

See what I mean? Cute answers, but not terribly helpful!

Yahweh's offer. Sure, these are the kinds of questions you might fire off at your digital assistant if you're really bored. It's clear, though, that Siri and Alexa and their ilk are not privy to all the answers in the universe and certainly not answers for some of the questions that keep us up at night. For answers to questions like "Why is there suffering?" or "What's the purpose of my life?", we need to go with a voice that has a lot more bandwidth than your phone can access. We need to ask Yahweh! Yahweh is the Hebrew name for God.

King Solomon didn't have a digital assistant at his disposal to ponder the big questions of life, but he did have a relationship with God, a relationship that God promised to his father, King David, when God said that David's heir "will be a son to me" (2 Samuel 7:14). Solomon was a young man when David died. With the full weight of ruling the kingdom on his shoulders, Solomon needed help and God made Solomon an offer. The God of the whole universe says to Solomon, "Ask what I should give you" (v. 5).

Wow! Can you imagine God coming to you tonight and saying to you, "Ask for whatever you wish, and I'll give it to you"? For what would you ask? Some would ask for wealth, no doubt, others for better health. Some might ask for a relationship, others for talent. Still others might ask for more wishes!

The question, however, is whether we'd know what to do if we actually got our wish. Lottery winners see their wishes come true when they hit the big jackpot, but most lottery winners wind up miserable because they don't have a good plan for the money. We might ask God for good health, but we may not have the ability or the discipline to maintain it. We might acquire a special talent or ability, but squander it in the wrong place. Maybe that's why this incident stands out in the Scriptures. After all, God doesn't seem to make this offer very often!

Solomon's request. Solomon, however, asked for wisdom, which is a really great response to God's offer. Instead of asking for something temporary to benefit himself, Solomon wanted a framework for managing his life and his leadership as the king of Israel. He recognized that, on his own, he was young and inexperienced and "did not know how to go out or come in" (v. 7). How many young people would admit that? He

needed help and a background from which to make decisions, so he asked for wisdom. "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" (v. 9).

We should point out here that God also offered wisdom to the first humans, but they chose to take a shortcut to get it. Adam and Eve wanted the wisdom to discern between good and evil, which is why they ate the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3). They listened to some bad advice, hoping to "be like God." They forgot that true wisdom only comes from God, and is only cultivated in humans through a long-term relationship with God.

Adam and Eve wanted to make themselves the source of wisdom. Humans have been making the same mistake ever since, which is why the difference between good and evil is often misconstrued in a fallen world. You can't get real wisdom from a human source, even a digital one created by humans. For real wisdom, you have to lean into the best and only source: God alone.

Solomon understood this truth, which he no doubt learned by watching his father, David (v. 6). He didn't treat God's offer like that of a magic genie, offering wishes that would benefit only him; Solomon understood that real wisdom is given to God's people so that it might be exercised on behalf of others. Solomon showed more care and concern for his people than he did for himself. He wanted to do right by them and do right by God. So, his request of God is for the one thing that would bring real peace and prosperity to the kingdom.

Solomon's request for wisdom pleased God so much that He also offered Solomon the things he didn't ask for: riches and honor, an unsurpassed royal reputation and long life. But there was a caveat: all these things would be given to Solomon "if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked" (vv. 13-14). For God, wisdom wasn't a one-time offer but the product of a long relationship, a continuous asking and constant conversation between God and the king.

Solomon's downfall. Unfortunately, we know this didn't turn out well for Solomon. Although he became known for his wisdom and his riches, Solomon gradually turned his attention away from God and God's wisdom and toward the lesser things God had given him. Solomon turned to his gold, to building up his army and to marriage alliances with

foreign princesses (10:23-11:13). These were the very things that God had warned the kings of Israel to avoid (Deut. 17:16-17).

Even before the monarchy existed, God told the potential kings of Israel to spend time every day reading the law of God, "so that [you] may learn to fear the Lord [your] God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting [yourself] above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment..." (Deut. 17:19-20). In other words, the kings of Israel were to cultivate wisdom every day by connecting with God and remembering that God alone was its source. Solomon eventually became ineffective and unwise because he stopped asking the right questions.

Solomon's story is a cautionary tale for the people of God. We need wisdom, to be able to discern good and evil, but are we asking for it? Are we cultivating it daily in our relationship with God? James warns us to ask the right questions. "You do not have because you do not ask," he says. "You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures" (Jas. 4:2-3). Without wisdom, our desires become twisted, as Solomon's eventually did, and we fail to ask for what we really need. James, in a manner of speaking, invites us to follow the example of the young Solomon. "Submit yourselves therefore to God...Draw near to God and [God] will draw near to you...Humble yourselves before the Lord and [God] will exalt you" (Jas. 4:7-10).

Our approach to the questions of life, both big and small, will be altered if we ask for a daily dose of wisdom, drawing near to the Lord in prayer and in reading the Scriptures. When we cultivate a lifetime relationship with God, we will learn to ask the right questions and be ready for the answers God gives. Just ask Yahweh!

Prayer: Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Source: Bolluyt, Jess. "55 questions to ask Siri for a hilarious response." cheatsheet.com. January 2, 2017. Retrieved January 23, 2017.

Ask Yahweh

Sunday, September 3, 2017

1 Kings 3:5-12

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Some of us are old enough to remember the days when "research" involved heading to the library, scouring the card catalog (which had actual paper cards), and searching by topic, author or title. Maybe we did a search in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, or the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, or pulled a reference book off the shelf to find the answer to a particular question or problem. We might even have asked the librarian for some help to get the information we needed.

The advent of the personal computer and the Internet changed all that. Now, "Googling" a question is the quickest way to get an answer. But, even this involves physically typing some words on a keyboard and in an age when information comes at us fast and furious, who has time for that?

These days, all we need to do is to punch one button and ask the robotic assistant in our pocket-sized smartphones to probe the questions of the universe. And, not only can we get the information we're looking for right in the palm of our hand, we can also get it in the voice, accent, language and timbre we prefer.

Even though your digital assistant can help you with a lot of information like the weather forecast, the score of last night's game, or remedies for the common cold, it's a lot less helpful with questions that are ambiguous or open-ended. Ask a question like, "What's the meaning of life?" and your phone is more likely to act like a politician and duck the question. Here are some examples I tried with Siri, Apple's digital assistant:

- Question: Which came first, the chicken or the egg?
Siri's answer: "I checked their calendars. They both have the same birthday!"
- Question: How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood? Siri's answer: "Just because it could, doesn't mean that it would."
- Question: Where is Elvis Presley?
Siri's answer: "My sources tell me Area 51. But that's classified."
Another answer Siri gives is, "My sources say he has left the building."
- Question: What is the meaning of life?
Siri's answer: "I Kant answer that. Ha Ha!" or, "I find it odd that you would ask this of an inanimate object."