

The Challenge of New Responsibilities

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Facing Life's Challenges Series

1 Kings 3:1-15

This morning I want to start a new series for the summer that I'm titling "Facing Life's Challenges." Over the summer we are going to be looking at Old Testament stories from the books of 1 and 2 Kings regarding King Solomon and two prophets, Elijah and Elisha.

Today we are going to talk about the beginning of King Solomon's reign. It is the story of King Solomon, as a young man, taking over as King of Israel from his father, King David. Now this was an extraordinarily daunting task. He was following a legend. His father, King David, was larger than life in the eyes of the people. Even today, 3000 years later, people around the world have heard about David's slaying of the giant, Goliath. This guy was the stuff of mythology! And Solomon's father, David, was also the writer of many of the most beloved Psalms including Psalm 23:

SLIDE – Psalm 23

1 A psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Under David's leadership, Jerusalem was captured and it became the capital of Israel. Even King David's sins were larger than life. How many movies have been made about David's affair with Bathsheba?

King Solomon is taking over and the question, of course, for him is how do you follow a legend? It is your turn now. The person who you are replacing was extraordinary. What do you do for the second act?

I think of a pastor who tries to take over a church following the death or retirement of the beloved founding pastor. I mean, imagine following in the footsteps of John Wimber, the founding pastor of Vineyard Anaheim, and the founder of the Vineyard movement. Or imagine following in the footsteps of Rick Warren, or Tony Evans. Imagine the task facing the current Pope, Pope Benedict. I mean, you are following after one of the most popular popes in 2000 years of history, Pope John Paul II.

Pope John Paul was an athlete. He was a skier. He was good looking. He was ultra-charismatic. I mean, John Paul just had charisma oozing out of him. He had an incredible capacity to connect with people. He had two Ph.D.'s. He spoke 7-9 languages. 5 million people jammed into Rome for his funeral. There would have been more there, if Rome could have handled more. The church was deluged with demands that Pope John Paul II be fast-tracked to sainthood.

And you are the little German guy following this legend. How do you pull it off?

Following a legend. I think of being the new wife who marries the widower following the death of his beloved first wife, the saintly mother of his children. Their home is filled with photos of the two of them; the memory of her is everywhere.

Following a legend – I think of someone who is trying to succeed their father who founded a business, or succeeding the founder of a huge corporation. I mean, how do you follow in the footsteps of Dave Thomas at Wendy's? He WAS Wendy's. Or you are the person taking over for Bill Gates at Microsoft. In sports, you are Earle Bruce taking over for Woody Hayes. Or you are following Coach Wooden at UCLA. Or you are playing Centerfield for the Yankees with the two predecessors being Joe DiMaggio and Mickey Mantle.

That was the task facing King Solomon; following in the footsteps of a legend. And not only so, but what made the challenge even more daunting was that there was massive in-fighting from his half-brothers. All of whom wanted to assume the throne. And Solomon couldn't be sure that there still weren't elements in Israelite society that continued to be loyal to the former King Saul. There were internal enemies within. There were external threats from surrounding nations without.

You are King Solomon. You are taking over the kingdom. What is your first move?

Of course, new responsibilities are not just found in the grand and the great. Every human being faces the challenges of new responsibilities whether we are talking about a new marriage, becoming a new parent, working at a new job, taking on a new ministry, entering a new season of life, having an empty nest, or entering retirement. Whenever you face new responsibilities, what are the things you ought to keep in mind?

As we read the story of King Solomon today, I think there are at least six significant lessons about succeeding in your new responsibilities that we can draw out of King Solomon's assumption of the kingdom. I've called today's talk, "The Challenge of New Responsibilities." Let's pray.

SLIDE – 1 Kings 3:1-15

1 Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the Lord, and the wall around Jerusalem. 2 The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the Lord. 3 Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. 4 The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 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." 6 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. 7 “Now, 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. 8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 9 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?” 10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. 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 in administering justice, 12 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. 13 Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. 14 And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.” 15 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.

The Bible writer is sending a signal to us when we face new responsibilities,

SLIDE

The significance of early choices

In verse 1 we read about Solomon’s marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter,

SLIDE – 1 Kiings 3:1

1 Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the Lord, and the wall around Jerusalem.

And in verse 3 we read about Solomon’s offering sacrifices at the high places.

SLIDE – 1 Kings 3:3

3 Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

Now both of these decisions, Solomon’s marriage and his various marriages to other women (polygamy was practiced back in Old Testament times) as well as Solomon’s offering sacrifices and burning incense on the high places (the high places were worship places in Canaan before the Israelites invaded and the Israelites took over and converted those high places into places for the worship of the Lord. The high places always carried with them the danger of syncretism – mixing the worship of God with pagan worship). In any case, the writer is signaling to us in listing Solomon’s marriage

and his offering of sacrifices at the high places, the significance of Solomon's early choices.

You see, we, who have the Bible, know the end of the story. The nation of Israel is on its way to judgment. That's what 1 and 2 Kings tells us. This is a nation that has a sword hanging over its head. So we know the end of the story. The end of the story will be the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the exile of the Southern Kingdom of Judah to Babylon. Therefore, as we read the story of Solomon and all of his grandeur – his incredible wealth, his brilliance, and his writing of Proverbs, the temple that he built, his palaces, the amount of gold he had – we read it like people who are watching the movie "The Titanic." You know, you watch the early scenes of that movie – the grandeur of the ballroom, the crystal chandelier, the rare woods that were used in paneling the ship, the beautiful dishes – and you are not taken in. Because anyone who watches The Titanic is waiting for one thing – the iceberg!

SLIDE – The Titanic and the iceberg

So all of the early statements in the movie take on added significance. When the captain walks around the ship and says, "I can assure you that these are all the lifeboats we will need; we don't want to clutter up the ship with additional lifeboats," or when the owner of the shipping line makes the statement that "God himself could not sink the Titanic," we know those statements are going to come back to haunt the speakers.

And as I said, Solomon's early choices are going to come back to haunt him because they call our attention to certain seeds of disobedience that would eventually take root in Solomon's life and bring down his kingdom.

Over a century ago, Robert Lewis Stevenson wrote a novel called "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." He illustrated the way that a seed of sin grows in a person's life. Dr. Jekyll had come up with a magic potion in which he could be instantly transformed into the evil Mr. Hyde. He actually became physically transformed into the other person when he drank the potion. And as the evil Mr. Hyde, he was able to act out all of the lusts and perversions that were kept locked up in his heart, without impacting the reputation of the noble Dr. Jekyll. He could act out on all of these evil impulses and then take the antidote turning him back into Dr. Jekyll and do it all without a hint of scandal.

Well, one day Dr. Jekyll woke up to discover that in his sleep, without the help of the potion, he had become Mr. Hyde. It frightened him. He ran down to his laboratory to take the antidote, but nothing happened. He drank it all, but nothing happened. And try as he might, no formula that he concocted could restore him back to where was. The evil that he unleashed in his life became the dominant principle. He let something loose in this life that became uncontrollable.

Now any addict understands the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. How many of you

would say, “You know, looking back in my life, I wish I had never opened the door to this particular sin, this particular habit. If I knew then what I know now about how that seed would take root in my life, how difficult it would be for me to rid myself of it, I would never have cracked that door at all.”

The importance of early choices. There is a phenomenal book written by Bobby Clinton titled *The Making of a Leader*. And I would, by the way, recommend this book for any of you who aspire to leadership, or are current leaders and want to know more about how leaders are developed. But Bobby Clinton talks about how God develops leadership in people’s lives. He explores the biographies of many influential Christian leaders both from the Bible as well as in history. As an initial step, what we see God do is what Bobby Clinton calls “integrity checks.” God checks out the individual’s character. He brings in various testing experiences into the person’s life, which forces them to make a choice for or against faithfulness to God; for or against their declared values; for or against telling the truth and integrity and being courageous in declaring what they believe.

Now, if the person passes the test, they get to move on in leadership. But if a person fails the test, that person will be tested over and over again. And I see this friends in people’s lives especially when they are new Christians, especially when they are new leaders, and especially when those folks are in their 20’s. As a general rule, people do not often have great fruit in their ministries or in their businesses while then are in the 20’s. Occasionally, you will find an exception. But most of the decade of one’s 20’s and most of the early experience of newer Christians is all about integrity checks. What are your early choices going to be?

I remember an early integrity check for me when I was teaching at OSU. I was 26 years old and I was an assistant professor teaching business law for undergraduates and grad students at OSU. I got an offer from one of the largest public relations firms in the United States. They said that they had come upon some articles that I had written and they wondered if I would be interested in writing editorials which they guaranteed would be placed in various national newspapers – The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and different local papers. They said that they would supply me with the background material in writing each of these articles. They said that each of the articles would take no more than 3 hours of my time for which they would give me \$1500 an article; and they would give me 10 articles a year to write.

Now \$15,000 for 20-30 hours of work was real money back in 1982. I thought to myself, “WOW! Marlene and I will be able to pay for the kids’ college education.” This was amazing! \$15,000 a year for writing a few editorials. I said, “Sign me up!”

The next week they sent me the first editorial they wanted me to write. It had to do with the Free Speech Rights of Cigarette Companies. They wanted me to write an editorial arguing that cigarette companies ought to be able to advertise on TV and on the radio under the 1st Amendment’s Commercial Free Speech Doctrine.

Integrity test time. Friends, are there any of you getting an integrity test from the Lord? Are you going to obey God? Are you going to sell out? Are you going to crack a door to disobedience, or are you going to leave a door slammed? Are you going to act consistently with your values?

SLIDE

It says in verse 1,

Clearly this was a marriage of convenience, a political arrangement perhaps set up by King Solomon's father, King David, who enjoyed friendly relations with Egypt before his death. We're told in 1 Kings 9:16 that the wedding dowry was the city of Gezer.

Some people, who you walk with, will direct you down a wise path; other people who you walk with will direct you down a path of destruction. That's why the wisdom found in Proverbs warns us about our closest relationships. We read, for example, in Proverbs 12:26, "The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray."

You need to be cautious in who you choose as close friends, because if you are not, you will be led astray. Proverbs 13:20 says something similar: “Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.”

And consider Proverbs 14:7, “Stay away from the foolish, for you will not find knowledge on their lips.”

We cannot over-estimate the importance of close relationships as setting the entire context for your relationship with God. It is amazing to me how often people will take a job, join a law firm, enter a medical practice, sign partnership papers, and not be hugely cautious before entering those entangling relationships. We convince ourselves saying, “Well, I need a paycheck. This is what’s being dangled in front of me. I need a paycheck.”

Friend, you need a warm relationship with God more than you need a paycheck. For some of you really need to reflect on Jesus’ words in Mark 8:36, “What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?”

Your close relationships will set the context for your entire life with God.

And, if it is not obvious, single people, there is no more significant relationship that you can have in setting the context of your walk with God than your marriage. And yet, even here, I’ve talked with so many Christians over the years who essentially never checked out the depth of their fiancée’s commitment to Christ. I remember on the wedding day of one of my dearest friends, we were out taking a walk together around a park, talking about his wedding that was coming up in just a few hours. Because this was an out-of-town wedding, I did not know his fiancée. So I said to him (I’ll call him Jim), “Jim, tell me about your fiancée. What is she like? What do you love about her?”

He said something that nearly stopped my heart. He said, “Well, I think she’s a Christian.”

I just wanted to scream: “You THINK she’s a Christian? You THINK she’s a Christian? You are getting married, buddy, in 3 hours and you don’t know the answer to that question? It is not 100% obvious to you? You haven’t prayed together? You haven’t been talking about your relationship with God morning, noon, and night for the last six months? And you are setting the context for your relationship with God for the next 50 years?”

Sadly, he really struggled for many years until his wife found a deep relationship with God for herself. The significance of close relationships.

And then when we are building a foundation for future success in any new responsibility, we can’t neglect the significance of our God connection.

SLIDE

The significance of our God-Connection

SLIDE - 1 Kings 3:4-5

4 The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 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 goes to Gibeon, which was the resting place for the tabernacle of God. In the tabernacle at Gibeon was the great bronze altar that was made during the time of Moses. Even though the tent was kept in Jerusalem, and that was where the Ark of the Covenant was, this was the place that people used for making sacrifices.

And in taking on new responsibilities, I don't think there is anything more important than that you build a rock-solid relationship with God. That is at the foundation. Developing a secret history with God. Jesus talks about building a secret history with God in Matthew 6:6 when he says:

SLIDE – Mt 6:6

6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

And, friend, you developing a habit of regularly meeting with God, getting to know him, getting to know his ways, getting to know what God approves of and disapproves of, getting to know his mind, you developing a secret history with God is going to be at the foundation of all future success – in a new relationship, in a new job, in a new ministry, in a new season of life. And it is never too late to develop your secret history with God.

Now, notice in 1 Kings 3 that God makes an audacious promise to Solomon regarding Solomon's prayer.

SLIDE – 1 Kings 3:5

5 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."

And this sounds very much like what Jesus says to us in Matthew 7:7-8,

SLIDE – Matt. 7:7-8

7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened.

Prayer needs to be at the foundation of any new venture. Whenever you are starting off, the question is: have I bathed this decision in prayer? Is this new venture drenched in prayer? Does this thing come out of my secret history with God, or am I just climbing out on a limb on my own? You are thinking about moving to a new city; you are thinking

about taking a new job; you are thinking of launching a new ministry – has it been bathed in prayer? Is this coming out of a deep place in your relationship with God, or is it just your own good idea that you will then say: God, please bless this mess! There is a better way to do things, friends.

Why does God ask us to pray? Why, over and over, in the Bible do we read these encouragements: Ask me; ask; come to me? Why? Maybe you struggle with that. One of the most frequently raised objections to prayer is what's the point of prayer anyway? Why do we bother? I mean, if there is a God and he really does know everything, then he knows what I need before I ask. So what's the point of me spending time asking? Why don't I get onto something more productive like working and doing? Why spend time asking?

There are a dozen reasons why we are told to ask. But let me share with you real quickly, just 4 good reasons:

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#1 – God wants to develop a relationship with us.

Like a good father, God is not interested simply in giving gifts to us. It is not enough for God to be like one of those absent fathers, who sends a check in the mail every month or so, and writes: "I'll see you when I see you." God wants a relationship with us. He invites us, "to come and build a secret history with me. I don't want to just give you things," God says. "I want to give you myself. I want to give you my presence."

Why should I pray? To develop your friendship with God, that's why.

Why should you pray? Because:

SLIDE

#2 – God wants us to connect blessings we receive with himself.

You know, there is much good in our lives and yet, if we are honest, we would say that we don't thank God nearly enough for all the many blessings in our life. Isn't that true of you? Would you say, "I just don't say 'thank you' enough to God for all the good things in my life." But I will tell you, you are more inclined to say thank you when you've been praying for something for a period of time and then you receive that blessing. If you've been asking and asking and asking God for a job, and then the door opens up for you to get a job, I will bet you that you will say thank you to God.

This is the reason why we are instructed to pray for our daily bread. It is not because all of us would starve, if we didn't ask God for bread. Many folks who don't ask God for bread, eat fine. It is that God wants us to connect the blessing of our provision with him so that we see him as the source and we give him thanks.

Why should you pray? Why does God say "Ask me?" Because:

SLIDE

#3 – God wants to change us in the asking.

You cannot go before God many times as you ask for something without being changed. One of the ways that God refines us and perfects us is in the furnace of unanswered prayer. What is it that you really value? What are you clinging to as the source of your happiness in this world? What are the idols in your life that need to be knocked down. What do you say “I must have otherwise I can never be joyful or thankful?”

God invites us to ask so that he might change us and perfect us. God invites us to ask because

SLIDE

#4 – He wants to give us significance.

God could easily do everything God wants to do in this world on his own. But he wants to give us the dignity and significance of partnering together with him in bringing his kingdom into this world. And so he gives us this great gift of prayer and he says, “I want to join with you; I could do it on my own; I could save everyone on my own; I could feed everyone on my own; I could bring peace to this world on my own; but, I want you to know the joy of being a partner – a junior partner, most certainly – with me as I work out my purposes in this world.”

Friend, it doesn't matter who you are; it doesn't matter how smart you are; it doesn't matter what your health is like, you can have incredible significance in this world simply by praying, simply by regularly going before God and asking for his purposes. You can be a partner with God while you lie on a hospital bed, while you go through cancer treatments, while you are confined to a wheelchair, if you are elderly, if you are poor, even if you have no roof over your head, you can be a partner with God.

So God says, “Ask. Build a relationship with me.”

In starting new ventures, it is so important that we start with what I call “self suspicion.”

SLIDE

The significance of self-suspicion

Look at verses 7-8 with me.

SLIDE – 1 Kings 3:7-8

7 “Now, 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. 8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number.

You see in Solomon's prayer a confession of need and acknowledgement of inadequacy.

- I'm starting this new marriage, and I don't pretend to be sufficient or adequate to be able to pull off a great marriage.
- I'm starting this new ministry, God forbid that I think I could pull this off on my own.
- We're empty nesters now; we are facing retirement. Lord, I don't want to waste the time I have left on earth.

Solomon says in verse 7,

SLIDE – 1 Kings 3:7

7 "Now, 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.

He is not literally a little child. He is not a teenager. By this point, he is married. He has at least one son, a son by the name of Rehoboam, who will succeed him as king. But he is acknowledging that apart from God he is not sufficient.

You know, our society pounds into our lives a thousand times, a million times over, to believe in yourself, to trust in yourself. My 4-year old granddaughter watches a cartoon called "Arthur" on PBS.

Arthur is a nerdy little guy in eyeglasses. I asked my wife, Marlene, "What exactly is Arthur? I mean is that a dog, or a mouse?" I found out he is an aardvark. I said, "I didn't know aardvarks wore eyeglasses and v-neck sweaters."

But when the cartoon Arthur comes on, there is a little theme song. I want to read to you the words of this theme song. This is what we pound into the minds of America's preschoolers:

SLIDE

Every day when you're
Walking down the street,
Everybody that you meet
Has an original point of view.
And I say – Hey! (Hey!)
What a wonderful kind of day
If we could learn to work and play
And get along with each other
You gotta listen to your heart,
Listen to the beat,
Listen to the rhythm,
The rhythm of the street.
Open up your eyes.

Open up your ears.
Get together
And make things better
By working together.

It's a simple message,
And it comes from the heart.
Believe in yourself,
For that's the place to start.

And I say – Hey! (Hey!)
What a wonderful kind of day
If we could learn to work and play
And get along with each other.

Hey! What a wonderful kind of day. Hey!
What a wonderful kind of day. Hey!

Now, look at this:

SLIDE
You gotta listen to your heart,
Listen to the beat,
Listen to the rhythm of the street.

And then the next verse:

SLIDE
It's a simple message,
And it comes from the heart,
Believe in yourself,
For that's the place to start.

Do you know what the Bible teaches regarding all of this believing in yourself, follow your own heart, American philosophy? It says that the only person who does that is the fool. It is exactly the opposite of biblical wisdom. Do you know what the Bible teaches is the way to success? It is Proverbs 3:5-6

SLIDE – Proverbs 3:5-6
5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

It says explicitly don't trust in yourself. According to God, there is something in me and in you that is not totally trustworthy. We are sinners. We live life in this world subject to our own desires. We have, all of us, huge blind spots. We bend truth to suit ourselves.

So God says don't lean on your own understanding. Don't lean on your own understanding regarding marriage. Don't lean on your own understanding regarding what you think love is. Don't lean on your own understanding what new position to take, or a major move in your life. Lean on the Lord. Trust in the Lord. Listen to the counsel of very mature Christian brothers and sisters who are not afraid to disagree with you. We need the Lord if we are going to be walking down the right path.

And this is underlined over and over again in scripture. Proverbs 14:12 puts it this way: "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death."

In other words, there are times you might think you are on the right path, when actually you are headed for destruction. We have to be suspicious about our own motives, if we are going to do life successfully. If we are simply left to our own devices, and our own desires, we will regularly run into dead-ends. And so we are building a foundation for success regarding new ventures. God says to us, "Ask me; ask me for anything." We look at ourselves and say, "My goodness, I can't trust in myself and God is inviting me to ask him. What should I ask for? What should I pray for?"

What should you pray for? What is the one thing you need most when you are facing a new challenge? The new challenge could be a new conflict that arose, a new obstacle in your life, or it could be, as we've been talking about, a new venture.

SLIDE

The significance of seeking wisdom

SLIDE – 1 Kings 3:9

9 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?"

When you are praying to God, you are saying, "Lord, I really need your help in this new venture, this new relationship. I've just begun a dating relationship. I'm entering a new season of life." You can't ask for anything better than for wisdom.

Now, friends, wisdom is not asking God to make you smart. You know, "God, give me 20 more IQ points." Being smart does not guarantee you successful in your new venture. And being smart does not guarantee a successful life. You can be brilliant in your technical field of expertise. You can be a brilliant lawyer and yet be absolutely clueless regarding how life is to be lived. You can be a brilliant researcher, a brilliant college professor, and yet be clueless regarding how to have a successful marriage. So many brilliant people are not only on their second marriages, but they are on their third, their fourth, and even these second, third, and fourth marriages are failing.

Some of you know this one in your own experience. You may know an amazing amount about running a business, or selling a product, or making money. But you may know nothing about raising kids, or how to have lasting healthy relationships. And you may certainly know nothing about how to find success in God's eyes.

Marlene and I just watched a video on Enron called “The Smartest Guys in the Room.” By the way, if you pick up the video, there is one really bad scene in it that you will want to fast forward through. But Enron is a fascinating story of these brilliant business people with Harvard MBA’s, law degrees from the best law schools in America. And all of these brilliant people, ended up destroying a company, throwing tens of thousands of people out of work, shredding their reputations, and ultimately ending the existence of one of America’s greatest accounting firms.

One of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century was a French philosopher named Michel Foucault. He has been hugely influential in laying the foundations of what is called “postmodernism.” The pervading theme in Foucault’s philosophy was that all human relationships are essentially defined by a struggle for power. Right and wrong; truth and falsehood, these are all illusions, just the creation of language that covers up our will to dominate. So, according to Foucault, socialists believe in the distribution of goods because they want to get their hands on other people’s money. And conservatives believe the opposite because they want to keep their money to themselves. And psychologists label people insane because they want to lock other people up. Doctors just like bossing people around.

It is amazing that Foucault’s incredibly bleak and cynical philosophy has been so popular. But one thing was true about Foucault. His own life spun wildly out of control before he died. He repeatedly tried to commit suicide. He was involved in the most broken, sadomasochistic relationships in California. He had hundreds of sexual partners, and eventually died of AIDS in the 1980’s. And Michael Foucault, with his powerful IQ, and his very influential philosophy, would not be called by God a “wise man.”

See, according to the Bible, wisdom is one of the things that you can never have apart from God. We read in the Bible that Christ is our wisdom and the Lord is called the only wise God. You can be really smart without a relationship with God, but you can’t be wise. And when Solomon stopped walking with God, he lost the gift of wisdom. It is impossible to be wise apart from God. It is like trying to bake a cake in a washing machine. You are just going to get a mess. Or its like trying to dry clothes in an oven. You are just going to catch your clothes on fire.

With all of our abilities, we human beings were never meant to find wisdom on our own.

What is wisdom? What was Solomon praying for when he prayed for a discerning heart in verse 9,

SLIDE – 1 Kings 3:9

9 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?”

A discerning heart is more literally a hearing heart, a listening heart. If you want a short-hand definition of wisdom;

SLIDE

Wisdom = God's perspective of life

When you pray for wisdom, you are praying, "God, give me your perspective." Give me your perspective of this dating relationship. God, give me your perspective of this business partnership. Give me your perspective of retirement. Give me your perspective of this illness. Give me your perspective of immigrants, or war, or the environment.

When you are praying and praying and you are not getting any answers, you are praying for healing, but it isn't happening, what do you need in a situation like that? You need God's wisdom. God, give me your perspective? What are you doing beyond this moment? Give me grasp of eternity. Give me a grasp of the resurrection of the dead.

Wisdom is God's perspective on life. Another way to put it is:

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Wisdom = seeing below the surface

That is what we are asking for when we pray for discernment or insight. God, I'm so often taken in by the appearance of things. People say things and I just believe them. The book of Proverbs is all about getting below the surface, getting below the appearance, helping me to become wise in my dealings with other people.

So we are focusing on our early choices, particularly our close relationships. We are building a rock-solid relationship with God. And instead of relying on ourselves and our own understanding and what we think is right, we are trusting in God and we are seeking him for wisdom.

And what is the response to all of this? verses 10-15,

SLIDE – 1 Kings 3:10-15

10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. 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 in administering justice, 12 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. 13 Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. 14 And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." 15 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.

And here we encounter God's generosity.

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The significance of God's generosity

One thing that you can know about God is not only does he answer prayer, when you pray, but the answer will completely surpass your request. We read in Ephesians 3:20-21 these words:

SLIDE – Eph. 3:20-21

20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

This is what Jesus says to us in inviting us to pray and to seek him whenever we enter a new venture. He says in Matthew 7:11,

SLIDE – Mt 7:11

11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

I did a Coffee and Conversation here at the church the other night as a way to connect with some of you folks. We had a nice turn out of maybe 70-75 people. Someone came up to me at the end and said, "Did you ever think that when you prayed 15 years ago about the church that all of this would be going on at Vineyard Columbus – the Community Center, all the outreaches, all the missions, all the thousands of people – did you ever think this?"

I said, "Absolutely never! I had dreams that the church would grow. But when we pray to God regarding any new responsibility, we are approaching the God who does immeasurably more than all we ask, think, or imagine."

So, friends, if it is God who is leading you in the new challenge, where God guides, God provides. If God calls you into something, he will meet you when you get there. And he will go beyond what we ask, or think, or imagine. Let's pray.

The Challenge of New Responsibilities

Rich Nathan
June 30 and July 1, 2007
Facing Life's Challenges
1 Kings 3:1-15

- I. The Significance of Early Choices (1 Kings 3.1-3)**
- II. The Significance of Close Relationships (1 Kings 3.1)**
- III. The Significance of Our God-Connection (1 Kings 3.4, 5)**
- IV. The Significance of Self-Suspicion (Proverbs 3.4, 5)**
- V. The Significance of Seeking Wisdom (1 Kings 3.7-9)**
- VI. The Significance of God's Generosity (1 Kings 3.10-13)**