
David's Prayer

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¹⁰ *Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the assembly; and David said:*

“Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever.

¹¹ *Yours, O Lord, is the greatness,
The power and the glory,
The victory and the majesty;
For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours;
Yours is the kingdom, O Lord,
And You are exalted as head over all.*

¹² *Both riches and honor come from You,
And You reign over all.
In Your hand is power and might;
In Your hand it is to make great
And to give strength to all.*

¹³ *“Now therefore, our God,
We thank You
And praise Your glorious name.*

¹⁴ *But who am I, and who are my people,
That we should be able to offer so willingly as this?
For all things come from You,
And of Your own we have given You.*

¹⁵ *For we are aliens and pilgrims before You,
As were all our fathers;
Our days on earth are as a shadow,
And without hope.*

¹⁶ *“O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house
for Your holy name is from Your hand, and is all Your own. ¹⁷I know also, my
God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the
uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these things; and now with
joy I have seen Your people, who are present here to offer willingly to You. ¹⁸O
Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the
intent of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and fix their heart toward You.
¹⁹And give my son Solomon a loyal heart to keep Your commandments and Your
testimonies and Your statutes, to do all these things, and to build the temple for
which I have made provision” (1 Chronicles 29:10–19, NKJV)*

When one of Christ's disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1, NASB), he expressed a need that we all have. Just as our parents teach us to speak during the first few years

of life, we need to be taught how to speak to our heavenly Father—how to pray—once we enter into new life in Christ. Our Lord responded to this question with the most famous prayer of the Bible, the Lord’s Prayer, which every believer comes to know by heart. But before the advent of Christ, the ancient saints had just as much of a need to know how to pray, and the Lord taught them, it would seem, mainly through the examples of prayer by godly men recorded in the Scriptures.

One such prayer, which seems to rise above the rest, is the final prayer that King David offers at the end of his life. Because it only appears in the somewhat neglected book of 1 Chronicles, it is often overlooked, but I contend that this prayer is something like the Lord’s Prayer of the Old Testament. In this final scene of David’s reign, he looms large in his typological role as a godly king and a spiritual leader of his people. He leads God’s people in prayer and teaches them how to pray, just as his greater Son would in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:9–13). And, realizing that his death was immanent, David intercedes for God’s people, just as Christ would in His High Priestly Prayer (John 17). So, let us consider David’s prayer from these two different perspectives: first, how it is a prayer that still teaches us how to pray, and second, how David prayed for us, all of God’s people, including those who were with him on *that* day and those who are reading these words *today*.

The beginning of David’s prayer reminds us that the language of prayer is the language of praise and that the first purpose of prayer is to give God our worship. David begins by blessing the Lord, which simply means declaring and celebrating who He is. Commentators and translations are divided regarding whether the appellation “our father” (verse 10) refers to God or to Israel, that is, whether David addresses God as “our Father, the God of Israel,” or “the God of Israel our father.” In either case, David begins by acknowledging the long and loving history of the covenant of grace. If “our Father” refers to God’s Fatherhood, then it is, of course, easy to see how that comforting assurance is echoed in the way Jesus taught us to address our Father in the Lord’s Prayer. But I have come to believe that the Hebrew accents in this verse favor the other interpretation, that God is called “the God of Israel our father.” If this is true, then we have a different kind of comparison to the Lord’s Prayer. It is fitting that the model prayer of the New Covenant, the Lord’s Prayer, would drop the ancestral reference to the fatherhood of Israel and teach both Jew and Gentile believers to address God simply as “our Father.”

Verse 11 brings us to the heart of David’s praise, where he heaps up the glorious attributes of God in one of the most fervent expressions of worship in the Bible. This verse of pure praise found its way into the synagogue liturgy and is now used in the *siddur*, or Jewish prayerbook, as part of the liturgy recited when the Torah scroll is taken out to be read.¹ This verse was certainly well known to the disciples when Jesus taught them to pray, “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever” (Matt. 6:13). As the disciples would see the Psalms of David come to fulfillment in the life of Christ, they would also have heard this ancient prayer of David in a new light as his greater Son fulfilled the role of teaching us how to pray. We are taught to pray with praise. In our prayers, we are to worshipfully dwell upon the nature of God and bless Him for His greatness, power, glory, victory, and majesty. Unfortunately, we often hurry to our petitions before meditating on the glory of our God and worshiping Him for who He is.

As David piles up these attributes of God in praise, we sense that he is in awe, that he is multiplying words in an attempt to describe what is ultimately indescribable—the glory of God. He heightens his praise with a tenfold repetition of the word “all” in this prayer—God is head over all, He reigns

¹ Moshe Eisemann, *Divrei Hayamim I / I Chronicles*, ArtScroll Tanach Series (Rahway, NJ: Mesorah Publications, 1987), 356.

over all, He gives strength to all.² One of the attributes David lists in verse 11 is the Hebrew word *nēṣaḥ*, which is translated variously as “victory,” “splendor,” or “majesty.” Having no exact English equivalent, the word combines the ideas of supremacy and eternity,³ and it is used as a title of God in 1 Samuel 15:29. The other attributes in this list are sometimes applied in a lesser sense throughout Scripture to describe people or things, but this word, used as a personal attribute, always and only describes the nature of God. The biblical language of prayer and praise does reserve some words for God alone, and perhaps that is a good lesson for us. Our language of praise is already at a deficit as we try to use mere words to describe the indescribable. So, when we bandy about words like “awesome” to describe a movie or a meal, we cheapen our language of praise. It is a good practice to reserve some language of praise for God alone.

In verse 12, David moves from praising God for who He is to praising Him for what He gives. Riches, honor, and strength come from Him alone. Now, David is not saying that we can all expect these things in unlimited quantity, as the “health and wealth” preachers misapply this verse. Nor is David just talking about his own unique experience as a king. His point is simply that every good gift is from above—whatever strength we have, whatever resources we have, are all gifts of God. Our Savior taught us to pray for and be content with our daily bread, but David’s prayer also envisions what we know to be true: that God freely blesses us far beyond our daily bread. No matter how little of these things we may think we have, each one of us has honor, and riches, and strength far beyond what we deserve. What we deserve is unthinkable, so what we have, whatever we have, can only be described as honor, riches, and strength, all of which is ultimately unearned and undeserved. This is the logic of a thankful heart that has been saved by grace, and it is why we see David’s prayer move seamlessly from praise to thanksgiving.

David says in verse 13, “Now therefore, our God, we thank You.” It’s a brief word of thanks that has in view the blessings of the previous verse, but the element of thanksgiving runs a bit deeper than just a few words. When we read words like this, we tend to think that we give thanks by speaking the words, because that’s how we give thanks in everyday life—we say, “thank you.” But in the Bible, the Hebrew verb “to give thanks” is a full action verb that envisions either service of some kind, or worship, or the making and keeping of vows. We see these clear connections in the thanksgiving psalms (e.g. Ps. 30; 32; 34; 40; 75; 107; 116; and 118). And, the Hebrew noun “thanks” (תודה) is not used to denote an idea or a feeling expressed with words. Instead, it is simply used as the proper name of one of the offerings commanded in Leviticus—a tangible thing, the thank offering (Lev. 7:12). You’ll note that after the conclusion of David’s prayer, there is an incredible scene of sacrificial worship featuring thousands of offerings (1 Chron. 29:21–22). So, when David says, “we thank you,” it’s not the words themselves that contain his thanksgiving—rather it’s the worship and the sacrifices that follow. The words are just the preamble to the actual thanksgiving of their worship. Likewise, one of the tangible means by which we thank the Lord is our worship. Indeed, words and feelings of thanksgiving can be no substitute for action. The essence of thanksgiving, as it is envisioned in the Old Testament, is borne out in life by what we do, and what we give, for the glory of God and for the good of His people. Perhaps this is why Jesus left out the element of thanksgiving in the Lord’s Prayer—perhaps He was teaching us that thanksgiving to God is primarily something to do rather than something to say. It’s really the Sermon on the Mount, rather than the Lord’s Prayer, that teaches us how to give thanks.

David moves to the element of confession in verses 14 and 15, not so much confessing specific sins but confessing our unworthiness and weakness apart from God’s grace. “Who am I?” and “Who

² Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 509.

³ William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based on the First, Second, and Third Editions of the Koehler-Baumgartner Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 244.

are we?” he asks rhetorically. He answers by saying that we are aliens and pilgrims in this world, whose days are like passing shadows. David confesses how short our lives are and how hopeless they would be without the grace and blessings of God. The humility he expresses in these words is the natural corollary to the praise of verse 11. If God possesses all greatness, power, and glory, we can only humble ourselves before Him and confess our lowliness, our weakness, and our transience in this world. We are reminded by these verses that faithful prayer comes from a humble and contrite heart and that the confession of sin includes the confession of our poor and lowly nature as sinners, who are in fact hopeless without the grace of God.

Thus far in David’s model prayer, we see the priority of praise, followed by thanksgiving and confession from a humble heart. In the last half of his prayer, David moves to petition. As a godly king who knows that his hour has come, he prays for the hearts of his people. In fact, David mentions the heart five times in three verses. You might say that he intends to get to the *heart* of prayer and to show us that this petition for faithful, willing hearts takes precedence.

David’s emphasis on the heart begins in verse 17, where he acknowledges that God tests the hearts of men. The verb translated “test” mainly connotes the idea of “to see” or “to examine.” It’s helpful to remember that when the Old Testament talks about the “heart,” it means the entire inner person—our thoughts, our will, our intentions, our desires, and our emotions. The very act of prayer reminds us of this point—that God clearly sees and perfectly knows our hearts. The Lord had been teaching David this lesson from the very beginning of David’s kingship. On the same day that he was anointed king by the prophet Samuel, the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance ... for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). David knew that God would be watching his heart. Throughout his life, throughout his victories and his failures, David learned that his heart was an open book before the Lord. And he learned to pray, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight” (Ps. 19:14). So, in his final prayer, David brings us back to the priority of the heart. It is where true faith is found and from whence true prayer arises. God knows the heart, and nothing reveals this more than prayer. God knows if we truly love Him and humbly trust Him, or if we are simply going through the motions as our hearts turn elsewhere.

In his second mention of the heart in verse 17, David claims that his own heart has been upright and willing in all the offerings he has made. This is not a prideful claim. There is a sense, of course, in which God sees all of our hearts as upright if we are justified by grace through faith in Christ. But it’s also true that David seems to be speaking in his typological role, as a reflection of Christ. In this role, he often spoke of his own innocence and righteousness, particularly in the Psalms, and we see him in this typological light as he prays at the end of his life. He is a king with an upright heart, praying for his people. The impression is almost that the upright heart of the king makes his prayer effectual. After he says that his heart is upright before God, David mentions how willing his people are (in verse 17, and also back in verse 14). Three times he speaks of their willingness, using a Hebrew word (נָדַב) that, when it refers to a sacrifice, denotes a freewill offering and that, when it refers to a person, denotes a volunteer. The point of verse 17 is that his people are volunteers. This is the same language David used in Psalm 110 to describe Christ’s people as volunteers in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3). So, in his final prayer, David is typologically pictured as a king with an upright heart whose people are volunteers. It’s also fascinating that, in verse 20, the people prostrated themselves before the Lord and the king. They didn’t worship David, of course, but it seems as though they understood at least that David’s role as king pointed to a much greater king who was to come.

Now, when this king with an upright heart prays for his people, who stand before him as volunteers in the day of his power, he offers a prayer for their hearts: “O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the intent of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and fix their heart toward you” (NKJV). His first petition is to keep “this” in the hearts of

God's people. "This" refers back to the quality of willingness mentioned in verse 17. David is praying that God would maintain this willingness in the faith and the hearts of the people. Now, if the phrase "the intent of the thoughts of the heart" sounds familiar, it is because David uses the exact Hebrew phrase found in Genesis 6:5, which says that "every intent of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil continually." This phrase is only used twice in all of Scripture: in Genesis 6:5 and here in David's prayer. So, the purposeful repetition of this unique phrase invites a comparison. In the sinful heart, the intents of the thoughts of the heart are only evil continually. But, in the believer's heart, the intents of the thoughts of the heart are transformed, and we are given a willing faith. David's prayer here is that the willingness of our faith would be forever kept in our hearts by God.

We noted that Psalm 110 speaks of Christ's people serving as willing volunteers in the day of His power. Here, David prays that we would always be that people—a willing people. We must continue to pray for a willing faith, and we must examine our hearts and guard them against begrudgingly serving the Lord. The willingness for which David prays, and which we greatly need, is the joyful and eager desire to serve and worship the Lord, not simply out of a sense of duty, but out of genuine love and thanksgiving for our Savior. This is the day of Christ's power, and we, His people, need to be volunteers in the day of His power. The intents of the thoughts of our hearts need to be willingly fixed upon serving and glorifying Him. This is a prayer that we must continue to pray.

David mentions the heart again in verse 18. In this petition, he goes on to pray that the hearts of God's people would be fixed on Him. The verb (יָצַד) translated "fix" in the NKJV and "direct" in the NASB is the verb usually translated "to prepare." This word appears throughout 1 and 2 Chronicles to describe people who either prepared or didn't prepare their hearts to seek the Lord. In 2 Chronicles 19:3, for instance, Jehoshaphat "prepared [his] heart to seek God" (NKJV). In 2 Chronicles 12:14, Rehoboam "did evil" because "he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD."

There is a whole theology of "preparing the heart" in 1 and 2 Chronicles, where the "heart" is mentioned over fifty times. That ongoing theme comes to a crescendo as David prays that God would prepare the hearts of His people to seek Him.

David's prayer reminds us that our hearts are in the hands of a sovereign God, but throughout the book of Chronicles, we see that "preparing the heart" to seek the Lord is something that the kings and the people of Israel either did or failed to do, with predictable results. It is something that we are called to do and that we must pray for the strength to do. But what is it? What does it mean to prepare our hearts to seek the Lord?

To prepare is to make ready. The Hebrew verb is used elsewhere to describe people preparing food or an army preparing for war (e.g., Gen. 43:16, Josh. 8:4). Preparation is not the main event—it is getting ready for the main event. Seeking the Lord is the main event, so how do we prepare our hearts to do that?

Think of it this way. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (NASB). Here are two things that go together, and in order: not being conformed and being transformed. Being transformed is the main event, but not being conformed is a conscious preparation for that transformation. Preparing your heart means not being conformed to this world—not filling your heart with the worldly desires and influences that distract us from seeking the Lord. A good illustration of this is the generation of Israelites in the wilderness. They grumbled about the food, about being weary, about Moses's leadership, and, at one point, they even wanted to return to Egypt. Psalm 78:8 describes them as "a generation that did not prepare its heart," and so they were not faithful to God. In other words, they were conformed to this world. Their desires were earthly, mundane, and selfish. That is, they did not prepare their heart. And so, we are reminded by their example, and by David's prayer, that if we

fill our hearts with the desires of the world, then our hearts will be weighed down and unprepared to seek the Lord. We must pray, and strive by God's grace, to not be conformed to this world, to clear our hearts of the desires and the influences of the world that can easily dominate the heart, and, thus, to prepare our hearts to be transformed by the renewing of our minds in Christ.

Finally, David prays for his son's heart in verse 19: "Give my son Solomon a loyal heart to keep Your commandments and Your testimonies and Your statutes, to do all these things, and to build the temple for which I have made provision" (NKJV). This is a beautiful example of a father praying for the heart of his son, and it's an important model for parents to follow. There's also a crucial lesson here for parents as we pray for our children. When you think of Solomon, perhaps the first thing that comes to your mind is the way he stumbled into sin. You might think that David's prayer for him, that he would have a loyal heart, went unanswered. But that's not the way to look at it. No matter how hard we pray for our children, they will sin, not because our prayers are unanswered, but because our children are like us—they are sinners. The sins of David and Solomon are well documented, but God used both father and son for His glory and the advancement of His kingdom. God saves sinners, like us and our children, and He uses sinners, like us and our children, to bring Him glory and to build His kingdom. So, when our children stumble, we should not lose heart in our prayers for them. Instead, we should pray all the more.

David's prayer is a model for how we should pray for our children. He prays for a "loyal heart." The word translated "loyal" in the NKJV is the adjective *shalem*, which comes from the noun *shalom*, the one Hebrew word that everybody knows, which means "peace." *Shalem* means "complete," "undivided," or "at peace." David's prayer is that Solomon's heart would be so with respect to God's Word. This is a prayer that we must constantly pray for ourselves and for our children—that our hearts would be at peace, walking in the ways of the Lord according to His Word. In this fallen world, the hearts of unbelievers find no peace, but true peace, wholeness of heart, can be found in Christ. Augustine put it well when he prayed, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You."⁴

David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29 continues to teach us how to pray. Our prayers should be full of praise, offered from thankful hearts and contrite spirits, with petitions that focus on the heart of the life of faith. We must have hearts that are willing to serve our God, prepared to seek the Lord, and at peace in Christ and His Word. This is God's will for your heart—pray for such a heart as this. May God be pleased and glorified to give what He commands.

⁴ The author's paraphrase of Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.