

2 Chronicles: I Was Praying in the Temple

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Prayer of Illumination

Guide us, O God, by your Word, and Holy Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover peace, through Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

Background

If you haven't noticed in our series *Wayfare through the Word*, we've been spending a lot of time with the Kings of Israel. In the New Testament there are four gospels that tell the story of Jesus—the King of Kings—from different angles. In the Hebrew Scriptures the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles all tell the stories of the kings of Israel from different perspectives.

Our Scripture reading this morning from 2 Chronicles, is not only one of the most important chapters in 2 Chronicles, but one of the most important chapters in all of the Old Testament. Humanity is given hope—that no matter who they are or what they have done, if they call on the name of the Lord, there is the possibility of a new start. With God, our future is always hopeful, no matter how rough our past or bleak our present.

In our passage, we find ourselves 20 years into King Solomon's rule. For the last two decades Solomon's been constructing his palace and the temple. Cedar from Lebanon has been brought in. The temple has been adorned with the finest gold from Parvaim. The expert craftsmen Hiram from Tyre was brought in to fashion the stone, wood, and metal designs. Like his father David, Solomon brought the Ark of the Covenant into the temple.

With the construction done, Solomon is dedicating the temple to the Lord before the people. His father David's life-long dream of building a temple to God has finally been realized. It's a time of national thanksgiving.

In the temple dedication Solomon is standing and then kneeling in prayer—not on a soap box, but a four-foot tall bronze box. It's the only time in the Bible we hear of something like this.

Solomon prays passionately before the people:

**God, teach us the good way to walk in.
May your eyes ever be on this house day and night.
May your eyes be open and your ears attentive to your people. When they cry out to you,
may you forgive them, hear their cause, and take action.**

Solomon offers a prayer for the foreigners that will come to Israel to seek the Lord—that they might be blessed and that God would hear their prayer. The temple built by foreigners will also be a house of prayer for all nations, not just Israel.

Solomon then offers seven prayer requests to God about difficult things that might happen to Israel—

Justice in the courts
Drought and famine
Sickness
Military defeat
Exile

He asks that the Lord would be with his people in all the seasons of life—when he gives and when he takes away.

Then, many temple sacrifices are made.
Musical instruments are played in worship.
The congregation repeats the liturgical refrain:

“For the Lord is good, his steadfast love endures forever.”

Then, in a scene similar to Mt. Sinai and a foreshadowing of Pentecost in the future—fire from heaven comes down and the temple is filled with the glory of the Lord. Worship of the living God makes the people of God joyful and glad in heart because of the goodness of God.

After this dedication, God appeared a second time to Solomon in the night, and utters these five beautiful words to Solomon,

“I HAVE HEARD YOUR PRAYER.”

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Let's hear now *the Word of the Lord about God's second appearance to King Solomon* in:

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:12-18 (NRSV)

Then the Lord appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him:

"I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place.

For now I have chosen and consecrated this house so that my name may be there forever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time. As for you, if you walk before me, as your father David walked, doing according to all that I have commanded you and keeping my statutes and my ordinances, then I will establish your royal throne, as I made covenant with your father David saying, 'You shall never lack a successor to rule over Israel.'"

***The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.***

SERMON – 2 Chronicles: *I Was Praying in the Temple*

Sara Blakely became the youngest self-made female billionaire at age 41 with her clothing design empire Spanx. She credits her father in helping her sharpen her entrepreneurial skills.

When Sara was growing up, each week around the dinner table her father would ask her and her siblings to share a time in the last week that they failed. Instead of being disappointed or upset, he would celebrate their efforts.

"What it did was reframe my definition of failure," Blakely said of the tradition. "Failure for me became ***not trying***, versus *the outcome*."

These kitchen table lessons helped Blakely to find lessons from life's setbacks.

"My dad would encourage me any time something didn't go the way I expected it to, or maybe I got embarrassed by a situation, to write down where the hidden gifts were and what I got out of it," she said. "I started realizing that in everything there was some amazing nugget that I wouldn't have wanted to pass up."

These kitchen table conversations with her father instilled in Sara the courage and the moxy to pursue her dreams. And she's still doing it.

Our Scripture reading this morning from 2 Chronicles is a good one for Father's Day. King Solomon has put into practice the lessons of his father David. And he's realized his father's dream of building a house for the name of the Lord.

The importance of the temple is one of the key themes in 2 Chronicles. The temple was so important because it represented God's presence on earth. The temple is where you meet God and God meets you. But Solomon knows God is too big to be contained in a man-made building, let alone the earth and the heavens. The earth is full of your glory, but it doesn't contain it all.

We would do well to heed Solomon's wisdom here. If we ever feel that ***all of God*** fits snugly in our church alone or our ideas alone—we're in trouble. There's a lot more of God than that. We don't own God. We belong to God—we are called by his name. He is not called by our name.

For us Christians, Jesus became the ultimate and eternal temple of God. In Matthew Jesus says, "In this place there is one greater than the temple." And John says in his prologue, "the Word became flesh and "tabernacled" among us.

Another name for Jesus is called "Immanuel," meaning God with us. When we come to Christ—we meet God.

Our passage gives us the ***Four Steps of Faith***. If you find yourself in distress or hard times in your life—practice to these Four Steps. They're like the flight attendant's instructions on the plane before takeoff. The Four Steps are for all of us in a time of spiritual emergency or weakness. You can't earn God's love. You can't manipulate God. But these Four Steps are an incredible gift and incredible source of spiritual power that God lets us tap into, whenever or wherever we need it.

Step 1: Humble yourself

Step 2: Pray

Step 3: Seek the Lord

Step 4: Turn from evil

You can't ever go wrong with these four steps—ever. Do the four steps every day.

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Step One: Humble yourself. David prays in Psalm 51 “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart. These O God, you will not despise.” We all need to humble ourselves—no matter who we are: a prince, a pauper, or even a pope.

A few years ago Pope Francis appeared and spoke at the White House alongside the President. He visited some of the greatest Catholic churches on the East coast of the US. He spoke before Congress. He addressed the gathered nations of the United Nations Assembly. Pope Francis had a busy week. Eighteen presentations in three days.

Every report, every big network evening news headline, every testimony of the faithful spoken out loud, focused on one thing: Pope Francis’ humanity and humility.

Pope Francis is a leader who is tapped into Step One. He realizes the source of what it means to be human: **Human=humus=dirt, ground, earth.** Humanity without humility is inhumanity. If you don’t remember that you’re made of dirt, you’ll treat others like dirt.

As a priest in Argentina, he rode the bus to “work” every day.

As the pope, he has washed the feet of ordinary people, just to demonstrate that he is a servant, not a prince.

As the leader of the billion-member Catholic church, he’s gone to some truly scary places—the Middle East war zones, Eastern European war zones, and he even ventured out to the US Congress! Now that takes guts! 😊

Step Two: Pray. In your brokenness pray. It could be in church or in your car or in the desert. Offer to God your “broken hallelujahs” as Leonard Cohen calls them. God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah these amazing words, “When you call upon me and pray to me, I will hear you.”

God heard Solomon’s prayers, and he’ll hear yours.

Step Three: Seek. Seek God’s face, God’s presence.

James says, “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.” Jeremiah also says, “When you search for me, you will find me. If you seek me with all your heart, *I will let you find me.*”

In the game of hide and seek—God wants to be found by us every single time.

Step Four: Turn—turn away from evil. Turn towards God, with all your heart and soul. Like David.

Do this individually and do this collectively as a people.

Job in his suffering says this in faith, “The fear of the Lord is true wisdom and to depart from evil is understanding.”

If you do these four steps wholeheartedly: ***humble yourself, pray, seek God, and turn away from evil you will be heard.*** You will be forgiven. Restored. Guaranteed. Not to say everything will be perfect. Not everything will be easy. Not all your prayers will be answered, but they'll be heard.

By God's grace, your spiritual slate will be wiped clean.
We can be "strong in the broken places," as Hemingway once wrote.
This is God's heart, his deepest desire for us.
Grace is in not just the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well.

One of the things I did on my recent vacation was a weekend road trip to Memphis with my best buddy Mike.

In addition to seeing the National Civil Rights Museum, the ducks at the Peabody Hotel, eating some legendary BBQ, going to the Elmwood Cemetery, and listening to some smoking blues bands, we of course had to go to Graceland. And since we've been talking about kings in our sermon series, I need to talk about another king—Elvis! ☺

It was really fun to get a glimpse of what Elvis's home life was like at Graceland. I learned about one of the songs Elvis sang called "***It is No Secret What God Can Do.***" It's got a pretty cool story behind it.

Stuart Hamblen wrote the song—and he was a popular singer, songwriter, actor, poet, and radio personality from the 1930s through the 1950s.

Billy Graham came to Los Angeles in 1949 for what became an historic evangelistic crusade. Stuart Hamblen invited Billy Graham on his radio show. Although Hamblen was known for his fast living and hard drinking, he was a PK—a preacher's kid of a Methodist minister. So he warmly welcomed Graham as a guest. It was at that interview that Graham extended an invitation to Hamblen to attend the crusade and he accepted.

After attending the evangelistic event, Hamblen contacted Graham and asked if they could talk in person. It was there in his hotel room that Hamblen "surrendered his life to Christ."

Not too long after, on a street in Hollywood, Hamblen later ran into John Wayne. He asked Hamblen about the rumor around town that he'd changed his ways. Hamblen told John Wayne that it was no secret what God had done for him and that he could do it for Wayne too.

Wayne said it sounded like a song and suggested Hamblen write one. And he did.

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The result was Hamblen's song *It is No Secret What God Can Do*. It was a crossover song that was the first to be #1 in the gospel, country, and pop categories.

The chimes of time ring out the news
Another day is through
Someone slipped and fell
Was that someone you?

You may have longed for added strength
Your courage to renew
Do not be disheartened
For I have news for you

It is no secret what God can do
What He's done for others, He'll do for you
With arms wide open He'll pardon you
It is no secret what God can do

Immanuel, it's no secret—God is inviting us to his four-step dance of humbling ourselves, praying, seeking God, and turning away from evil.

Shall we dance?

Amen.

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