

Asking for wisdom (1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14)

How do you make God smile?

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In the movie *Big*, which sits at the apex of the genie genre (sorry, *Aladdin*), the young protagonist gazes with great hope into the wish-granting machine called Zoltar.

He wishes to be “big,” or adult, and (spoiler alert) . . . the machine makes him big, offering this young child his wish and with it the same expression the machine offered the last child who approached and inserted a coin.

For Zoltar it is a transaction, as rote as anything. *People come past here all the time asking for something, I can hear him saying. This person wanted fame. This one wanted me to help them get rid of a hangnail. Whatever. At least it's better than wishing for more wishes.* Over time and thousands of wishes we could imagine (and that's what we're doing here, imagining that an arcade machine has thoughts) that Zoltar is unfazed by any request.

So when a young child stops in front of Zoltar one day, inserts a coin, and says, “I want a discerning mind,” you must imagine (again?) how Zoltar's metal face perks up at this request.

Or, if this is too bizarre for you, imagine God when young King Solomon asks for an understanding mind to govern the people and the ability to discern good from evil. This is an amazing moment, and we are told that Solomon's request actually pleases God. Imagine all the prayers across time and space, how the divine ears must perk

up when someone has the gumption to set aside requesting what might bring comfort in order to seek what might bring fulfillment. This is almost a perfect answer to the theological question, How do you make God smile?

Throughout the Christian tradition the answer has been the same: we please God when we seek the ways of God. When we seek to live to a standard worthy of our divinity. When we seek justice, love mercy, go with humility; when we care for the stranger, widow, and orphan; when we offer hospitality to God's beloved at the margins. And now, Solomon has helped us add another: when we seek a discerning mind above all else, God is pleased with us.

I like to define wisdom as "the ability to know right from wrong, to choose right, and to do right." Knowing. Choosing. Doing. And across many years this rough definition has been refined by 1 Kings 3, one of my favorite passages in the canon.

I love that it already requires a great deal of wisdom to even respond like this. Solomon is not an empty vessel, and neither are we.

I love that Solomon has so much at stake, yet changes course—not because he needs to politically but because some deeper spiritual truth has taken root in him. Enlightenment is a great inconvenience.

Most of all, I love that God is happy about all this. For all the ways we imagine God as presented to us as wrathful or old or masculine or omnipotent, in front of Solomon is a God who seems genuinely surprised and pleased. It reminds me of a compliment someone once paid me that made me smile *out of nowhere*. Does Solomon have this effect on God?

We must again imagine, but this holy encounter suggests that we are truly in relationship with God, that relationship is dialogical and changing by the second, and that we are not pawns or puppets but that God . . . hmmm, what is the verb? God *gods* along with us! Alongside God we decide our fate.

This should change what we seek for ourselves and ask for in the midst of our formation and transformation. In the presence of a God who can truly deliver anything, may we have the wisdom to seek to be delivered.

- Julian DeShazier