

2 Samuel 7:1-14a  
In Temples Made of Human Hearts  
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The very heart of the Christian faith is the beautiful reality that God isn't looking for something *from* us, but offering something *to* us. God is not looking for you to do something great for him, but he's looking to do something great in you. To meet you, take up residence in you, and reveal himself to you every day.

You may have seen this bumper sticker before (Jesus is coming, everybody look busy). What the biblical story spends 66 books trying to get across is not a way for you to clean yourself up for God, or climb your way up to him. What the Bible offers is the story of how the God of the universe left eternity, and entered our existence, becoming like you and me, so that he might bring us to himself. ***The eternal became temporal, to offer that which is fleeting, that which can never be taken away.***

If you are here this morning because you thought to yourself, "You know, it's Sunday and I'm up, I really should try and make myself better... I think I'll try church," you're in the wrong place. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad that you're here. If that is why you're here, I want you to pay close attention, because what we proclaim here has nothing to do with self-help, self-esteem, or self-improvement, but has everything to do with God's rescue mission for lost people. He wants you to know how loved, cherished, and precious you are to him.

This morning, we are coming to the end of a series of messages on the life of David, but it's actually not the end. One commentator calls this passage "the dramatic and theological center of the David story, and at the very heart of the evangelical message in the Old Testament." So it's not so much the end as it is the pinnacle. Maybe some other time we'll get to part 2 of the story.

But for now, would you please stand out of reverence for God's Word and listen to the Word of God from 2 Samuel 7?

**Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you."**

**But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"' Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And**

I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

And may the same Holy Spirit who inspired the writing and preservation of these words, inspire them now in our hearing, as well. Amen, and you may be seated.

*“May the words of my mouth O Lord and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer.” God if there is anyone here within the sound of my voice who has not heard your invitation of grace, who has not felt the unconditional love and welcome of you, I pray that you would take these words of a broken and sinful man, and fill them with your transformative Holy Spirit. This I pray in the name of the Savior, the Word made flesh, Jesus our King, amen.*

Things are finally coming together for David. After years of danger, struggle, and persecution—with the likes of Goliath, Saul, and others finally out of the picture; with the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel miraculously unified—things are finally looking good for David. Verse 1 says that **“he was settled in his house”** and **“had rest from his enemies.”**

When we go through times in our lives when we feel like the weight of the world is pressing down on us, when it seems like things continually get the best of us, we look to God. So when the break in the clouds finally comes, it seems only natural to return the favor. “God, you’ve done me a solid in bringing me through, now it’s time for me to give back to you.”

So David thinks. It’s all coming up roses, so David pays a visit to Pastor Nathan, the Prophet, telling him what his plans are. He thinks to himself, “Here I am living like a king in a palace of cedar, and you, God, are stuck out in the tent. Surely not, O Lord.” David is going to build God a dwelling place fit for the King of the universe. To which Nathan says, “Yeah, that’s mighty generous of you D, go and do what’s in your heart, God’s with you.”

I think sometimes we think of God as the cosmic favor *doer*. God, if you just get me out of this jam, I promise I’ll be in church for good, or if you just help me in this way, I will be a better person. As if God operated on a barter system. God wants something from us, but it’s not what we think. It’s not quantifiable or measurable, it’s not something we can withdraw from our bank account. God wants our heart.

But that same night, the Bible says, the **word of the Lord came to Nathan**. How many times does this happen? The ideas we have in light of day, plans of all the good we’re going to do for God, plans for something noble, something honorable, plans that appear clear in daylight, take on a new

outlook at night. It's under the cover of darkness, when prayer and silence surround us, that we see most clearly.

That night, God gave Nathan pause. God assessed David's plan and Nathan realized "this isn't God's plan." So God tells Nathan, "Go and tell David: **Would you build for me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day.**"

***Turns out David's building plans for God were going to get in the way of God's building plans for David.***

Eugene Peterson puts it this way: "David, you want to build me a house? Forget it, I'm building you a house. The kingdom that I am shaping here is not what you do for me but what I do through you. I'm doing the building here, not you. I'm not going to let you confuse things by launching a building operation on your own. If you fill Jerusalem with the sights and sounds of your building project—carpenters' hammers, masons' chisels, teamsters' shouts—before long everyone will be caught up in what *you* are doing, and not attentive to what *I* am doing. This is a *Kingdom* that we are dealing with, and I am the King. I've gotten along without a so-called house for a long time now; where did you ever come up with the idea that I need or want a house? There will come a time when it is appropriate to build something like what you have in mind—your son, in fact, will do it—but this is not the time. First we have to get the concept of *my* sovereignty established in the people's imagination—your kingship a witness to my kingship, not an obscuring of it. *That* is the house I am building—your kingship as witness and representation of my sovereignty. First things first." (Peterson, 167-168)

The gospel truth of this passage is this: God is less interested in what we can build for him, than in what he will build in us. Keeping God at arm's length and repaying favors with gestures of service, or gifts of money in the collection, sometimes keeps us from letting God into the only real thing he wants from us—our heart. But I understand that, hearts and lives, that's serious stuff. That could totally change the way I behave, who I spend time with, how I spend my money. But it could also mean an intimacy with God we never imagined was possible. Psalm 37 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." But in reality, it's easier to build temples.

The twentieth century was called The Christian Century in America. In it, we saw the church become enmeshed in public life in unprecedented ways. We saw the growth and expansion, and then decline of mainline denominations like ours, followed by the exponential growth of the evangelical movement. Church growth campaigns, strategic marketing, and seeker sensitive models, as well as the continuation of urban sprawl, gave birth to the mega church. Holy ambition seemed to build and build and build. We've perfected the art of building God some pretty spectacular and majestic temples.

I'm not being critical of these; in fact, I'm grateful for them. The reason I'm standing here in front of you now is largely because of a place like this. I'm simply saying that it's possible to miss the Spirit in the midst of the trappings of church. If David would have begun a building campaign, he might have missed what God was really trying to do.

I don't know if you noticed this, but the primary actor in these verses is not David, it's God. In between verse 5-14, there are over 20 verbs used, and all of them have God as the subject of the action.

**I have been with you wherever you went**  
**I will make for you a great name**  
**I will appoint a place for my people Israel**  
**I will give you rest from all your enemies**  
**I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever**

And the list goes on. Ephesians 2:10 says "for we are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." What God is offering David here is pure grace. Not only is God so good that he preserves David in the face of all sorts of danger, but once he's out of the woods, God doubles down on his generosity. God doubles down on blessing, God doubles down on grace.

Instead of building God a home, God is going to build David a home, a lineage, a family. As I read these verses, I'm struck by how everything is about what God will do for David. This is a far cry from the covenants God made with Moses and Abraham, that said "if you do 'X' then I will do 'Y'." Verse 15 says: "**My steadfast love will not depart from him, and your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.**"

And when God says forever, God means forever, because who would come along just a few generations, Jesus the Messiah—from the lineage of David, God's chosen and beloved. This is Gospel, folks. What God wants more than anything is you.

So men, dads, dads-to-be, what can we learn from this passage about leading our family? Take a look with me at what is in verse 18. "**Then King David went in and sat before the Lord.**"

The way we lead is not by charging full speed ahead with our plans. Godly leadership begins by bending the knee in prayer, by sitting and waiting before God. When we sit down, all the dust we've feverishly whipped up settles and we're able to see clearly. The way we build and nurture our houses and our families is not by dreaming big dreams and executing them in a timely and profitable way. It's by taking action in prayer. When David sat down, the real action started; not David building a house for God, but God making himself real to David not just in his surviving, but in his thriving.

The good news of this passage is that God is often more impressed by what we *don't* do than what we *do* do. Because it's in the quiet of inactivity, it's when our mouths are shut and our eyes are open, it's when we've slowed down long enough to actually take in our surroundings, when God can reveal his manifold grace.

So dads, enjoy your afternoon on the couch, you'll be in just the right posture to hear God's heart in yours.