

“The Wisdom Of Gratitude”

Dr. D. Jay Losher

19 August 2018 + Gaithersburg Presbyterian Church

I Kings 3:3-13 + Matthew 7:21-29 = true wisdom

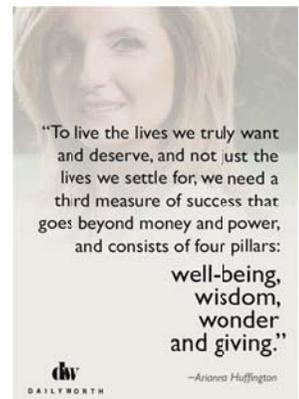
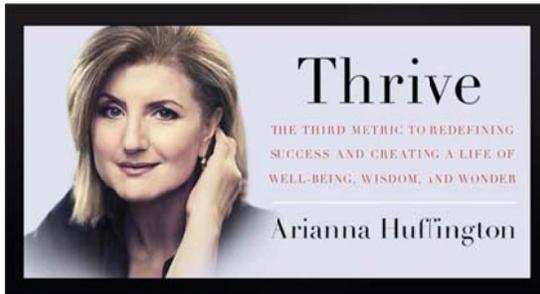
Arianna Huffington, editor-in-chief of the *Huffington Post*, in her book *Thrive* tells how she came by sheer driving spirit to extraordinary success both in money and power. However, when she collapsed from exhaustion in 2007, she discovered her definition of success in life had to change dramatically.

Now her definition of success includes what she calls a “third metric” which embraces well-being, wonder, giving and not surprisingly, that strange word we’ve heard today: “wisdom,” that ineffable “**understanding mind**” Solomon asked for. Huffington’s definition of wisdom includes:

- Understanding life as a classroom where we can learn even from our struggles
- Appreciating the difference between information and wisdom
- Paying attention to our intuition and interior life
- Practicing and expressing gratitude

Interesting parallels with Solomon’s story: both include three common metrics of success: riches, long life in honor (neither of which Solomon asked for) and “understanding” (for which he did ask). For Solomon and Huffington, wisdom also includes a fourth metric: gratitude. Huffington speaks of it in her book while Solomon acts on it: after Solomon wakes from his dream, he offers sacrifices of thanksgiving to God for granting him the gift of an “understanding mind.”¹

The bottom line for both Arianna Huffington’s biography and Solomon’s story is that a “discerning mind” leads inevitably to a grateful heart. Wisdom is good, but the gratitude it leads to inextricably is an even better response, shall we say even a “wiser” response.



Solomon “The Great,” Solomon “The Wise:” for all his attributed wisdom and worldly success, yet the historians point out his reign was also filled with compromise and corruption.



Notice the gloss in passing at the beginning of our text: “**only, [Solomon] sacrificed and offered incense at the high places,**” meaning Solomon committed the worst possible sin, worshipping other gods. He added to his sin by taking hundreds of foreign wives and following their gods as well. He broke the first and most important commandment: “**Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.**” And yet God blessed Solomon, or so the chronicles read.

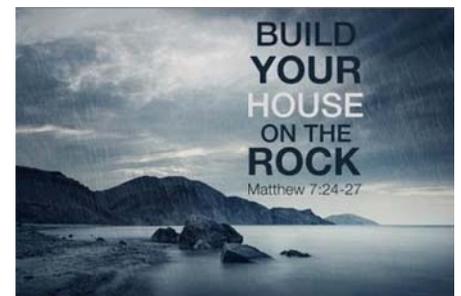


History has been kind to Solomon, with good reason. His reign saw the Israelite empire reached its zenith. His false worship aside, in his reign they experienced unprecedented peace with prosperity, and the Israelites remembered it with great nostalgia.

Everyone was happy. Solomon built the priests the Temple. They loved him. The farmers enjoyed good prices for their crops to feed the workers in a multitude of public works. He patronized the intellectuals, and gifted the artists with so many commissions they were hard pressed to keep up.

Given the prosperity and the far extension of the empire, Solomon was either profoundly wise or fiendishly clever. Historians have chosen to emphasize the former over the latter.

There is another discussion of wisdom in Jesus’ words today. From near the end of the Sermon on the Mount:



“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.... And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.”

Sage advice from Jesus. Pat Bradfield, church secretary at John Calvin PC in Dallas, says she doesn't remember a lot of scripture but does remember these verses because when she was looking for a house in Titusville, Florida, she remembered thinking, "Make sure to find a house built on rock not sand."



The rock of Jesus' parable is his words, his wisdom shared like Solomon's, lives built on the rock of salvation. The sand in the parable is a life lived without taking Jesus seriously, living by our own wits and cleverness, lives built on the shifting sands of fashion. Jesus and Solomon give us a stark choice: chasing after the ephemeral or the eternal.

This wisdom Jesus and Solomon speak of is not the same as mere knowledge. A discerning heart is not the same as what Ariana Huffington calls "information." They are as different as rock and sand.



Another sharp contrast was discussed on NPR's *All Things Considered* this last week, people debating and defending Liberal Arts versus STEM education. You know STEM, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, the lucrative fields on graduation. The discussion started with the usual jokes about Liberal Arts majors ending up flipping burgers. But it quickly evolved into a deep discussion of the relevance of Liberal Arts education in our world and society today.

The discussion brought to mind my own father who graduated from Texas Tech University in 1950 with a double degree in Petroleum and Mechanical engineering. He got the highest paying job offer of all the graduates that year. He was very good at it, first in drilling for oil in the booming Permian Basin, then later as a project engineer in a worldwide firm.



Yet later in life, he lamented the fact that his great engineering education had left out the Humanities. He wished he had had a history course, or music, or philosophy, or art appreciation. He felt there was a whole exciting side of his life that was empty. He was successful by any measure. He did provide

¹ April Yamasaki, *Christian Century*, August 5, 2015, p. 21

² *Ibid*