

God's Wisdom for Living a Consistent Life

2 Chronicles 2:1-13

I have read this week the UK Bible Society's tribute produced for Her Majesty's 90th Birthday entitled 'The Servant Queen and the King she serves.' It is as they advertise an inspiring multi-faceted insight into a life well lived for others that draws out the central role of her trust in Jesus Christ in shaping her life and work. I would like to begin by making the point that in her succession to the throne in 1952 the young Elizabeth came to understand that her authority was derived not from her own Father George VI, or Parliament, but from God to whom she would ultimately remain accountable to all the days of her life. Beginning that year in preparation for her Coronation in 1953 the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, who helped guide and prepare her for the role, impressed upon a young Elizabeth that she was 'God-called to exert a spiritual power and lead her subjects by her personal example.'

Six months before her coronation it was a young Elizabeth who humbly asked the people of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth to; "Pray that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve Him and you, all the days of my life." This year Queen Elizabeth II turned 90 years old. Married to her husband Philip for 69 years. She is the longest reigning monarch in British history, 64 years, and as such is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, of which she attends weekly, even when she's on holiday. Her personal faith and depth of trust in God is testified to in this statement she made in 2002.

"I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God... I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian gospel." She has continued in this pattern of belief and prayer each and every day for herself, family and others.

Her life has certainly been marked by that simple trust in God and in Christ no matter what has come looking constantly upward in devotion towards God for wisdom and the strength so that she might look outwards to sincerely serve her people.

Under God her character and attitude has remained consistent. It has certainly never eroded, only blossomed. To this day she has both publically and privately lived by the promised wisdom and strength of God who has truly answered her prayers. Praying for God's wisdom and strength daily has blessed the longevity of her reign as Queen as she has followed the Lord her God wholeheartedly each and every day. We have from scripture reading the story of Solomon who succeeded his father as King of Israel beginning with the same humility and desire for wisdom as Elizabeth.

At the end of **1 Chronicles 29:25** *The LORD highly exalted Solomon in the sight of all of Israel and bestowed on him royal splendour such as no king over Israel ever had before.*

He succeeded his father David as King. In 2 Chronicles Solomon is firmly established on the throne meaning all the rivals to the throne have been eliminated along with any other enemies. Solomon has been anointed by God, put in place by his father, and set to reign, having been made exceedingly great by the Lord God who is with him.

King Solomon is probably most well known in world history for his wisdom, which in a selfless prayer he asks God for, closely followed by wealth and women. We know that his wisdom was not earthly wisdom gleaned from years of experience and problem solving. Rather, it was wisdom that was imparted to him by God divinely giving him the ability to apply knowledge to life situations. Solomon is additionally known for building the great temple to God at Jerusalem, but little is said about the palace he built for himself which was four times larger than the temple. In the beginning, the reception of God's gift of wisdom was to help facilitate the building work of the Jerusalem Temple. Solomon's selfless prayer resulted in God giving Solomon what he asked for and a lot more.

God gave Solomon what he asked for

Importantly for us to understand today, the Lord gives the reasons for his response.... reasons for giving Solomon what he asked for. They are in V.11. *God said to Solomon,*
"Since this is your heart's desire and
You have not asked for wealth, possessions or honour,
Nor the death of your enemies, or a long life
But for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people
over whom I have made you king.

What did kings in the ancient world usually want from their gods? It does not take much to work this out. The things written by them or about them say that they often asked their gods for long life, riches, and death to their enemies. Notice how God explicitly says that Solomon did not ask for those things.

People often talk about the Wisdom of Solomon, but the Wisdom of Solomon is really the wisdom of God, given to Solomon as a gift. In verse 12, God said: *“Therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you...”* what you have asked for. Then, God says: *“And I will also give you”* what you have not asked for. In the end, Solomon received the things other kings prayed for – *Wealth, possessions, and honour, all his life... such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have.”* God gives generously, abundantly, beyond all expectations: "I God now do according your word Solomon. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you will arise after you". Solomon gets wisdom plus wealth and honour, but it all comes as a gift from God.

There is a difference, isn't there, between wisdom and intelligence? Intelligence is an innate, inherited ability and we get what we are given. But wisdom is something else. I am sure that all of us know people who seem to be very intelligent but also seem to often make foolish decisions. And all of us will know people who the world might not consider so intelligent but the choices they make usually seem to be wise choices.

Not all of us can be super intelligent. Not all of us can be great athletes. Not all of us can be skilled business or crafts people. But all of us can pray often for the wisdom that comes only from God. And judging by the experience of Solomon in the earlier part of his reign, we can pray with the confidence that God will answer our prayer. As we pray to God and read God's word we can be confident while God may not increase our IQ he will give us 'wisdom from above' **James 1:5**.

Two chapters later in his letter in the New Testament James the brother of Jesus writes of Two Kinds of Wisdom. **James 3: 13** Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. **14** But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. **16** For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. **17** But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

However, Wisdom is not enough!

Solomon’s story is a bit like the global economy over the past few years. As things get better and better, and some people get richer and richer, and more and more powerful, they become tempted to believe that nothing could possibly go wrong, could it? This question hangs over the entire history of Solomon. In today’s reading, it is just lurking in the shadows. In verse 1 Solomon established himself firmly over his kingdom, for the LORD God was with him and made him exceedingly great. The reason being in verse 12 for it contains God’s promises to Solomon with regards to being given wisdom and knowledge, wealth, possessions and honour “such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have.” So, what could possibly go wrong? Compromise...

Compromise entered Solomon’s life and a decision-making process, which was the sure sign that Solomon’s character had, began to erode.

Solomon’s marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter was one of the first signs of compromise in his life. (1 Kings 3)

Solomon’s ability to make a marriage alliance with Egypt demonstrates his kingship and nation’s newfound prominence, which might produce some nationalistic arrogance. Another problem existed was that marrying a foreign princess might bring destructive foreign religious and political ideas to Israel. Besides Pharaoh’s daughter, he loves Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women. All together, he accumulates “seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines.” Like the marriage to the Egyptian princess, most of these unions probably were politically motivated. **Deuteronomy 17:17** explicitly forbade the king of Israel to marry many wives who would lead him astray. The extent to which Solomon disobeyed this important command is shocking. The result was exactly as predicted: His wives turned him to idolatry. Of all the sins recorded in Scripture,

God takes idolatry the most seriously, for no other sin has the capability of wrecking the entire covenant by itself.

Solomon's tolerance of other religions sent his character plummeting. (1 Kings 11:4-8)

As Solomon grew older, his resistance wore down; and he became increasingly vulnerable. His devotion and service to the Lord became more and more obligatory, sadly to the point where...

Solomon's heart was no longer wholly God's.

The Lord had ceased to be the major factor in his life. Once this shift occurred, the next steps into idolatry became more natural and easier to accept. Solomon established a religious tolerance that treated all religions alike leading to his own downfall.

Solomon's sin will soon cause the nation to crash from the heights it has achieved. His idolatry will lead to idolatry among the people. Israel has begun the long road to exile, though they do not know yet that their actions entail such consequences.

How did something so right go so wrong? It seems that as time went by Solomon forgot the very first encounter the night God appeared to him and spoke to him. His heart's desire changed, as did the source of his wisdom. Lack of humility and self-ambition it would appear got the better of him. So, he willfully gave himself over to evil and sinful idolatry. Listening to his foreign wives he gave in and worshipped their gods. Wisdom is NOT enough! Solomon had the world, he had wisdom, and it was not enough. Again, the letter of James has wise words for us, **3:13** Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

Challenge:

Just like Queen Elizabeth, we too should prioritise daily prayer, the place where we come into the presence of God. The place where God shapes our lives, gives us wisdom and strengthens us to live and act in humility. The story of both Elizabeth and Solomon should serve to remind us to continue to pray each and every day for the wisdom that is the generous gift of God and to pray with confidence, and never stop, because if you do you could end up like Solomon who was not ignorant, just down right rebellious. He knew better but did not do better. Let us not get caught in that trap!