

August 16, 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time: 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

If Solomon were an older and more experienced ruler when God appears to him in his dream, I wonder if he would ask for wisdom.

by [April Yamasaki](#) in the [August 5, 2015](#) issue

The quest for knowledge may be pursued at higher speeds with smarter tools today,” writes Arianna Huffington. “But wisdom is found no more readily than it was three thousand years ago in the court of King Solomon. In fact, ours is a generation bloated with information and starved for wisdom.”

After Solomon becomes king, God appears to him in a dream and gives him a life-changing invitation: “Ask what I should give you.” Solomon begins his answer by acknowledging God’s love for his father, David—a love that has placed Solomon on his father’s throne, so that David’s legacy and family line will continue. Solomon describes himself as “only a little child”—perhaps a reference to his youthfulness (although his exact age here is unknown), or a figure of speech reflecting his sense of the enormity of his responsibility as king.

Then Solomon finally turns to his request, asking God for “an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil.” Solomon asks for wisdom. This might be the wisest thing Solomon ever does.

God replies, “I give you a wise and discerning mind. . . . I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life.”

While mulling over this story of Solomon’s success and wisdom, I’ve also been reading Huffington’s book *Thrive*. The *Huffington Post* cofounder and editor in chief has known extraordinary success in the form of money and power. But in her own experience, those two measures of success were not enough. In 2007, she collapsed from exhaustion. Clearly her life—and her definition of success—needed to change.

Now her definition of success includes what she calls a “third metric,” which embraces well-being, wonder, giving—and wisdom. Here is how she defines it:

- Understanding life as a classroom where we can learn even from our struggles
- Practicing and expressing gratitude
- Paying attention to our intuition and interior life
- Appreciating the difference between information and wisdom
- Slowing down in our culture of hurry sickness
- Being mindful instead of operating on automatic pilot

I’m struck by the parallels with Solomon’s wisdom. His story also suggests three measures of success: riches and honor (neither of which he asks for) and wisdom (which he does). For Solomon, wisdom includes gratitude; after he wakes from his dream, he offers sacrifices in thanksgiving to God. The rest of 1 Kings 3 gives an example of Solomon’s wisdom in judging a dispute between two women who both claim to be the mother of the same baby boy. Solomon doesn’t have the information that DNA testing could provide us today, but his wisdom enables him to determine that the real mother is the woman who acts in the baby’s best interest to preserve his life.

Solomon’s reputation for wisdom spreads throughout his kingdom and beyond (4:29–34). The queen of Sheba travels to Jerusalem to test his wisdom and is satisfied (10:1–10). And yet for all his wisdom, Solomon also makes some unwise decisions in his later years—decisions that eventually lead to the loss of his kingdom (11:1–13).

If Solomon were an older and more experienced ruler when God appears to him in his dream, I wonder if he would ask for wisdom. Would he ask for wisdom if he were not already wealthy and powerful? If Huffington hadn’t already been rich and influential, would she have discovered that third metric? What might wisdom mean for us ordinary folk?

Perhaps the most important lesson I’m learning about wisdom, from both Solomon’s story and Huffington’s book, is the practice of gratitude. In our hurry-sick society, it’s all too easy to rush through life without thinking or stopping to give thanks. Cultivating a spirit of thankfulness helps me slow down and be more mindful of my surroundings and of other people. It helps me to be more positive in the face of challenges and to ask myself, Where can I be thankful in this situation? What can I

learn?

And so I've added a simple gratitude list to the end of my day: just five people, things, thoughts, or experiences that I can offer back to God with thanks. Sometimes I write them in my journal. More often I just mentally list them and let them go. My gratitude list seems oh so ordinary, nothing on the order of a visit from the queen of Sheba. It's the wonder of sunshine in the morning after days of rain, an actual letter in the mail, a church potluck, reading a good book, hearing a song on the radio. Simple pleasures, really, since I'm no king or celebrity.

I don't know that my gratitude practice is making me any wiser. It may or may not prevent me from collapsing from exhaustion myself someday. But it seems to be a step in the right direction, toward greater well-being, wonder, and wisdom. And it's something anyone can begin to learn—from King Solomon to Arianna Huffington to you and me.