1 Kings 3:1-14
The Characteristics of Spiritual Leadership

The book of 1 Kings opens with the account of the end of King David's reign when his oldest son, Adonijah attempted to overtake the throne despite his clear knowledge that Solomon was God's choice for the task. David, in response to God's command that was given through the prophet Nathan, immediately turned the throne over to his younger son Solomon. After David's death and burial, Adonijah staged a second, more aggressive and violent, but failed attempt at a coup. As a result, Solomon, after an attempt to dispense grace and forgiveness, was forced to put Adonijah to death along with Joab the chief of the military, and Abiathar the high priest who were both co-conspirators. At this point Solomon was now unencumbered in his position as the king of the united kingdom of Israel and Judah.

Solomon was young and inexperienced in the task of leadership. However, unlike his older brother, Solomon had a great respect for his father, David, and an even greater respect and reverence for God. Solomon was already characterized by his godly character when he accepted the throne of Israel and that preparation would prove appropriate for the task.

A Man of Peace. Solomon's reign was characterized by a period of peace. The peaceful kingdom that he inherited came at a great cost. The battles that were fought by David and his predecessor Saul cost many thousands of Israelite lives. Both Saul and David were men of war. Solomon was determined to lead the nation as a man of peace and desired to keep the peace in the kingdom without having to do battle. Unlike David and Saul, Solomon sought to maintain peace with the neighbors of Israel (and also peace within the country) through communication and negotiation rather than with the sword. He was a man of reconciliation, seeking to find ways to solve problems without expressing anger or retribution. Solomon was known for his policy of making alliances with all of the neighboring nations and tribes.
1 Kings 3:1-4. *And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh’s daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about. 2 Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days. 3 And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. 4 And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.*

We see that one of the first acts done by Solomon was to negotiate a peace treaty with Egypt, a treaty that included taking the daughter of the Pharaoh as his wife, positioning himself as the Pharaoh’s son-in-law. The taking of wives (and children) as a means to negotiate peace was common among the pagan nations, a practice that accounts for Solomon’s many wives and concubines. One might note that both the establishing of alliances with pagan nations and this practice of polygamy are both forbidden by Mosaic Law. Solomon’s strategy for peace brought with it significant consequences that would significantly impact his kingdom in the years to come.

In addition to his daughter, the Pharaoh also gave to Solomon the southern coastal land of Gezer (modern-day Gaza), providing him with a safe merchant route through Philistia and a clear and secure border to the south. This deal with the Pharaoh brought peace, but a peace that was bought with an unexpected price. Along with the Pharaoh’s daughter came her Egyptian pagan religion that Solomon would later allow to be freely practiced. It is evident that Solomon was initially unaware of this consequence as he truly desired God’s will to be exercised in Israel and Judah. Solomon did not allow his Egyptian wife to live in David’s palace because of her paganism, placing her in temporary quarters until he built a place for her.

Solomon inherited a kingdom that was in a state of both incompleteness and dynamic change. The nations of Israel and Judah were loosely united, joined by one common king. The dual priesthood of Abiathar and Zadok was now held by Zadok alone. Because of the plans for building the temple, the location of the
sanctuary and the Arc of the Covenant were temporary and displaced. Solomon came to Gibeon to worship, though the tent of the tabernacle was properly located in Jerusalem. God called His people to come together and worship Him in the Jerusalem Tabernacle, but due to temple construction, Gibeon was set up as one of the many "high places" where worship was taking place. This practice of worship on hilltops and mountaintops was similar to that of the Canaanites, and was inappropriate. Solomon would have to correct this problem later in his reign. Yet, it was at Gibeon that Solomon chose to bring a great sacrifice to the altar as a sincere expression of thankfulness to God.

Solomon was overwhelmed by the task of leading the kingdom. Like Joshua who received the leadership of Israel from Moses, Solomon did not feel adequate for the task and needed encouraging from the LORD. It is evident that Solomon had already made some decisions that were contrary to their Law. One thing is clear however: at this point in his life Solomon loved God, and was fully sincere in his desire to follow God’s will as he led the united kingdoms.

1 Kings 3:5. *In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.*

Of course, God knows the heart of Solomon, so his question of him is not without full understanding of his answer. When God questions us, predominantly through His Word, God is not searching to find the answer. Such a theological position ignores God’s attribute of omniscience: knowing all. Instead, by questioning, God is leading us to search for answers within in our own hearts. As Solomon is given such a question, he is caused to consider the true priorities in his life.

How would you respond to such an open-ended offer from God? Would you seek something that would serve your own needs, or would you seek something that would serve the needs of others? The answer to this one question serves to separate those who truly love God from those who simply make a show of it. Your own answer to this question can be profoundly revealing of the true nature of your relationship with God and of your agape love for others.

The concept of a wish-granting Genie has been common to man for many years. There are probably very few people who have not given thought to their response to an offer of three wishes, or their response to the winning of a large lottery prize.
It is likely that our first "knee-jerk" reaction to an offer like that heard by Solomon might be to respond in a way that asks the LORD for riches, good health, or other significant personal benefits. Such a response is only natural for man. Then, upon recognizing the context of the situation, a Christian might then recognize the folly of such a choice, repent, and turn to asking for something that would empower service to God's kingdom. We find that Solomon's first response was neither of these, and was far more appropriate to the needs in Solomon's life as well as the life of this new kingdom.

1 Kings 3:6. *And Solomon said, Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.*

**Gratitude.** Solomon's first response was not one of seizing the opportunity to make a withdrawal from God's huge bank account, but rather to express gratitude to God for what He has done for his father and now for himself. Solomon recognized the mercy of God as it was demonstrated in the life of his father, David. Solomon knew his father, and was quite familiar with his transgressions and sins, and he knew of the forgiveness that David had received from God. Solomon had repeatedly witnessed God working actively in the life of his father. Now Solomon finds himself in his father's place on the throne and knows that God will show the same mercy and grace towards himself as he seeks to lead the nation. Solomon is grateful to God for that mercy.

God has demonstrated that same grace and mercy towards all people who love Him. All people deserve eternal separation from a Holy and Just God, yet God's unconditional love is demonstrated when He loves us while we are yet sinful. When one considers the role of God in our lives, this can be one of our first thoughts, and understanding this truth can lead us to an appreciation for what God has done for us who deserve nothing. This is the gratitude that Solomon expresses, a gratitude that we should all share.
1 Kings 3:7. **And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.**

**Humility.** Solomon's next statement is one of humility, a true assessment of his intrinsic unworthiness and his abilities. Solomon was both young, and inexperienced. However, this response to God's question reveals that he was already quite wise for his age. One only need consider the contrast between Solomon and Adonijah, his older brother who had recently twice tried to take the throne of David in a coup. Adonijah proclaimed himself King, obviously feeling well-prepared for the task. On the other hand, Solomon better understood the responsibility of national and spiritual leadership that places one's own desires aside and seeks God's desires and purposes. Solomon was awestruck by the gravity of that responsibility and felt fully inadequate for the task, referring to himself as only a child who does not even know the proper protocol for going in and out of the King's palace. The Hebrew phrase “go out and go in” is an idiom that expresses the full range of required responsibilities and/or knowledge for a task, a task that Solomon feels is far beyond his own knowledge and wisdom.

This characteristic of true humility before God is a hallmark of a true spiritual leader. When one feels adequate to administer God's plan, he/she is setting himself/herself equal with God. Only Jesus is given that authority. A true spiritual leader will recognize his inability to administer God's kingdom plan, and as a result of that humility will be open to listening to the Holy Spirit when it comes to making decisions on behalf of those in his/her sphere of responsibility. In today's churches such people include pastors, priests, deacons, bishops, elders, overseers, members, etc.

1 Kings 3:8. **And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.**

**Concern for others.** It is apparent that Adonijah had little or no concern for the people of Israel. He simply wanted to be The King, thinking that he deserved it by virtue of his position as David’s oldest living son. Solomon's response is quite different as he sees the multitudes of people who the King is responsible to. Solomon’s statement "that cannot be numbered" is a reference to the promise of
God to Abraham, indicating his appreciation for the fulfilled covenant. Solomon recognizes that his responsibility is to all of Israel, and what he does in his reign will impact its people for generations to come. Where Adonijah's first thoughts were for his own personal power and gain, Solomon's first thoughts were of the needs of the people, and the tremendous responsibility the king has to serve them. Adonijah would have been a king of conquest; Solomon would be a servant king who expresses a genuine concern for the people and seeks their welfare.

Like Solomon, a true spiritual leader will be more concerned with the needs of others than for himself. When we observe the leadership styles of our pastors and lay administrators, this characteristic (or the lack of it) is quickly evident. Does the individual in a position of spiritual leadership seek his or her own way in matters, or is God's purposes for the true need of the body the primary focus? As we find ourselves in positions of decision-making for the body, are those decisions motivated by our own personal agenda, or by a true and sincere concern for the needs of those who are impacted by our choices? Do we alienate others by our adamant desire for our own way? We see from the context of Solomon’s dilemma that God is pleased when our concern is for others rather than for ourselves.

1 Kings 3:9. *Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?*

**Discernment.** The result of Solomon's gratitude, humility, and concern for the people motivated his greatest desire: to have the wisdom to discern God's plans and purposes for the people. In response to God's offer of anything he desired, Solomon did not ask for great wealth, or long life, as would be asked by most. His request was short and simple. Solomon knew that, as a spiritual leader, God's purpose and plan could only be administered if he was discerning of it. He knew that he did not have within himself the wisdom or ability to do this on his own. He knew he needed the wisdom from God to accomplish the task.

This characteristic of discernment is one that is sometimes lacking in our administration of God's grace. We organize programs, assign leadership, administer budgets, and run our churches at most like a business corporation and at least like a social club, and oftentimes we are so caught up in the administration

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1 Genesis 13:16.
and the power of leadership that we are no longer sensitive to the still-small voice that is asking us to stop, listen, and join God in His plan. I have seen leadership so enamored by their own position of power that the Holy Spirit is not only ignored, but is not even genuinely welcomed. When this happens, an attitude of, "this is the way we will do it regardless of what you say," “my way or the highway,” or “we have never done it that way before.” is realized, and God's purposes are thwarted as the prompting of the Holy Spirit is quenched by pride and self-will. Conflict arises in the body as people complain when their own personal agenda is not met. Nearly all conflict in the church body comes from self-centered insistence on the part of an individual or small group that is not caring about or discerning of the impact of their behavior on that body.

When one demonstrates a sincere desire for godly leadership and an ability to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit, their own self-will and pride is overwhelmed by God's love for the people and for His purposes. It is only then that an individual is ready to lead.

1 Kings 3:10. *And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing.*

Why was God pleased by Solomon's request? His request was humble, sincere, selfless, and demonstrated those characteristics of a spiritual leader that are necessary for administering God's grace and purpose in his church. How pleased is God with the choices that we make? Are our motives self-centered and characterized by a passionate defense of what we want and hope for, or are our motives driven by a desire to know God and His will in every occasion of leadership? God was pleased that Solomon's true heart was for Him.

1 Kings 3:11-12. *And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; 12 Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.*
How did God respond to Solomon's request? First, God encouraged Solomon by showing his pleasure at Solomon's desire to seek Him first\(^2\) in all that he would be required to do as a leader of God's people. Solomon showed no interest in his own personal gain, or the gain of his family, but rather was interested solely in being a godly leader. So, God was pleased with his request.

It is interesting to note that Solomon's initial request demonstrated the very wisdom and discernment that God states that He had already granted to Solomon. That is, Solomon was already demonstrating the very wisdom that he sought because God had already given him that wise and understanding heart. Some may argue a tradition that Solomon received this power of discernment following the dream, but the context shows that Solomon was growing in wisdom and discernment as God was preparing him for this position of leadership. The differences between Adonijah and Solomon did not appear after the dream, but rather, were characteristic of each of these brothers' base personalities. Nathan had long-before announced God's choice of Solomon to lead the nation, an announcement that Solomon was well-aware of. He grew from his childhood knowing that this day was coming, and unlike Adonijah, Solomon stayed by David's side and learned from him the characteristics of a man who has a heart for God.

The scriptures do not contain a great deal of detail concerning the events that took place during the reign of Solomon since the annals of history are more concerned with wars and battles, but what is shown is that Solomon continued to rule in a manner that no leader had ever done before: with a heart towards God's purpose rather than his own. Solomon's wisdom was unlike the wisdom of the world because it came from a discernment of the Holy Spirit in his life. Solomon is known best for his wisdom, one that was unchallenged (and will always remain unchallenged) in the pagan world simply because his wisdom is based upon a discernment of God's will, a power that is unavailable to the unrepentant spirit. This is this same wisdom that is available to all who trust God through the power of the Holy Spirit. I would not state that any man, save Christ alone, has had the depth of wisdom and discernment demonstrated by Solomon, but it is still that same wisdom that is granted by God to one who seeks Him. This wisdom, available to all people of faith is infinitely greater than the greatest wisdom of a lost heart. It is this same wisdom that should characterize any individual who would seek to be making decisions for the body of Christ.

\(^2\) Matthew 6:33.
1 Kings 3:13-14. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. 14 And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.

Because of Solomon's desire for a life of obedience, God went beyond the request of Solomon to give to him all the resources he would need to serve as a respected King of Israel. As Solomon's wisdom became known among the nations, they lavished gifts upon him throughout his reign, and Solomon became immensely wealthy, gathering a wealth that, in their culture and time would classify him as the richest person in the world. In respect to today's wealth he would still be in that position.

As we consider the result of God's promise, Solomon became honored and respected more than any of the other nation's kings during his lifetime. This is quite a change from the past history of Israel where the nations considered Israel and its king a very minor player in world events. Most nations considered Israel a speed-bump in the merchant trade routes. History reveals, however, that God's promise went even further than His initial statement, as the wisdom and discernment demonstrated by Solomon has not been realized again by any king or world leader since. What made Solomon so wealthy, powerful, and respected? It was his sincere love for God and his discernment of God's plan and purpose in his administration of Israel. Likewise, true success will be realized by spiritual leaders of today who place God first, and do so with a sincere sensitivity to His voice when it comes to administration.

God also demonstrated his blessing of Solomon by promising him a long life. Long life is often used to characterize the godliness of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. Some theologians have argued that the incredibly long lives that are recorded of the pre-Noahic patriarchs are willfully exaggerated in an attempt to identify their superior godliness. If this were true, Solomon would have lived longer than Methuselah.

Solomon served as king over the united tribes of Israel and Judah for 40 years, a period of time roughly the same as his father, David. This was a time of peace
and prosperity for both Israel and Judah. We will see, however, that Solomon was still a man who is subject to the temptations and rationalizations of the world, and these would prove to bring him down later in life, possibly shortening the life that God promised him. No man is so wise as to be above the temptations of this world. Solomon did not recognize this, yet through his example we can avoid his mistake.

We see that the characteristics of a true spiritual leader include a heart that loves God, and is truly thankful for what God has done. This is an individual who has a love for God's people and a desire for their welfare that is greater than any desire for self. This is an individual who seeks God in order to discern His plan and purposes in every occasion, and as a result, exercises Godly wisdom in administration. This is an individual who has a heart that seeks peace and reconciliation. The Apostle Paul wrote frequently of this ministry of reconciliation and peace that he simply expected from the church leadership.

2 Corinthians 5:18. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.

Ephesians 4:2-3. With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

May God grant his grace and wisdom on those who are called upon to take positions of leadership in the church so that His purposes and plans can be accomplished rather than our own, and so that our fellowship would always be characterized by peace and unity, not disrupted by the discord and conflict that is never led of the Holy Spirit.

Some of us may need to seek God’s forgiveness for failing to maintain a spirit of peace, gratitude, humility, discernment and a concern for others. We have demanded our own way and disrupted the peace and unity of the fellowship. We may need to go to one another and ask for forgiveness for our self-centeredness and ask for prayer for one another that we would surrender our self-will and follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit in all that we do.
Let us continue to pray for one another and for those whom we have set apart to administer the grace of God in our communities of faith. Let us pray that both we and they will grow in appreciation for what God is doing in our lives, grow in humility as we grow in our understanding of the nature of God’s grace, grow in discernment of God’s will and purpose for us and for His church, and seek the manner of wisdom that Solomon sought: one that has one central purpose: to serve others as we serve the LORD.