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A Prayer That We May Know God by Bryan Jeffrey Leech

God of Wisdom, “the more we know of you the more we realize the need to know more. We desire to know you and to know you well. We long to enter into intimacy with you, so that instead of merely knowing facts about you, we may move from being your servants to becoming your friends.

As we progress in our quest of you, may we also face honestly those subtle temptations that keep us from approaching you with humility and openness.

Help us, Lord, to take time to be quiet, so that in the stillness we may hear those things which are never shouted, but which are whispered to those who take time to listen. Help us to be childlike but never immature; that we may hang upon your every word, until our thinking is renewed-and, without knowing it, we experience the mind of Christ. Amen.”

In some ways it is difficult to believe that tomorrow marks five years since a beautiful September morning was shattered by an attack that has changed so much about our lives, nation, politics, culture and the world. It is probably a good thing that we don't know what the next five years will hold. Jesus said, “*Do not worry about tomorrow, sufficient for today are the problems of today.*

Tomorrow will bring worries of its own.” We never know what a day will bring.

The mood today seems to be one of uncertainty, apprehension, and anxiety. When I was Nathan's age one of the most watched programs on television was “*Happy Days.*” Today one of the most popular shows is, “*Lost,*” which is about survivors of a plane crash and in many ways it is a metaphor for the age we are living in. The people in it are lost, uncertain, and fearful of a world full of threats.

What do we need in times like this?

First, perhaps **a sense of perspective.** The world has always been both a beautiful and a dangerous place. Though they have changed over time, threats are always present; death is still a part of life. People respond in different ways to the challenges we face – entertainment, insulating from the rest of the

world, drugs, distraction. None of these is a solution. We are not the first people to feel lost, to struggle with uncertainty, indecision, and threats from within ourselves and from others who are different.

The context for today's scripture from 1 Kings is an unsettled time of political turmoil within the nation and threats beyond the borders. Before King David dies two of his sons Adonijah and Solomon are working the angles politically, militarily, and spiritually to position themselves to be next on the throne. Solomon and his supporters, including his mother Bathsheba, win the approval of King David. In a classic case, of be careful what you wish for, you just might get it, soon after receiving his father's blessing, the weight of the responsibility of leading a nation began to press down upon Solomon's young shoulders. It isn't a surprise that he was having a little trouble sleeping and was dreaming. Listen to 1 Kings 3:5-15,

"At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon **during the night in a dream**, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

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, O 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?"

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 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.” 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.”

With the upcoming elections, the media is filled with political ads, news and opinions. As nasty and negative as politics is today in our country, it is nothing compared to what Solomon, the son of David was involved with when he came to power. His father David, on his death bed, tells him to kill two people to avenge old wrongs (see 1 Kings 2:6 and 9 - Joab and Shimei). He is competing with his older brother for power and then orders his death. Now however, there is a job to do; now he has to lead in uncertain times and he needed the same thing that we need in the times in which we find ourselves. Solomon needs and all of us need **WISDOM. Wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life.**

In his dream, God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” Can you imagine God asking you that question? If you could ask God for anything, what would you ask God for? If God offered to grant you one wish, what would it be (other than wishing for more wishes which we all know you can’t)? Depending on our circumstances in life we might wish for food, to be rich and powerful and married to someone we desire. We might ask to be emotionally sensitive, artistic or musical or to be a strong, professional athlete or articulate, attractive, and successful. Some of us might ask to be an instrument of change, to accomplish something important, to make the world a better place, to be respected, and go down in history, perhaps we’d wish for something for someone other than ourselves such as health or life for a loved one who is sick or who has died. Wealth, security, fame, someone to love, world peace the choices are endless.

Solomon has a dream and he got to ask God for anything – what an opportunity, a responsibility, and a risk. What we would ask God for is very

a Traditionally *peace offerings*

telling, it reveals our value system. Instead of asking for long life, wealth, the death of his enemies (perhaps because he's killed many of them already, others would flee to the safety of other nations see 1 Kings 11:14, 24, 26), or power, **Solomon asked for a discerning heart of wisdom that he might lead the people with justice.**

Wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life. Wisdom is skill in the art of living with each aspect of our life under God's guidance and direction. When God gives us wisdom, then we are to use it. Put another way, **when God gives it, we live it.** Solomon was given a wise and discerning heart or mind and he tends to be remembered positively, however, he didn't live as wisely as he might have. He married so many women who worshipped other gods his heart was led astray. This was a key factor that led to internal dissent that would result in splitting the country. High taxes, huge debt, and forced labor to work on building projects, led to growing domestic dissatisfaction while the threat of attack from Egypt was growing and not addressed well. When God gives wisdom, we still have to live it, heed it, and follow it.

Proverbs which is a book full of practical wisdom tells us (1:7) , *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction."* Solomon got in trouble when he began fearing what his wives would say more than pleasing the Lord and he neglected what God had told him. Proverbs tells us, "When pride comes then comes disgrace, but **wisdom** is with the **humble**. **Wisdom** is with those who **take advice**."

Wisdom is a **fountain of life** to one who has it. To get **wisdom** is to **love oneself**; to keep understanding is to prosper. Know that **wisdom** is such to your soul; if you find it, you will find **a future, and your hope** will not be cut off." (Proverbs 11:2, 13:10, 16:22, 19:8, 14:14).

God gives us wisdom, guidance, and direction about how to live, but it is up to us to apply it, do it, and live it.

Jesus' life was marked by many things and one of them is wisdom. He was so attractive in part because he was so wise. We learn in Luke 2:40, 52 that when he was a boy, "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and

the favor of God was upon him. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.” Jesus was filled with and increased in wisdom. He read and learned the scriptures, he lived wisely. Jesus criticized the people of his time pointing out how people came from all over to hear the wisdom of Solomon but (Luke 11:31) “something greater than Solomon is here!” Jesus is the wise and faithful king, the one who Isaiah said would be filled with (Isaiah 11:2) “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”

As eager as he was to have power, Solomon felt overwhelmed by his responsibility as king. We also can feel we don't have the wisdom we need, or we may lack the ability to follow through on what we know is right. So what can we do about it? Well James 1:5 tells us plainly, ***“If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.”*** God is happy to help us live lives marked by love, hope, and a good future. When God gives wisdom, we are the ones who need to live it out. God gives it, we live it.

How can we tell when our life or someone else's is marked by the wisdom of God? James 3:14-17, “But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such **wisdom** does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But **the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.** And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.”

Wisdom is about making good choices about who or what we will worship, what we will do with our lives, what we will do in countless situations each day, what we will look at, what we will dwell on. Where we struggle we can ask God for help. In Matthew's story about the birth of Jesus, what kind of people came looking for the baby boy? Wise men. Wise people are still seeking Jesus

because we see in his life something we'd like in our own. Sometimes in stressing the divinity of Jesus I think we miss the simple truth that Jesus was so appealing in part because he was so wise, he was so **skilled in the art of living with each aspect of his life under God's guidance and direction.** Jesus sought God's wisdom constantly and what God gave he lived and shared with others.

When I was in my first two years of college I ran in the mornings with a friend who was in United States Marine Officer training. He gave me for my dorm room door a picture of John Wayne as Sgt. John Striker in *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, with the quote, "Life is tough, but it's tougher if you're stupid." I don't mean to be ungracious in saying that, but it is true life is tougher, and we make life tougher on ourselves and others when we make stupid choices instead of wise, godly ones. That is simply a fact.

The progress of our lives is very significantly the result of the choices we make each day. Will I do my homework or not? Will I exercise or not? Will I read the Bible or something instructive that will help me grow or not? Will I eat this or that? Will I watch this or that? Life demands that we make many choices every day. Every single choice we make is shaping who we are and who we are becoming. **Wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life.** When God gives it, live it. Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount by telling everyone who listened, you're wise if you do what I've said, you're like a man who built his house on a rock, but if you hear it and don't do it, you're a fool, you're building your life on sand. Paul described Jesus as "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." We are wise to listen and learn from him.

If we need wisdom, ask God who will give it to generously and happily. When we fail to live wisely the consequences are painful and the more responsibility we have, the more people who are impacted by our wise or foolish living, the higher the stakes in the choices we make. When we were on a mission trip in Anniston, Alabama the local supervisor told us "many a Alabama boys' last words are 'Watch this.' If you hear that and you're in the car, get out." The greater the level of one's leadership; the wider and deeper the impact of our

choices. Solomon's decisions would have dire consequences for God's people for millennia to come. Not only our own lives, but our family, our friends, our church, the cause of Christ in the world are all impacted positively or negatively by the choices we make each day.

If we are willing to be humble and to take advice, as we learn to make **godly choices in life, then we will find the words of Proverbs to be true that wisdom is a fountain of life and when we find it and live it we will have a future with hope.**

"Give us, O Lord,
Steadfast hearts, which no unworthy thought can drag downwards;
Unconquered hearts, which no tribulation can wear out;
Upright hearts, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside.

Bestow upon us also, O Lord God,
Understanding to know,
Diligence to seek you,
Wisdom to find you,
And a faithfulness that may finally embrace you,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen by *Thomas a Kempis, 15th Century*

The Serenity Prayer

God, give us grace
To accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things that should be changed,
And the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.
Reinhold Niebuhr

Blessing: based on Colossians 2:2-3

Now may our hearts be encouraged and united in love, so that we may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery,

that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”