

1 Kings 3

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[0 : 0 0] We'll turn again to the opening chapter of Proverbs, and let me just read those first few verses again for our benefit. Proverbs chapter 1, page 635.

The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel, for attaining wisdom and discipline, for understanding words of insight, for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair, for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young, let the wise listen and answer the learning, let the discerning the judgment, for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Solomon's great theme is wisdom.

He's known as a wise man, the wisest man of his or any generation. And as we consider his theme, as we consider this opening portion of the book of Proverbs, we need to first establish in our minds the qualifications or the credentials that Solomon has.

I'll make an admission. I love television shows with courtroom drama, like Law and Order, and these other TV shows that show you the inside of a courtroom. And at the first, when people are giving the testimony, you'll have the witnesses, the people who saw the various events.

[1 : 2 6] But then you'll have the experts, the expert witnesses. And when they're interviewed, they have to give their credentials, where they study, what their degrees are, why they have a knowledge of this particular subject, why anyone should pay attention to them.

And as we turn to the Bible, we should ask those same questions of the books in front of us, because we ask Solomon, why do you have a right to tell me how to live?

What wisdom, what insight do you have, and where does it come from? What credentials do you have that could be of benefit to me? And as we turn to the character of Solomon, as we turn to that chapter that we read in 1 Kings 3, we see the way in which he has this vibrant relationship with God, face on face, where he trusts in God, and where God in turn has given him wisdom, wisdom that he uses himself, but also wisdom that he shares with us.

So if you keep your finger in progress, if you look back for a moment at 1 Kings 3, we can see very simply the qualifications, the credentials that we have here for giving our attention to Solomon.

Because if we turn back, we see first in 1 Kings 3 and verse 3 that Solomon loved the Lord. Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father David.

[2 : 5 0] David loved the Lord. Solomon loved the Lord. Solomon followed the example of David. David wasn't perfect, and Solomon wasn't perfect. When you look to Solomon, we don't have a perfect guide.

We don't have a flawless example. Only in Jesus can we see one who is without sin, without stinging, without blemish. We're told here, even at the very beginning of Solomon's reign, that he offered sacrifices and burnt incense on the high places.

No temple had yet been built. And the people had taken to this practice of burning incense and having places of sacrifice round about in areas that were elevated, where substantial places in the country.

Solomon joined in. But we're told that he had a love for God. And that's where you really need to begin. Can you say that of yourself, that you love the Lord?

And that you demonstrate your love for the Lord? You might be able to say it. But Solomon said it and showed it. He followed the example that he saw in his own home, in his own upbringing.

[3 : 57] Godly family, godly father. David, a man after God's own heart. Trusting and following God. Solomon likewise loved the Lord and walked according to his statutes.

I think this is the challenge for us today, is to have that consistency. Because the world sees so very clearly hypocrisy. Saying one thing and doing another.

And when we present, instead of a consistent witness to the world, when we show our flaws, they'll say to themselves, well, they say this, but they do that.

Now, I don't need to go to church to see that. I don't need to go to read the Bible. I can do the same thing on my own. And you see, Solomon had an integrity and a consistency within his own life.

They're also told in verse 4 that he honored the Lord. The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, so that was the most important, high place. And Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

[4 : 58] Even at this point, Solomon was a man of wealth, a man of property, a man of position. And he demonstrated his love and his commitment to God through offering sacrifices, through giving of what he himself had.

Again, this should be a character that all Christians should have. That we honor God with what he has given us. The time he has given us. The resources he has given us.

The talents, the gifts that each one of us has. Do we love the Lord and do we honor the Lord? Is it obvious by the way in which we use our time that we honor God?

Is it obvious by the way in which we use our money that we honor God? I was attending a seminar now many years ago, and the person speaking about Christianity explored, and he challenged the church leaders.

He said, well, as a church, you would obviously value evangelism. But if you look at the checkbook, if you look at your accounts, how much money is spent on evangelism? And you know, if you actually look at somebody's checkbook, if you do have a checkbook, maybe you're not old enough to have a checkbook yet, but you look at your expenses, what you spend money on.

[6 : 06] And is it obvious from your list of monthly expenses that you honor God with the money he has given you? Whether that means supporting the church, whether that means supporting people in need, whether that means supporting the work of the gospel here at home or further afield.

But nonetheless, Solomon had wealth, and he honored God with his wealth. Thirdly, we are troubled that Solomon responded to God. There was a two-way dialogue.

There was a communication between the two. When the Lord appears to Solomon, he said, ask for whatever you want to give me. And what does Solomon do? He asks. He responds in faith.

God says, ask. Solomon asks. You have the opposite example in the Old Testament with King Ahaz. You remember in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 7, God comes to Ahaz and says, ask for a sign.

Ahaz says, I'm not going to put the Lord to the test. I'm not going to test God in this. I'm not going to ask for a sign. And God responded in anger. Because Ahaz had disobeyed God rather than honored God.

[7 : 12] So do you respond to God? The knowledge that you have, the understanding that you have, it's limited, it's imperfect, but what you know do you respond to? Solomon was given this direct vision.

Ask for whatever you want and I'll give it to you. And he responded. We're also told in verse 6 that he understood something of the character of God. Verse 6 from Solomon answered, You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and like his muck right in heart.

You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne to this very day. And so he realized the character and the quality of God.

He understood God and his nature. He saw how God dealt with his father. And he realized that God hadn't changed and that he was dealing with him in the same way.

So we have to ask ourselves, do we have an understanding of who God is? Of how God operates? About the great principles by which this world that he has created is meant to run?

[8 : 19] What great principles our lives are meant to be guided by? And we'll get to that in a moment when we look more at the substance of the book of Proverbs. But Solomon knew something about God.

And what Solomon knew compared to what we have in the whole of the Bible was but a fraction. We have so much more insight. We have so much more knowledge. We have so much more privilege than Abraham, than Moses, than David, than Solomon, than the great Old Testament prophets, even John the Baptist himself, that we have so much more wisdom, so much more insight, so much more that we can know about God.

And so we take advantage of that knowledge. Do we look to the Word of God and do we take from that Word and from the experience of others, again, do we put all of these bits of information together?

Because there's a very big difference between knowledge and wisdom, between a collection of facts or figures, and actually wisdom, knowing what to do with what you know.

And that's really what wisdom is. Wisdom is putting together information and knowledge in such a way as to use it well and wisely for you, for others, and in relationship to God.

[9 : 32] One other quality, and this is key, you see this in verse 10, is that Solomon pleased God. Verse 10, the Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.

So if we want to ask ourselves, what are the credentials that Solomon has today for speaking to us 29 and a bit centuries after his time, the answer is simply this.

Here was a man who feared the Lord, here was a man who walked in the way of the Lord, here was a man who understood the Lord, and here was a man who was gifted in wisdom and knowledge and who wanted to pass that knowledge on to others.

In Proverbs chapter 1, verse 7, we're told, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge that first despise wisdom and discipline. That was the great prerequisite.

You know, you go to university and there are some courses that you can take, but there are other courses that you can only take if you satisfy the requirements. Now, in order to understand or to benefit from anything that will be said in the book of Proverbs, you have to satisfy this requirement, the fear of the Lord.

[10 : 42] That doesn't mean, you see, sometimes the word fear, in English, comes across more like you would speak of phobias. You're afraid of the dark, you're afraid of snakes, you're afraid of some type of animals or certain situations.

But fear, in the Bible's definition, is a right relationship with God. Who's the creator? We're the creation. He is all-powerful. We are limited. He's perfect.

He's without sin. We have sinned. We have fallen short. So the fear of the Lord speaks of a vibrant and vital relationship with God on His terms. You see, that's the key.

We can all claim any number of friendships or any number of relationships, but only real relationships and real friendships are two-way. You see, you could look at any of the great, famous people today.

You could see President Bush on the news. You can see the Queen of England. You could point to these people and say, I know her, I know him, I know their name, I know where they live, I know what they do. But that's not a friendship.

[11 : 43] That's not a relationship. You know something about them. You know a few facts, a few figures, a few details. The difference is, is that a relationship is where Queen Elizabeth turns and says, I know him.

And George Bush says, I know her. Or Tony Blair, you know, and you say, well, that's more impressive than somebody who's famous like that says, I know this person, I know that person. And when you have a fear of the Lord that is, as the Bible defines it, it's to reign.

You know God, and God knows you. You are in a relationship with God that He recognizes. That's on His terms. And you see, there are many people today who say they know God.

They follow God. They serve God. And then they do that with genuine sincerity, with real zeal and desire to do good and to honor God. But yet, if it's not based on the Bible, and that's based on Jesus, because Jesus is the key, He's the way, He's the truth, He's the life.

If He, He said, you must be born again, you must have a whole new relationship, a whole new beginning. So the fear of the Lord, which is the bringing of knowledge, is a right relationship with God based on knowing Jesus, based on receiving, responding to the gift of salvation that is in Jesus, and then in turn, realizing He's Savior, He's Lord, and therefore you live according to His Word.

[13 : 08] So that's the background. That's the introduction. That's the author. Now, what does Solomon have to say to us? And I just, very simply, around the theme of wisdom, we first of all see that there is a need, a desperate need, in our lives, individually, collectively, for wisdom.

We see, secondly, the request, the request that existed when Solomon actually asked for wisdom. Thirdly, the gift whereby God provided wisdom, and fourth, and most importantly, the exercise of wisdom.

Solomon used what he was given. We'll stay for just a moment in 1 Kings 3 to see some of these first early points. But firstly, we see the need for wisdom.

And when Solomon responded to God in verse 7, Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in the face 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 who you must count a number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong for whom is able to govern this great people of yours.

[14 : 23] Now, you see, Solomon had a real challenge. He inherited the throne from his father David, a very popular king, but he inherited a throne that was under threat. You read the first few chapters of First Kings and you see the intrigue of his own family and you realize that when Solomon said I'm only a little child, when he said I can't, I'm not able to do what you're calling me to do, I don't have the wisdom, I don't have the discernment, I don't have the strength.

So you see there with the need, but also the recognition. And that combination is absolutely essential. It's as Solomon said, I need wisdom, and he understood it personally.

And I can say to you that you need the wisdom that God can give, you need the guidance that God alone can provide, you need the salvation that God has provided in Jesus, but that's all well and good, but unless you actually realize it for yourself, recognize the need, recognize the problem, then and only then will you make use of the provision.

It's like the person who says or thinks to themselves, I'm fit, I'm healthy, I'm in good physical shape. I don't need to go to the doctor, I don't need to get a physical, I don't need any type of examination.

The person who feels sick, the person who feels tired, the person who feels run down, the person who feels very keen that their health isn't good, that's the person who will go to the doctor, that's the person who will get tests, that's the person who will seek help.

[15 : 48] Because they don't feel well, they don't feel strong, they don't feel healthy. Can you remember the words of Jesus? You're healthy, you don't need a doctor, it's only with this. The words of Jesus, don't need a seizure, don't need a sinner.

And you see, there's a recognition of need as the first step in satisfying that need. And that's why many of these programs that seek to help people, you look at Alcoholics Anonymous, for example, or any of the 12-step programs, and the first step is recognition, saying, I have a problem with alcohol, I have a problem with drugs, I can't cope with this or with that.

So it's a statement of a fact, of realization, of admitting the problem. And you see, Solomon admitted the problem, and that was the first step to solving it.

Secondly, we see the request, and we read that from the passage as well. Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.

Could have asked for anything. It was a wide-open invitation, ask for whatever you want, and I'll give it. How much money could he have asked for? How much fame? How much popularity? How much security or stability, whatever, he could have asked for, but he said, Lord, you've made me a king.

[17 : 05] You've given me a huge people to govern, and I'm in a situation that I'm over my head. I don't know if you've ever felt over your head. If you've been in water and you feel like you want to touch the bottom and keep yourself up, you realize that the bottom is far below where your foot is.

And it's a very dangerous feeling, a very scary feeling, and you feel that there's nothing below your feet and you're sitting below the water.

And that's the idea here. Solomon, he says, I'm a child. I'm inadequate. I'm unable to live up to this responsibility. I need a heart that is able to discern.

Now, discerning means being able to see clearly right from wrong, good from evil, and seeing clearly the way to go. Again, you think of people driving in the car and at night, especially if it's damp or wet, the car can team up.

And what you need to do is you need to push on the button that's for the, to clear the windscreen, to defog the windshield in front of you so that you can see.

[18 : 13] Because otherwise, if you're driving and you can't see or the windshield wipers aren't working, you're in great danger. Because you can't see the way to fear. You can't see any hazards. You can't discern where to turn, where to go.

And that's what Solomon is saying, is that he needs a heart. And when he speaks about a heart, that really means the same person. In the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, when the writers speak about a heart, it means the center of the emotions, which we think of as a heart.

It's also the center of the intellect, and it's also really the center, the core of the person. And we have the same idea that if a person has a problem with their heart, it's a major problem.

A friend of mine in Edinburgh recently had a minor problem with his heart and had to have a procedure to correct that problem. So you know, when you're talking about the heart, everything that's minor really is major.

The doctor said to him, look, most likely this will never cause you any problem. However, there is a chance, very small, that suddenly without warning your heart will stop eating. But that's a major problem.

[19 : 19] And that problem had to be sorted. And Solomon is saying that he needs a heart that is up to the task. He needs a healthy, a discerning, and a vibrant heart that he can see right from wrong.

And this reminds us, for example, of the word of Jesus. So Jesus said to his disciples, he said, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for everyone you ask to receive.

And Jesus who signs and to him who knocks the door will be opened. So God is in the business of giving the people open invitations. Giving his people, as it were, a blind check.

You fill in the details and I'll give it to you. It's interesting though that many times God gives us what we think we want, what we think will satisfy, what we think will make us happy when in fact it's empty, it's non- it just doesn't fulfill, it doesn't satisfy, it doesn't fill the void.

Solomon could have asked for pleasure, he could have asked for wealth, he could have asked for military success, and yet he asked for a discerning heart. As Jesus says, ask, seek, and knock.

[20 : 27] But in so doing, he wants us to ask and to seek and to knock what is pleasing to him, what is helpful to others, and what will be for our best interest. It's not a blank check to write for our pleasure, our satisfaction, our sense of fulfillment, but when Jesus speaks in those terms, or when God speaks to Solomon in those terms, it's along the lines of ask, but be wise in what you ask.

Be wise in what you ask for and ask for something that will not just benefit you, but as Solomon did, will benefit others. Solomon needed the heart of wisdom in order that he would govern his people wisely and well.

And notice as well that when you're asked for something by God, you are meant to respond and respond in faith. The words of James, for example, James chapter 1, if any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God.

It gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt. Because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the waves.

that man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord. He was a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. So you see, we are meant to ask for the right things, to seek what we need and what we do of a benefit to others, but when we are responding to God, we respond in faith.

[21 : 52] If you need wisdom, ask for it. But believe that God will get it. Because if you ask and doubt, you won't get it. Because God won't trust you with that wisdom. We won't trust you with that discernment.

If you're not sure that you're going to get it, you're most likely not going to use it well if you do. So you see, today, God is speaking to you. He's saying to you, whatever you need, ask.

Whatever you lack, ask. Whatever is missing, ask. But make sure you're wise in what you're asking for. Is that what you seek? Something that will make you genuinely satisfied and fulfilled?

Will it be used well by you for the benefit of others? Will it bring you closer to God? Will it make you more of the man or woman that God wants you to be? God says, ask for anything and Solomon says, I need a heart of wisdom.

And you see that God gives what he was asked for. God gave Solomon exactly what he wanted, but God did more. God gave a bonus. And you're finding from your experience with God that when you're asking God for help or for strength or for wisdom, that he gives what is needed, but he always gives more.

[23 : 03] Look, for example, at verse 11. 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 and administering justice, I will do what you have asked.

I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that it 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. So you didn't ask for wealth, but I'm going to give it to you anyway.

You didn't ask for success over your enemies, but I'm going to give it to you anyway. You didn't ask for a long life, I'm going to give it to you anyway. And you see the way that God always gives more than we ask for, more than we request, because he loves us, he cares for us, he provides for us.

And if you look clearly at your own circumstance, you look back, and maybe it's very, it's much easier to look back and to see answers to prayer, provision of God, you look back and you see that not only did God get you through situations, not only did he give you enough to get by, but he gave you more than was necessary.

[24 : 19] Downstairs, as we were cleaning up after lunch, there were a lot of people who ate, but there was a sufficient and extra amount of food, there was more food than was required.

So more people could have eaten. And you're wondering, with all those people gathered together, would there be enough food? And there was more than enough. And that's the way in which God always helps us, giving us more than we need, blessing us with more than we even ask for.

So that's the gift of wisdom. Now we come to this point about exercising, exercising wisdom that God gives. And this word exercise is a good word because it means that you're using what God has provided for you, and you're actually putting some effort into it.

You know, when you're exercising, you're breaking into a sweat, you're doing something that works the muscles of your legs or your arms, that makes you stronger. It might be painful, it might be difficult, it might be challenging, but that exercise is working out what you already have.

You already have the muscles, you already have the blood, you already have all of these abilities, but the exercise that's sharpening you is enabling you to focus, enabling you to put together all that is there so that you're faster, you're stronger, you're healthier, you're more physically fit.

[25 : 35] And Solomon did, he took what God gave him and he put it to use. That's why we read from the end of chapter 3 of the wise ruling, he had this difficult situation, two women, one living child, one dead child, birthed him and say, the baby's mine.

How do you determine who's lying, who's telling the truth? Well, he exercised the wisdom that God gave him and notice that he exercised the wisdom for the benefit of others, for the benefit of his community.

He said, God, I need wisdom to govern this people. The first thing that we see is he's governing this people and administering justice and he's using the wisdom that God gave. And it was obvious because the people at the end he said that there held the king and all because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.

So he used the gift of wisdom for the benefit of his community and as he turns to that passage in Proverbs, he uses the wisdom for our benefit. He shares his wisdom with us.

And as you read these opening verses of Proverbs, if you read the whole book, you see the way in which he speaks to our very situations. He speaks to our temptations, he speaks to our trials, he speaks to our challenges, he speaks to our opportunities, he speaks to family life, he speaks to work life, he speaks to friendships, to relationships, and he speaks in such a way as to say that somewhere in this book you will find an answer to that problem, to that challenge.

[27 : 09] You'll find a principle, you'll find a way of dealing with this situation. All you need to do is look, all you need to do is read, all you need to do is to take from what God has provided through Solomon and put it into practice.

Solomon shared his wisdom with his generation and with us. He was a man whose wisdom was proverbial. Instead of and this is in 1 Kings 4, God gives Solomon wisdom and very great insight and the breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.

Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East and greater than all the wisdom of the East. He was wiser than any other man including Ethan the Ezraite, wiser than Heman, Chalcol and Darda, the sons of Nahal, and his fame spread to all the surrounding nations.

He spoke 3,000 Proverbs and his songs numbered 1,005. He described plant life from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the walls.

He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles, and fish. Men of all nations turned to listen to Solomon's wisdom spent by all the kings of the world who had heard of his wisdom.

[28 : 27] The Bible tells us that Solomon was a byword for wisdom and for knowledge. Everywhere, people came to hear this man, to visit this man, to listen to his wisdom.

They traveled thousands of miles to come to his court. And we have the benefit of him in our very hands, right in front of us, opened in the Bible. Do we look?

Do we read? Do we take to heart? Do we make use of this? Because you see, sometimes we're asking God for help that he has already provided.

We're asking God for wisdom that he has already given. And if we're not willing to look to him as to what he has revealed, we shouldn't then expect that he will give us something that is unrevealed.

If he's already said in black and white, here are the principles, here are the guidelines for life, and yet we haven't read it, or haven't taken it to heart. We can't then expect the miraculous or the unexpected when everything is already there.

[29 : 27] But above all, I think what this does is it points us forward. We're told in the Bible that Solomon was a man of great wisdom, but we're also told in the New Testament that one wiser than Solomon was there.

One greater than Solomon had a reason. One who had greater standing. One who had greater insight. One who had without equal knowledge, wisdom, strength, and power.

Jesus Christ. And if we ignore Solomon, we're going to be in danger of ignoring Jesus. If we fail to grasp the teaching that we have here in the Old Testament, we may very easily fail to appreciate the breadth and the depth of the wisdom that we have in Jesus.

So don't overlook Solomon. Don't go beyond this book of Proverbs because here is wisdom for you and for me. Challenges, questions, difficulties, problems with relationships, problems with friendships, difficulties at home, challenges at work.

You read this book and you'll see situations that ring a bell and you say, well, that's it? That's exactly what I need to do. I need to be silent instead of speaking. I need to be wise in my actions.

[30 : 38] I need to be aware of temptations, whatever it may be. But above all, we should have a greater appreciation of Jesus. Because all that we see in Solomon is perfected in Jesus.

All that we see in many ways to such a great extent in him, we see in 100% in Jesus. No flaws, no sins, no limitations in Jesus. Solomon lived and he died.

His kingdom was not going to be passed on to his son because he had fallen short. Jesus lived and lives forevermore. His kingdom knows no limit, knows no end and his lesson, his discernment, his wisdom is available for you today.

You seek, you ask, you knock, it will be given. The wisdom of Solomon, the wisdom of Jesus, the guidance that we need for life. Because I'm sure tonight there are people here who are facing difficulties, facing challenges, having to answer questions and they don't know where to go, they don't know where to turn, they don't have the answer.

And you may not have. And I don't. But I can tell you who does. Turn to God, turn to his word, turn to his truth, turn to Jesus in faith and receive the blessing, the answer, the wisdom and the discernment that you need for your benefit.

[31 : 59] But never forget that all that God did, is meant to benefit you and others. May God grant us his grace and his wisdom as we turn to him now in prayer.

Let us pray.