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Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

When God Says No

2 Samuel 7:18–29

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series: Prayers Of Our Fathers

There have been a few times in my life where I've had a dream, a goal, or a desire that just didn't work out the way I had planned. One of those times was during college. The spring of 2000 was a great time to be graduating from college with a business degree. The economy was white hot with the dot com craze. As a graduating senior I was interviewing all over the Bay Area looking to land a solid job. I wasn't disappointed and had multiple offers from different companies. At the time I felt that I was in the will of God and I thought I knew what God's plan was. I even felt that my ambition was centered on God and I sought His blessing in my career plans. But I began to wonder if my plan was God's plan. In fact I was beginning to wonder if God was telling me **no**.

My goal, my dream, my desire had always been to get to college, graduate, get a great job, and climb the corporate ladder to financial freedom and success. Becoming a pastor was not even on my radar! Then at the age of 17, I became a Christian, and slowly God began to change my heart, my worldview and my plans. I had another opportunity upon graduation and that was to move to Las Vegas and help start a new church. Through circumstances, through God's word, and through godly counsel, I began to see that my plan, my idea, my dream, was not necessarily God's. Sure God could have used me as a financial planner or marketing director or whatever, but God had something else for me, something different. A hard decision was made and I moved to Las Vegas to help plant a new church.

Have you ever had a dream, a plan, or a desire that just didn't work out? The idea, the dream, the desire may have been a really good one. There was probably nothing sinful about it and in fact you may have had everyone telling you to go for it. But in the end, God closed the door. I bet that some of you right now are faced with a decision and you are wondering what to do. Maybe there is a business deal that looks really good. Maybe you are dating someone and wondering if you should marry them. Maybe your dream has to do with your kids or your retirement. What do you do when it becomes clear that your dream is not God's? How do we respond when God tells us **no**? In this morning's text, God told King David **no** to a really great dream, and the king's response was to go to God in prayer. There is so much we can learn about prayer and about God by looking at how David prayed when God told him **no**. The question David's prayer answers is this: How do we pray when God says **no**?

Background of the Life of David

Before we get jump into David's prayer, we need to first understand the life of David and the circumstances leading up to his prayer. This is not an isolated prayer but comes about through David's life at a very special time. This was a unique time for David and Israel. David is the newly crowned king. His path to the throne has not been an easy one. He has been a man on the run and a man of war. David brings the Ark of the Covenant into the holy city of Jerusalem. The city itself is renamed the city of David. Israel is finally enjoying rest from all their enemies. David has time to reflect, to think and to dream during the time of peace and prosperity. A dream from the heart of David surfaces. He tells the prophet Nathan, his spiritual advisor, that he wants to build the Lord a "house," a temple for God's name and glory. Nathan responds, "You are the king, God has been good to you, go for it!"

David's dream was a righteous and godly one. He wanted to build a temple for people to worship. David had the time, the resources, the energy, and the blessing to do it. The problem was that David's plan was not God's. The Lord immediately speaks to Nathan and tells him that David will not build the temple, instead his son will. A similar passage is preserved for us in 1 Chronicles 17 as well. We learn that God did not want a "man of blood," "a man of war" to build His house. David must have thought, "Wait a second Lord, my wars were your wars! You are the one that asked me to fight and blessed those battles with victory!"

But God says **no**. He had a different plan, a greater plan. God wants to build David's "house." There is a play on words here. The "house" that the Lord wants to build for David is not a physical place, but refers to David's future dynasty and descendants. God promises David that his "house," his kingdom, his dynasty will last forever and will have no end. In fact the Lord promises David that He will make his name great by establishing his kingdom forever. God promises to be faithful to David's dynasty and never take away His steadfast love. It was quite a promise. Walter Brueggemann wrote, "This promise of David is perhaps the most remarkable in all Scripture."

In response to David's broken dream and God's amazing new promise, David prays a wonderful prayer. There are three lessons we can learn from David's prayer that teach us how to pray when God says **no**. This prayer is humble, it's focused on God, and it's courageous.

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD. You have spoken also of your servant’s house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord GOD! And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord GOD! Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it. Therefore you are great, O LORD God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods? And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O LORD, became their God. And now, O LORD God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken. And your name will be magnified forever, saying, ‘The LORD of hosts is God over Israel,’ and the house of your servant David will be established before you. For you, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, ‘I will build you a house.’ Therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. And now, O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. Now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you. For you, O Lord GOD, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever” (2 Samuel 7:18–29).

Humble Prayer

One of the striking characteristics of every prayer we’ve looked at in this teaching series so far is that they are all given in humility. In view of an awesome and powerful God, each person that we have studied so far realizes and understands just how small and frail they are. Before David prays, I love what David does first, *“David went in and sat before the Lord.”* David goes into the tent that housed the ark and sat before the Lord. I want you to notice two things here. David had a special place and special posture to pray. True, you and I can pray wherever and whenever we want. But there are times and moments that we need a new place to pray. A place that is comfortable and allows you to enter into God’s presence. If you have small kids, locking yourself in the closet or hiding in the garage can work, trust me I know! Do you have a place that helps you pray? A special chair, location, tree, view, etc.? Sometimes where we pray can affect how we pray.

David also had a special posture in prayer. Usually, Hebrews would stand or kneel to pray. David doesn’t do either, instead he sits. As a physical sign of humility David sits before the Lord. For me there are times when I need to walk and pray. Other times I need to sit still and pray. But, there are those times when I need to get on my knees and pray. You know what I’m talking about? David needed to sit.

David is now sitting in one of the most holy and sacred places he can be and how does he begin his prayer? He says, *“Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?”* Who am I? That is a great question to ask the Lord. David knew the answer. We know the answer. He wasn’t much! He was a nobody that God made into a somebody. Remember that David was once a shepherd boy. He was the eighth son of Jesse. Not the pick of the litter by any means. David went from shepherding sheep to shepherding God’s people as king of Israel. David knows where he comes from, he knows that God has been pursuing him this entire time and his response is one of humility, “Who am I?”

Throughout this prayer, David’s humility continues to show. Nine times David calls himself God’s *“servant.”* The king of Israel, who is surrounded by his own servants, when it comes to his relationship with God calls himself a servant. That’s humility. As God’s servant David continually sought to be obedient to God’s will. Throughout his life he has faithfully depended on God’s provision. David had developed a sacred trust between him and the Lord. In light of this David was humbled and prays “Who am I? I’m your servant.”

1 Peter 5:6 says, *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”* David got that. He fully acknowledges that all that he has become, all the blessings, all that he possesses, are pure gifts from God. God has been gracious and generous to David. In humility, David presents himself before God, takes no credit for anything God has done. David wanted to build God a house. His plan seemed good and worthy. But God said **no**. In response David says, “Who am I?” G.K. Chesterton once said, “Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak.” When is the last time in prayer you said to God, “Who am I?” In prayer do you come to God in humility from the valley floor looking up at His greatness? David’s prayer is not only marked with humility, but is also saturated in God.

God-Saturated Prayer

There is no doubt that God is the subject, the focus, and the bulls-eye of David’s prayer. God is mentioned nearly 16 times. Out of the different names used for God here, the most significant is the seven times David addresses God as, *“Sovereign LORD.”* Unfortunately the ESV does not keep that translation but other translations do. Over and over again David refers to God

as sovereign. Why does David call God sovereign? What does it mean? To call God sovereign is to acknowledge that God is in control and has the right to do whatever He wishes. It means that God knows what's best for us. All throughout David's life, God has been sovereign. God has been in control the entire time keeping David safe from Saul, victorious over Goliath and successful in battle. In verses 18-19, David thanks God for being sovereign over his family. In verses 22-24 David thanks God for being sovereign over his nation. And in verses 27-29, David thanks God for being sovereign and directing his own path.

I said this last week at our Millbrae campus, one of the keys to prayer is knowing just how big and awesome God is and just how small we are. David's prayer drips with the wonder, glory, and majesty of God. When God says **no**, like David, we need to remind ourselves that God is sovereign, God is in control and God knows what's best for us. We may be frustrated with God, we may complain, we may question Him, but at the end of the day we need to rest on the rock that He is God and we are not. Are your prayers saturated with God? How much time this week did you remind yourself of the character and nature of God? What is going on in your life right now that you need to stop and say, "God, You are sovereign. You are in control." David's prayer is marked with humility, it's saturated in God, and the next thing that jumped out to me was it's courageous.

Courageous Prayer

David says something I find very interesting in verse 27. In light of God's promise to build David's house, David says that he has found *"courage to pray this prayer to you."* Literally he has found the "heart" to make a request of God. Why does David need courage to pray? For one, he is praying to God in the tent near the ark. Fresh on his mind is what just happened to Uzzah. He was the guy who God struck dead just for accidentally touching the ark in chapter 6. David knew how loved and accepted he was by God, but he also knew how powerful and holy God was as well. It took courage to pray near the ark!

The second reason David needed courage because this was a bold and potentially dangerous request. Three times David says, *"and now"* (verses 25, 28, 29). Everything David has prayed up to this point has just been preliminary. He wants to get down to the nitty gritty and seal the deal with the promises God has made to him. God, through the prophet Nathan, has promised to bless David and his house forever. David wants God to now "confirm" and "do" (v.25) what God has promised. David is praying God's promise back to God. David courageously and boldly seeks to hold God to His word. I love that about David! The same guy who courageously stands on the promises of God and fights Goliath is now standing on the promises of God again. "Do what you said

you'd do God!" Because of God's proven faithfulness and reliable promises, David is certain that God will bless his dynasty and asks God to come through for him again.

This whole scene totally reminds me of my kids. If I promise something to them, guess what, I better do it! My kids will hold me to it! It doesn't matter how many hours or days go by, they will remind me of what I promised until I make good on it. The same is true of God. He has made hundreds of promises to His children and He will do them all. When God says **no**, like David, we need to remind ourselves and remind God of His promises. We have the promise of God's presence; He will never leave us (Heb 13:5). We have the promise of God's protection; He is our shield and tower (Psalm 18). God promises to give us His power and to provide for us (Isaiah 41). God promises to lead us (John 10:4), to give us rest (Matt 11:28), and guidance (Psalm 25:9). That is just naming a few of God's promises.

In this prayer, David is not telling God what to; he is reminding both he and God of the promises made. We know that God kept His promise to David. David's monarchy would rule for over 20 generations through 400 years. Brueggemann concludes that, "Prayer impacts the Lord of promise." David courageously asks God to make good on His promises to him and God does. What promises do you need to cling to this morning? Pray them! Remind God of them this week and remind yourself in prayer.

Even today God has kept His promise to David. Jesus Christ is a descendant of David. God has fulfilled His promises through His son who rules from a heavenly Jerusalem and whose kingdom is eternal. What I found amazing about God this week is that the greatest **no** He ever said was to His own son, Jesus Christ. Remember what Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane? In Matthew 26:39 Jesus prayed, *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."* There is no doubt that Jesus first wanted to do God's will no matter what the cost. Jesus knew that what He was going to endure would be painful, excruciating, and overwhelming. To take the sins of the world upon His shoulders, to be crucified, to be abandoned for a moment on the cross was almost too much to bear. Jesus prays and asks the Father if there was any way to let the cup of suffering and death pass. But the Father's answer was **no**. Jesus would bear the sin of all humanity on the cross; there was no other way. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, sin, Satan, and death were all defeated. You and I have been redeemed and set free by His blood. We can come boldly to God in prayer, as Hebrews 10 says, because of His work on the cross. If you are not a Christian this morning, your first prayer should be saying **yes** to Jesus and inviting Him to be your Lord and Savior.

Conclusion

There is a wonderful verse that I am sure most of you know by heart, Psalms 37:4, *“Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”* For years I prayed that prayer and believed in its promises. One day though I realized that I've been misinterpreting that verse. I thought it was saying, “Love God and he will give you anything your heart wants.” But that's not what it means. Psalm 37:4 is a call for us to love God and delight in Him. When we do that God will **put in our hearts His desires**. When I delight myself in God, **He will give** to me the desires of my heart. In other words, His desires, God's desires, become my own and are my delight. As I learn by faith to love and trust God, my heart changes. The amazing thing about prayer is that God changes my desires for His.

When I think back on all the times that I've sensed God telling me **no**, I can see now that He had a better plan. I moved to Las Vegas instead of taking a job in the Bay Area and met my wife Missy, had our first child, embarked on an incredible ministry, and through that ministry met Ann-Marie, Mark's daughter. Through that relationship I got to know Mark and CPC. However, my plan after finishing seminary was to go plant a new church in

Portland. I didn't want to move back to the Bay Area. But guess what God said to my plans? “No, I have a better plan.” And here we are. The best reaction we can have when God says **no**, like David, is to cooperate with humility in prayer. David who was once excited and committed to building the temple was overjoyed that God's plan was to build for him a dynasty that would outlast the temple. David had received far more than he had ever hoped for which eclipsed any disappointment he may have had for not building the temple.

How do we pray when God says **no**? We come to the Lord, sit at His feet and in humility confess, “Who am I?” We then sit in the wonder of God's character, nature and goodness and say, *“Therefore you are great, O Sovereign Lord. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you.”* We then muster the courage to cling and hold onto the promises of God. Whatever our situation may be, whatever it is that God says **no** to, we remind ourselves and God of His promises. In prayer God changes our desires and replaces them with His. That is what He did for David and that is His commitment to us.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.