

"At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, 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 this day. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days."

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

King Solomon is probably one of the better known biblical characters, even among people who don't read the bible. Novelists and movie makers have created stories about him, such as "King Solomon's Mine". When someone shows a great deal of common sense and intelligence in a difficult situation they may be said to have the wisdom of Solomon. Even in his own day, Solomon was a real celebrity. Along with being the richest man of his day, Solomon did have the good fortune of being known as the wisest man in the world. A collection of his wisdom is found in the book of Proverbs, and many of these proverbs have become common "words of wisdom" that are handed down from generation to generation.

When Solomon became king of Israel as successor to his father, King David, God had said to Him: *"Ask what I shall give you."* And Solomon, realizing the difficulty of the task before him, answered, *"now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"* We are told that God was pleased with Solomon's answer and made a very generous promise to him: *"Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days."*

But the story of Solomon is not all sweetness and light. While Solomon was the wisest man in the world, and while he was a rich and powerful man, he did not use his wisdom, his riches and all the other resources at his command wisely. Under the influence of his pagan wives he turned from the God who had so richly blessed him and began to worship the false gods of the other nations. Without God, what should have been a golden era for Israel became a time of trouble and turmoil, which would eventually result in the division of the kingdom of Israel. He had it all, but because he didn't use his gifts wisely, Solomon lost the benefit of them.

What about us? What are we doing with what we've got? Are we making good use of the blessings that God has given to us? Or are we wasting and squandering our gifts? In Solomon, we have a wonderful example of how *not* to use those things God has given to each and every one of us. And we should learn from Solomon's example that we are to seek, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to make the best use of the blessings God does give to us.

There is an old saying which says: "What you are is God's gift to you; what you do with yourself is your gift to God." Look at your life. You may not be rich and powerful like Solomon. You may not possess the wisdom of Solomon. But you are a special individual, someone who has been blessed by God in some wonderful, special ways. God's greatest blessing to you is that He has given His Son to save you, and to make you His child. We are born as slaves of sin; we are dying because of our sin and are cut off from God. There would be no hope for our lives, nor any assurance for the future if God did not do

something to change things. But God has changed things. He changes things as Jesus takes all our sin and guilt and shame upon Himself and dies for us on the cross. By taking our punishment and suffering for us, Christ sets us free from our sin. And in His resurrection, He makes it possible for us to have a new and wonderful life both here and now, and in eternity. In fact, St. Paul says: ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV) As His new creation we can live as God's people, living a life that is pleasing to Him. In that newness of life, we can also live to make the best use of everything He gives to us.

God blessed Solomon. He also blesses us. God gave Solomon wisdom and riches and honour. He gives each of us different gifts. That is true for you, my dear confirmands. There is no one else like you, no one else with the resources God has given to you, no one with your particular God-given talents and abilities. No matter how great or how small those talents and abilities and resources might be, they are yours as a gift of God.

What you are—and what you have—is God's gift to you. What you do with it is your gift to God. Now: what kind of a gift are you offering to God, who so richly blesses you and so richly blesses all of us? What are you doing with what you've got? Are you using it to the fullest, living up to your potential? Are you using all the resources that God has placed in your control to the best of your ability? Are you using them in a way that brings honour and glory to God? All too often we see people who have been richly blessed wasting their gifts, or being corrupted by the gifts themselves. There was an old television shows called Highway to Heaven. One episode was a reworking of the story of Ebenezer Scrooge. It told the story of a rich and powerful man, a man like Solomon, who had it all and yet who was a greedy, selfish cheat with no concern for anyone but himself. The man died and was about to be judged by God for his actions, but he pleaded for a second chance and was given an opportunity to relive the last week of his life. Now he was different. He showed more concern for the needs of the people around him. He used his wealth and influence for good rather than for his own selfish gain. He made a difference in that week, and he found the joy that comes in using the blessings you have as God intended them to be used.

We, who were dead in sin, have been given a new life—a second chance, if you will. As forgiven, redeemed children we are able to see the blessings that God gives us and the ways in which we can use them to His glory. There is real joy in using God's gifts to us in a way that pleases Him. But God is not pleased when we forget Him or when we find no way of using those same gifts for Him. That was Solomon's first mistake—he tried to use the gifts God had given to him apart from God and without any regard for God. We should learn from Solomon's mistake. We should strive to make God a part of all we do. The Bible says: ***“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*** (Colossians 3:17, ESV) This is not a call to full-time service in the church (although it may be for some!), but it does mean that we strive, by His grace, to make the best use of His gifts to us. If our talents help us in our careers, then that is a God-pleasing use of our gifts. If they bring enjoyment to us or to others, then that too pleases God. But there are also so many ways in which we can use our gifts directly to serve Him. Today you young men are entering a new stage in your life as members of this congregation. You will have new opportunities to serve the Lord as you use your gifts to His glory. It could be something as simple as helping with the PowerPoint or the sound system. Maybe the day is coming when you will serve as an elder or other leader in the congregation. Think of the things that you are good at, things you enjoy. How can they also be used to serve the Lord and His church? God gave you those gifts for a reason. Whatever you can do, do it for yourself but also do it for the Lord, and give glory to Him in this way.

Every parent knows the frustration of watching a child who is not living up to their potential, when they do not even try to do the things we know they can do. When we know they can do better, we want to see them do it. God feels the same way about His children. The difference is that He knows exactly what we can do, because He is the one that gives us the abilities in the first place. He wants us to enjoy our talents and abilities and to benefit from them. But He wants each and everyone of us to use His gifts in the best possible way, rather than wasting them by trying to live without His help and guidance. The best way to live up to our potential is to start by realizing that all we have is a gift from God and then by making God a part of everything we do. We also want to use our gifts to serve Him. Remember: what you are is God's gift to you; what you do with yourself is your gift to God. Blessed through the forgiveness we have in the dying Christ, and rejoicing in the life we have in the resurrected Christ, we live by faith in Him, praising Him for His countless mercies and blessings to us as His people, and using what He has entrusted to us to His glory in Jesus Christ. Amen.