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*A Prayer for Balance*  
1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

A man driving around the backwoods of Montana sees a sign in front of a broken-down house: "Talking Dog For Sale." He rings the bell, and the owner appears and tells him that the dog is in the backyard. The guy goes into the backyard and sees a nice looking Labrador retriever sitting there.

"You talk?" he asks.

"Yep," the Lab replies.

After the guy recovers from the shock of hearing a dog talk, he asks. "So, what's your story?"

The Lab looks up and says, "Well, I discovered that I could talk when I was rather young. I wanted to help my country, so I contacted the CIA. In no time at all, they had me jetting from country to country, sitting in rooms with spies and world leaders, because no one figured a dog would be eavesdropping."

"I was one of their most valuable spies for eight years running. But the jetting around really tired me out, and I knew I wasn't getting any younger. So I decided to settle down. I signed up for a job at the airport to do some undercover security, wandering near suspicious characters and listening in. I uncovered some incredible drug deals and was awarded a batch of medals."

"I got married, had a mess of puppies, and now I'm just retired.

The guy is amazed. He goes back in and asks the owner how much he wants for the dog.

"Ten dollars," the guy says.

"Ten dollars? This dog is amazing! Why on earth are you selling him so cheap?"

"Because he's a liar. He never did any of that stuff."

My sermon today is not on lying, but on the wisdom to know a talking dog when you see one. Wisdom has been described as balance, understanding, good judgment, discernment, and comprehension. In his sermon on the mount,

Jesus referred to “Solomon and all his glory.” But, Solomon was also known for his wisdom...at least in his early reign as King of Israel.

Solomon came to the throne differently from all of the other leaders of Israel. He was no charismatic hero...no Gideon or Samson or David. In fact, he never fought a day in his life and had been raised with a “silver spoon in his mouth.” He became king because his dying father singled him out to be the successor.

God appeared to the young king in a dream and offered to give him anything that he desired. This is an age-old motif in literature, and is a telling device of demonstrating an individual’s true nature. If all possibilities are open and there are no limits, then what one chooses in such a moment is an accurate reflection of what he or she is on the inside and what he or she truly values in life. In such a moment of testing, Solomon came through with flying colors, for he knew himself and his situation well enough to realize what he needed most. He asked for wisdom, for an understanding mind, for the ability to discern between good and evil so that he might be able to govern effectively and do the job that had been laid upon him by destiny. When you stop and think about it, of all the things a human being needs, Wisdom is that which lies at the foundation of every other achievement. It is the ability to see things realistically and then “put it all together.” It is the practical skill of knowing how to make life “work” in the deepest sense of that term.

The amazing thing is that Solomon recognized the value of wisdom so early in his life. Ask most twenty-year-olds what they would like most, and I am guessing they would opt for some of the more surface realities of life...such as fame or wealth or power. Solomon realized that none of these things could be sustained or utilized effectively without the prior quality of wisdom. The quality of wisdom is something we eventually come to realize, but usually only after many failures.

The prodigal son, when he started out, did not ask for wisdom — only power and money and freedom. His obsession was to be able to do as he pleased for a while. However, he turned out not pleased with what he had done. Solomon was ahead of his time, maturity-wise.

The writer of Kings indicates that God was delighted with Solomon's request and moved to answer it immediately. Scripture is consistent in indicating that we do not have to struggle against God to learn how to "put it together." James echoes that theme with the words, "if anyone lacks wisdom, let that person ask of God...and it will be given. (James 1:5) In fact, no less than fifty times the New Testament mentions the importance of wisdom. Solomon is famous for his wisdom and it is what I admire most about him.

An example of his wisdom was on the day two prostitutes were brought to him to settle a dispute. These two lived together and both had had babies at about the same time. One night one of them rolled over on her infant and smothered him and when she realized this, she exchanged infants with the other woman. On awakening this one realized that the dead baby was not hers and the two of them got into a terrible conflict over the identity of the remaining child. When Solomon heard this case, he ordered his sword brought out and proposed to cut in two the living infant and give a half to each one of the contestants. The suggestion caught both women by surprise, and in an unguarded moment one cried, "On no! Don't do that! Give her the baby rather kill him," while the other woman agreed to the proposal. Immediately, Solomon pronounced the first woman the true mother and awarded her the child, for the test of love had shrewdly brought the truth to light.

So first, what is the value of wisdom? Wisdom is that part of us that puts our knowledge into practical application. It is the place within where our experience combines with our knowledge, interpreting circumstances and environment for the purpose of making good decisions. There is a difference in being smart and having common sense. "Discretion is the better part of valor," Benjamin Franklin included in his *Poor Richard's Almanac*.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 is quoted by many who have no idea from where the words of wisdom come:

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:  
a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*

*a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.*

Stephen Covey says that wisdom is “your sense of balance.” It helps you know when to speak and when to remain silent. Wisdom helps you know when to offer advice and as father or mother, and when to let a son or daughter learn on their own...when to step in and intercede and when to let something run its course...when to confront and when to ignore...when to prevent and when to allow...when to let harmless falls become teachable moments, and when to avoid harmful accidents.

This past week, I received an email from John Philbrick. (For newer members, John and Linda moved to Poughkeepsie, New York, earlier this year to live nearer their family.) In his note, John mentioned babysitting their granddaughter for the day:

*...Jane is here with us today, though momentarily down for her afternoon nap. That's after twice climbing the stairs to the bedroom floor with me close behind- the first time (to our knowledge) that she's gone up stairs. Twice she had small falls; promptly got herself re-organized and kept on going! We're not sure we're going to tell her parents yet, but it was fun to watch...*

Secondly, how can we acquire wisdom or sharpen the wisdom we already have? The book of James says, “If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.” (James 1:5) Part of any process of prayer is that it opens our eyes to the world around us. Maybe God just changes us into wise persons; or maybe our desire combines with the desire of God for us to be wise and the outcome is that we become more sensitive to the ways of life and others, which make us more discerning individuals.

We also have the ability (and I would add responsibility) to develop that quality in our lives. It's really rather simple when you think about it. Wisdom

requires reflection. Here are a few questions we can ask ourselves when we have questions about the way we handled a situation:

- *What happened? Precisely, what happened as compared with what we think happened or what someone else said happened?*
- *What part did I play in what happened?*
- *What did I do right?*
- *How was I inappropriate?*
- *What can I do differently next time this happens?*
- *How have others handled similar experiences and what was the outcome of their experience?*

You can also get someone else's reflection on what happened.

Discernment (or wisdom) is the ability to recognize that just because your talking dog doesn't always tell the truth doesn't mean you don't have something of great value.

Perhaps the most familiar modern-day prayer is the Serenity Prayer, attributed to theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous and other "twelve-step programs:"

*God grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change;  
Courage to change the things I can;  
And the **wisdom** to know the difference.*

Solomon prayed for wisdom; Jesus grew in wisdom; James indicates that wisdom is available to all who seriously desire it. Apparently, of all that we might want in our lives, wisdom is at the top of God's list for us. AMEN.

## **Prayer of Illumination**

*Let us pray...*

*Living God,  
you are the giver of wisdom and true discernment,  
guiding those who seek your ways to choose the good.  
Grant that we, who feast on the true bread of heaven,  
may have eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

### **1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14**

Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established....

Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."