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If you could have anything you want, what would be your first choice? Think for a moment... How many of you would ask for better health? ... more money? ... more friends? ... more wisdom to decide what to ask for?

King Solomon faced such a choice, and up until that point, many voices influenced him. On his father's deathbed, David suggested that Solomon get rid of his rivals, such as Joab, who had killed David's other son, Absalom. Joab was the commander of the army and Solomon's uncle, but Solomon followed his father's advice and executed this rival. In addition, Solomon executed one of his brothers and banished a priest, acts to insure the elimination of any other claims to the throne.

In addition to getting rid of rivals, Solomon was also known for worshiping at what the Bible calls "high places," which were mountaintop locations where other nations gathered for worship. Maybe Solomon was trying to worship like everyone around him. Solomon was also known to have many foreign wives, which brought different customs into the

royal household. In the mix of all these influences, I imagine Solomon was searching for guidance, for a way to know how to follow what God desired. I imagine God saying to Solomon, "Wise up, will you? Among all the other voices surrounding you that encourage violence and unfaithfulness, listen to what I'm trying to tell you. Wise up!"

Sometimes it's hard to know whom to trust when so many voices try to get our attention and tell us what to do. For example, our nation continues to struggle to discern what to believe and whom to follow after the events of January 6 when a mob of people attacked the capitol building in an attempt to overthrow the election of our next President. Where do we find wisdom when so many voices speak in opposition to one another?

Have you ever wished you had a wise teacher who could answer all your questions? Followers of one teacher known for wisdom gathered in his house, while other followers gathered on the porch of his home to hear his teachings, and yet others gathered in the road to hear the repeated words of the teacher. When the

teacher was dying, the three groups anxiously waited for his last words of wisdom.

The followers inside the house said, “Dear teacher, give us your dying words of wisdom,” The wise one whispered, “Life is like a river.” The other followers at a distance asked, “What did he say? What did he say?” The ones closest in repeated, “Life is like a river.” This was passed on faithfully throughout the crowd of disciples.

Everyone nodded their heads at these words of wisdom, but one of the followers at the far end of the road frowned and asked aloud, “Life is like a river? What does that mean?”

So, this question passed back through the followers from group to group until it came back to where the teacher lay dying, “Life is like a river? What does that mean?” And the teacher struggled to lift his head off the pillow and replied, “OK. So maybe life isn’t like a river.”¹

It's hard to know where to find wisdom, and in the midst of all the influences that Solomon encountered, God offered in a vision to give Solomon anything he wanted. He could have asked for wealth or power, but Solomon asked for wisdom to guide his newly forming nation of people.

How do we find wisdom today? Not many of us may have such a vision as Solomon, but we still seek ways to know what God has in mind.

We may think that wisdom is “out there” somewhere, coming from an expert who tells us what to do. German theologian and mystic Meister Eckhart who was born in the mid-13th century wrote, “Wisdom consists in doing the next thing you have to do, doing it with your whole heart, and finding delight in doing it.”² In other words, go about your life activities and enjoy what you do. Trust that God’s Spirit moves within your life and presents opportunities at just the right time. Listen to what has been stirring in your life all along, what passions move within you, and trust that when you make a decision, God will journey with you whatever you decide.

Writer and spiritual teacher Richard Rohr suggests three “ways of knowing” that can help us gain greater wisdom:

The first is using images, which can help us bring unconscious ideas into consciousness. He

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wrote, “It happens through fantasy, through dreams, through symbols... It happens through pictures, events, and well-told stories. It happens through poetry, where well-chosen words create an image that, in turn, creates a new awareness—that was in us already. We knew it, but we didn’t know it.”³

The second way of wisdom is through the aesthetic knowing. Rohr says, “aesthetic knowing is a central and profound way of knowing. I’ve seen art lead to true changes of consciousness. I have seen people change their lives in response to a novel, a play, a piece of music, or a movie... Their souls were prepared, and God got in through the right metaphor at the right time.”

When our prayer group meets via Zoom on Thursday to reflect on a piece of artwork, we tap

into imagery and aesthetic ways of wisdom, often discerning how God is moving in our lives.

Rohr describes the third way of wisdom: “An epiphany is a parting of the veil, a life-changing manifestation of meaning, the eureka of awareness of self and the Other. It is the radical grace which we cannot manufacture or orchestrate. There are no formulas which ensure its appearance. It is always a gift, unearned, unexpected, and larger than our present life.”

Among all the voices that try to influence your life, you just might hear God suggest, “Wise up. Listen to my teachings.”

If you find yourself searching for wisdom, be open to the Spirit moving in your life in creative and unexpected ways. You just might find yourself wising up to what God has in mind.

¹Hodgin, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #905, adapted.

² Meister Eckhart, cited by Edward Hays in *Psalms for Zero Gravity* (Forest of Peace, 1998).

³ This and following two quotations from Richard Rohr, “Moving beyond Conventional Wisdom,” 2-25-21, <https://cac.org/moving-beyond-conventional-wisdom-2021-02-25/>