Solomon's part in David's legacy, and of his own success, and even the length of his life, were dependent upon walking in God's ways and keeping His requirements.

Sadly, Solomon was not up to the challenge. Though given wisdom beyond that of any other human being, he did not keep the Lord's command. The consequences were catastrophic. After his death, civil war split the kingdom into Israel and Judah, leading to the eventual disappearance of both.

There is a great lesson for us in all of this. It is not enough to be able to distinguish right from wrong, not enough to know how to provide leadership (the two things Solomon asked God for). It is not enough to be wise. We need to have the courage, determination, and tenacity to act according to the wisdom God gives us. In short, honour the Lord; endure in prayer; and remain in a vital, close, and loving relationship with our Father.

Then, with Wisdom, we can say,

*I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in [God's] presence,
rejoicing in his whole world
and delighting in mankind.*

Proverbs 8:30 - 31