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The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night;

and God said, "Ask what I should give you."

And Solomon said,

*"...Give your servant...an understanding mind
to govern your people,
able to discern between good and evil."*

Solomon prays for wisdom.

We hear of his wisdom throughout scripture.

A whole book of the Bible,

The Wisdom of Solomon.

He is attributed the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Solomon prays for wisdom
and it seems his prayer was answered.

Solomon's wisdom is legendary.

I remember learning about this story when I was younger.

Solomon was an example of a humble man.

God told Solomon to ask for anything he wanted.
Solomon could have asked for long life or riches.
Instead he prayed for an *understanding mind*
to govern the people of God.

This is NOT a prayer to become omnipotent.
This is a prayer of finitude.

...I am only a little child.

I do not know how to go out or come in.

This is the prayer of a small man,
wishing not to become larger,
but to grow closer to largeness itself.

I can't help but think of the serenity prayer,
*God grant me the courage to change the things I can,
the patience to accept the things I can't,
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

That's not from the Bible,
but it almost could be.
If you read it the right way,
the serenity prayer can become a way of saying,
Thy will be done.

Serenity is hard to find,
and wisdom hard to piece together.
If wisdom is about knowing the difference
between the things we can change
and the things we can't,
then Facebook comments show
that we aren't very wise.

I know people who love to read the comments.
For them, it's more entertaining than Netflix.
It's easy to argue on Facebook.
Harder to forgive,
to walk away
without making sure people know how right you are.

But there's another kind of serenity that we also find elusive.
The serenity of knowing that we have done enough.

How often do you feel like you've done enough?
Achieved enough?
Put in enough work?

The older I get,
the more demands on my time with work and family
and...well - who has time for anything else?

The further I go,
the more there is to do.

I haven't felt finished,
done,
in a long, long time.

I imagine you know the feeling.

Most of the time,
I'm sure it's because I'm not doing enough,
smart enough,
or enterprising enough.

Most of the time
I'm sure that if I just found the right key,
then the lock would tumble open.
Peace would be realized,
inner wells of strength would be tapped,
and I would reach the end of my to do list.

At least until Monday morning,
when there is a fresh batch of emails,
and messages,
and notes from Sunday morning.

That's how I feel most of the time.

I wonder how it might feel
if I prayed Solomon's prayer.
I wonder how it might feel
if I recognized my own smallness for what it is,
not a failing on my part,
but simply the reality of the world that God has made
and the life that God has given to me,
indeed to every one of us.

A prayer of finitude.
A prayer for the small person,
not asking to become larger,
but to grow closer to largeness itself.

A week or so ago,
our dear friend Roger Fynan
sent me an article from the Wall Street Journal.

It was entitled, "Escaping the Efficiency Trap."
I was struck by Roger's kindness,
thinking of me when he read these words
about how doing more
will just lead us to find more to do.

As the article states from the outset,
Certain forms of busyness can be delightful.
Gardening,
piddling around the house on a rainy day,
hobbies,
and cooking intricate meals.

These are pleasures all their own.

No, the article spoke to me about a different sort of busyness.
A kind of work that draws its energy
from the anxiety that our worth
is somehow tied to our productivity.

In order to feel more worthwhile,
we try to fit more and more into our lives.
In order to feel esteemed
we say yes to more,
thinking that “No” couldn’t possibly be an acceptable answer.
And if we do manage to say “no”,
the feeling might gnaw at us for days.

But you might have noticed,
that the more we do,
the more there is to do.

The article says it this way,
*if you succeed at fitting more in,
you’ll find the goal posts start to shift:
More things will begin to seem important,
meaningful
or obligatory.*

*Acquire a reputation for doing your work at amazing speed,
and you’ll be given more of it.*

And my favorite line from the article,
*The more efficient you get,
the more you become a “limitless repository
for other people’s expectations.”*

It's not just confined to work and jobs though.
It happens in all 360 degrees of our life.

Get more work done
so you can spend the proper amount of time with your family
and suddenly you'll wonder
why you don't cook more healthy meals.

Get all that done
and you start to muse about exercising
as much as your doctor says you ought to.

Plow through all of that
and you'll feel the void of not having a sufficiently meaningful hobby.

All of this to say,
we are not very wise.

We are, in fact,
sinful people
born into a sinful world.

The sins we do unto others are the most talked about,
but we are far more often sinning against ourselves.

Like Pharaoh against the Hebrew people,
demanding more work,
endless work,
to prove ourselves,
often to prove ourselves...to ourselves.

It's a vicious cycle.
A sinful cycle.

Perhaps that is what we mean
when we talk about original sin.

For what did the serpent say, but
eat the apple,
test yourself,
and see if you can't become like God...?

So, what to **do** about all of this **doing**?

If we cannot control busyness by becoming busier,
if we cannot ever become efficient enough,
what can we DO?
What can we control?
What can we accomplish?
What can we change?

We can acknowledge that we are finite,
that we are too small to face every challenge put before us.

And then,
like Solomon,
we can pray for wisdom.

Instead of the serenity prayer, we might instead pray this:

Lord, give me the courage to change what matters,
the courage to let go a great deal of what does not matter,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Even if God grants us all the wisdom of Solomon,
we won't be able to get it all done,

But we might, just might,
be able to tell what needs doing.

With that sort of wisdom, we could try to change our values,
the north star by which we make our decisions.

Here is a difficult truth,
you will never feel like you have done enough.

The world won't allow it.
Likely, you won't allow it either.

Our culture rewards busyness, worships at the altar of it.

Worshiping at the altar of God, means acknowledging our smallness,
and the largeness of God.

Worshiping at the altar of God means reorienting our values.

We cannot become large enough
for the demands of the world.

Instead,
we can pray for wisdom.
We can pray to draw closer to the infinite,
to draw closer to the Almighty.