

## A Church or a Deli?

I Kings 3:5-12

P= Pastor

S=Sparky

C=Chip

P: In our Old Testament reading for today, God appears to King Solomon in a dream, and says, "Ask what I should give you."

S: (whispers) Hey, Pastor!

P: (*pauses, not quite sure he heard something, and goes on.*) Solomon considers this offer and-

S: Hey, pastor!

P: (sigh) I heard a rumor you were going to be here today. What's going on, Sparky? As you can see, I'm a little busy right now.

S: Who do I talk to about getting on your show?

P: This is not a show; it's a worship service.

S: Okay, whatever. Who does the musical bookings for your worship service?

P: We don't do "bookings." We have a music director and she is generally in charge of special music--

S: Well, call her over here.

P: Couldn't this wait until after the service?

S: Nope.

P: Are you sure?

S: Honest. This can't wait. It's very important. It has to do with the service.

P: Okay. Before we bother her, tell me what's the problem?

S: There's no problem. I was just thinking, I don't see any of that special music listed in the program today. And you know, God has given this amazing voice.

P: Actually, I didn't know that.

S: See, that's just what I'm talking about! God gave me an awesome singing voice, and no one seems to know about it. And, well, I just wanted to share a message in song with all of you good folks out there.

P: We certainly welcome all musical gifts, but it would really be better if you gave us some notice. You see, believe it or not, we do *plan* these worship services.

S: Please! I really feel I need to do this. In fact, I feel like I'm called to do this. I just want to share what's in my heart.

P: (*looks over at music director*) What do you think? OK, Sparky, we're not going to stand here all morning arguing, and waste these peoples' time. If you feel that strongly that you have something in your heart that you think you are called to share, I guess we'll take a chance and accept your offer. Go ahead.

S: Great! Hey, Chip, get up here. I need your help.

C: (*offstage*) I can't go out there! I'm not even dressed. I thought we had the summer off. What's going on?

S: You don't even need to be seen. I just need you to hold the microphone. These arms of mine are, like, useless.

C: (*offstage*) What are you going to do with this microphone? (*Appears with the microphone in his mouth*)

S: I'm going to sing. (*taps the microphone with his head to see if it's live*) Is this thing on?

P: Wait a minute! Are you sure that's a good idea? I mean there are actually live people out there listening to this.

S: That's exactly what I'm looking for. Hit it Bro! (*Music comes on. He lip syncs to Old Time Rock and Roll for about 20 seconds. Chip drops the microphone and disappears offstage. The music stops*).

S: Hey, What are you doing? I'm not done yet.

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S: Okay, here's the deal. I heard you say that God came to Solomon in a dream and told him to ask for whatever he wanted. And I thought, "Way cool!" And then I remembered hearing that Jesus said something like that, too. "Ask and it shall be given to you." So there you are.

C: (*to congregation*) Did you follow any of that?

P: What does God's invitation to ask for things have to do with you singing about that old time rock n roll?

S: Well, if God keeps inviting us to ask for what we want, it's only right that we should take him up on the offer. This is my answer to God. I want to be a rock star. If I ask God to make it happen, God will make it happen, right?

P: Well . . .

S: So this was the start of my career. Now everyone knows how totally amazing I am. I'm betting there's probably a talent scout in the audience, waiting to sign me to a contract, so baby, I am on my way!

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P: I don't think that's right.

C: (crushed) What! You mean I'm not a great puppet?

P: No, of course you are, Chip. I meant no, Solomon is not flattering God. He is remembering what God has done. When he thinks about what he wants God to do in his life, he starts by remembering what God has already done in his life. Solomon realizes that he has already been granted more than he deserves. This leads him to consider his request of God with a humble heart.

S: Not to worry. I know all about being humble. I am only going to bill the church \$4,000 for my performance this morning. That's a fraction of what we rock stars usually charge.

C: I hate to break it to you, but you'll get paid the puppet union scale for doing this skit, same as any other puppet.

S: Really? How much is that?

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P: We're getting off the subject here. The point is that before Solomon makes his request, he first takes time to remember how much he has been given. Have you done that, Sparky?

S: Um, maybe I skipped that part. Tell you what: I'll have my people call your people and they'll get that straightened out.

C: You can't assign someone to be thankful for you. That's something you have to do for yourself.

S: OK, OK, I'll do it. I'll be thankful and all that. But don't try to spoil this. Even if God has given us a lot, God told us to ask for more. Remember, "Ask and it shall be given unto you."

C: I hate to admit it but Sparky does have a point.

P: He does. But let's keep going with the story. After remembering what God has done, next Solomon takes stock of where he's at in life and what he really needs.

C: Where is he at in life? Isn't he a great king?

P: Yes, he's a king. But he's not a great king. And he admits that. He doesn't try to pretend that he's better than other people. In fact, he actually makes fun of himself.

C: The king makes fun of himself?

P: Listen to what he says: "Lord, you have made your servant king, although I am only a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in."

S: King Solomon was a little kid?

P: No, he's a brand new king. He says that when it comes to the job of being a king, he is like a little child. He doesn't know anything about being king. He doesn't even know how a king is supposed to walk in or out of a room.

S: I'd recommend using the door.

C: He knows how to use a door. Personally, I think he has self-esteem issues.

P: I don't think Solomon has a problem at all. He's just being honest with himself. He knows that God has done amazing things for him, and he knows that as a new king, he has a lot to learn. Given that, what do you suppose this brand new king would ask for?

S: A brand new custom-made throne?

C: How about a strong army to protect his kingdom?

S: A lifetime supply of Cap'n Crunch?

P: Let's read on in the story and find out what he asked for. Solomon says, "Give me an understanding mind to govern your people, and the ability to tell right from wrong."

S: And what else?

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S: That's all he asks for? God says to ask for anything you want and that's all he can come up with?

C: That's interesting. He doesn't ask for money or jewels or armies or palaces or perfect health or anything? Just the wisdom to be a good king. I think that's kind of cool.

S: I think it's kind of crazy. But who am I to judge? Solomon's dream is to be a wise king; my dream is to be a rock star. I don't see any reason why God can't grant both of us our wishes.

P: Well, maybe if we keep going with the story, you will see a reason. When Solomon asked for wisdom, the Bible says that God was pleased with his request. Why do you suppose God was pleased?

S: Maybe he happened to have a lot of extra wisdom in stock that day and he was happy for a chance to give it away to someone.

C: There seems to be a lot of unused wisdom lying around in this puppet theater.

P: If we can continue with the story: God tells exactly why this was pleasing: “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 know what it right, I will do what you have asked.”

C: Do you know what that sounds like to me?

S: What?

C: That God wasn't necessarily planning to give Solomon whatever he asked for. It sounds like God is saying, “Because you asked for the right thing, I'm going to give it to you.” If Solomon had asked for riches or fame or revenge or long life, I don't think God would have given it to him. It seems like you have to ask for the right thing.

P: That's a very wise reflection.

S: I don't get it. Remember: “Ask and it shall be given to you.” That doesn't say, “Ask for the right thing and it will be given to you.”

P: Do you guys know the Lord's Prayer?

*(Puppets look at each other and nod)*

C: Sure, we know that.

P: The Lord's Prayer shows us how to pray. In that prayer, Jesus didn't ask for things or success or to be made better or stronger or healthier than others. The only thing in that entire prayer that Jesus said to request *for ourselves* was daily bread.

S: Wait a minute. Jesus said, “Ask and it shall be given to you” and you're telling me that applies only to sandwiches? What is this, a church or a deli?

P: Daily bread does not mean sandwiches. Daily bread means everything that we need in order to be a happy, faithful, productive member of God's creation.

C: So you're saying that God is always ready to give us the things that we *need*.

P: That's a good way to put it.

C: And when we ask God for selfish things that we want but don't need, God may not give us those.

P: Yes. Remember, God is good. God gives good gifts. God does not give gifts that are harmful to us. If we ask God to give us gifts that cater to our selfish wants, that's not good for us.

S: Well, this is like, a major bummer, dude. I want to be a rock star. Why can't I be a rock star? Why won't God let me be a rock star?

P: God didn't say you couldn't be a rock star.

*Sparky and Chip do a double take with each other.*

C: Hold on; I thought you said--

P: Let's get to the end of the story. God tells Solomon, "Because you asked for a good gift, for wisdom, I will give it to. And not only that, you're going to get a whole lot of those other things that you didn't ask for."

S: Okay, now I'm totally confused.

C: Me too.

P: God is saying that when we ask for the things we need in life to be faithful followers, that shows that our priorities are right. It shows that we're not putting our own selfish interests ahead of others. And as long as our priorities are right, we can expect to get a lot more out of life. If we love God and our neighbor, we will be able to enjoy all kinds of gifts that would destroy us if we thought only of ourselves.

S: Okay, so what's the bottom line here? Can I be a rock star or not?

P: The bottom line is that God wants to give you what you need. If you ask for that, God will give it to you every time. And when you have what you need, the rest of life is a lot easier.

S: So if I ask God for what I need, God will make me a rock star?

P: No. If you ask God for what you need, you may or may not become a rock star. But if you do become a rock star, it will be for the right reasons, because you enjoy the gift of music and you enjoy entertaining others. Not because you want to be cool and rich and famous. If you ask God for what you need, you will do things for the right reasons, and because of that your life will be a blessing rather than a curse.

C: Pastor, I think I get it now. God is not a magic genie who is there to grant us whatever we wish for. But God is good; and so God wants to give us what we need so that we can live good lives.

P: I think that's a good way to put it, Chip.

C: The problem is that I'm not always sure what it is that I need.

S: What you need is a good haircut.

C: Sparky, I'm serious. The Bible says that God is ready and willing to give us what we need; all we have to do is ask. But I'm not always sure what it is that I need. There are times when I don't know what to ask for.

P: I think we've all felt like that. When that happens, listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 8. "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit."

S: Whoa, that's pretty heavy stuff. What does it mean?

P: It means that when you're confused about what you need, open up your heart to God. You know, praying to God is talking to God. When you talk to God, just open your heart. Let God know if you're happy or sad or angry, or confused. And if you are confused about what to ask for, just ask God to give you what need and let God handle the details.

C: That makes me feel better. I think I can do that. Do you think you can do that, Sparky?

S: Well . . . I guess.

P: If you want to use your great singing talent to praise God, we'll be happy to find a way for you to do that in the service.

S: Actually, I don't think I have any singing talent. I was going to ask God for singing talent, too. (*Pause*) I have a confession to make (*another pause*)—I was lip-synching.

C: Duh! Newsflash! Puppets can't do anything BUT lip-synch!

P: Maybe we should do what Solomon did, Sparky.

S: What's that?

C: Ask God for wisdom. The wisdom to know what our talents are and how to best use them.

S: Maybe I could be a radio announcer. *(Clears his throat, and in his best radio announcers voice says,)* “We now return to our regularly scheduled program.”

C: *(Sighs)* Good bye, pastor. See you later, everyone. *(Grabs Sparky and pulls him off stage.)*

Puppet Theater

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S: What you need is a good haircut.

C: Sparky, I'm serious. The Bible says that God is ready and willing to give us what we need; all we have to do is ask. But I'm not always sure what it is that I need. There are times when I don't know what to ask for.

P: I think we've all felt like that. When that happens, listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 8. "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit."

S: Whoa, that's pretty heavy stuff. What does it mean?

P: It means that when you're confused about what you need, open up your heart to God. You know, praying to God is talking to God. When you talk to God, just open your heart. Let God know if you're happy or sad or angry, or confused. And if you are confused about what to ask for, just ask God to give you what need and let God handle the details.

C: That makes me feel better. I think I can do that. Do you think you can do that, Sparky?

S: Well . . . I guess.

P: If you want to use your great singing talent to praise God, we'll be happy to find a way for you to do that in the service.

S: Actually, I don't think I have any singing talent. I was going to ask God for singing talent, too. (*Pause*) I have a confession to make (*another pause*)—I was lip-synching.

C: Duh! Newsflash! Puppets can't do anything BUT lip-synch!

P: Maybe we should do what Solomon did, Sparky.

S: What's that?

C: Ask God for wisdom. The wisdom to know what our talents are and how to best use them.

S: Maybe I could be a radio announcer. *(Clears his throat, and in his best radio announcers voice says,)* “We now return to our regularly scheduled program.”

C: *(Sighs)* Good bye, pastor. See you later, everyone. *(Grabs Sparky and pulls him off stage.)*