

## “Household God”

Pastor Dave Carlson  
First Presbyterian Church  
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**New Testament Lesson:** John 2:17-22

**Old Testament Lesson:** 2 Samuel 7:1-14

I've been stuck at home for the past three weeks, for the most part. (I did get out regularly for short walks on the sidewalk, and I snuck away for a couple of more extensive outings just to keep my sanity. What actually happened, though, is I paid the price for it physically the next day – live and learn). Of course, most everyone knows I had hip resurfacing surgery on Aug. 5 and am still in the process of bouncing back. That's why I'm sitting instead of standing today (thank you for your understanding).

We all have limitations, and that's true for pastors and for each of you, for presidents and even for kings. King David had his limitations, as we see in today's Old Testament lesson.

Just like Pastor Dave wanted to control his comings and goings but couldn't (apart from God's will – live and learn), so King David wanted to be in control – and not only in control of his own comings and goings, but he wanted to be in control of God's comings and goings.

Second Samuel tells us that David wanted to build a house of God – and not only a house of God like our church here – but rather *the* house of God. King David wanted to build “a house for God to live in,” a house where God stays put, and can be visited, and consulted, whenever we want. Problem is, he decided to do this without consulting God on the matter. Now, to his credit, David did consult his prophet Nathan, knowing that the prophet without question knew the will of God. Wrong!

Turns out prophets – just like pastors, presidents, and each of you – can get it wrong if we don't first **go to God in prayer**. Because ultimately, God is in control – not Pastor Dave, not King David, not the president of the United States, and not you, your parents or your siblings, the boss or the spouse (I know, I'm treading on thin ice with that one)! But bear with me.

Can't we all agree that God is in control? I think King David knew this. And still he messed up – he decided he knew the heart of God so well, he decided that he had been so blessed by God, that God had entrusted him with so much that he could do for God what God had not asked of him.

God sees this and says to King David, “Are you the one to build me a house to live 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 and a tabernacle.” God says this through the prophet Nathan, adding, “Now therefore thus you (Nathan) shall say to my servant David:

Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel.” So while King David seeks to put God in a place of his choosing – a house built by human hands – God takes the opportunity to put David in his place. King David is reminded by God that he was once a lowly shepherd and that, without God, he is nothing – and that’s true whether David is a tender of sheep or the king of his people. Not meaning to, King David messed up big time, trying to control God!

Theologian Walter Brueggemann reminds us that God is in control, and whatever we think we know about God and God’s will beyond the core beliefs of Christianity may or may not be right. Live and learn; time will tell.

Here’s how Brueggemann sees it: “God (is) merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in faithfulness, righteous, omnipotent, and holy. But (Brueggemann) also insists that (the Bible shows God to be) hidden, wrathful, inscrutable, conflicted, unreliable, violent, and irrational. The drama of God’s character in the Hebrew Scriptures requires that we alternately submit and argue back, yield and wrestle with this Holy One who will not be domesticated by our theologies.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, we can’t box God in – not in a house of worship nor in our ideas of what’s right and what’s not when it comes to God’s will.

When King David tried to “domesticate” God – tried to make a house where God could stay – God turned the tables on him, saying, “the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth 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 a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.” Of course, we now see that God was ultimately speaking of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior born of the line of David. And he’s also talking about King Solomon, David’s son who will take the crown after him. (More on Solomon next week. For now, let’s focus on King David and how God works in his life – in our lives.)

God not only promises to use David in his divine plan for the redemption and salvation of the world, but he also promises to bless him abundantly as it all plays out. What are the blessings God bestows upon David and the people of Israel? Let’s take a look.

God says to David, “I have been with you wherever you went” – here, God provides **companionship, relationship**. God says, I “have cut off all your enemies from before you” – God provides **protection**. “I will make for you a great name,” says God, who, after all, is the source of any power or influence we enjoy, whether that’s in our families, at our jobs, in our communities, or hear at church. God is the source of our **work and responsibilities** – we answer to God and are accountable to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Sharp, Carolyn J., ed., *Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture, and the Church*, Walter Brueggemann, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011, p. 3.

What else? What else does God promise us? “I will appoint a place for my people Israel (our spiritual ancestors) and will plant them” – God provides us a home for both body & soul and the stability that goes along with it. ... “So that they may live in their own place and be disturbed no more.” God gives us our very lives and ensures us a divine and holy peace. “I will give you rest ...,” says God. God provides us space for **renewal and rejuvenation**, whether that’s here or in your homes or out in nature. God will not be domesticated!

What happens when we try to domesticate God, to control God and pin God down for our own purposes? Well, we loose out on all the blessings I just mentioned. We no longer have God with us; we move away from God and sever that relationship. We no longer enjoy God’s protection, but rather, we subject ourselves to the ways of the world. The world becomes our source of power and influence, whether that’s our sense of self-worth based on worldly standards of beauty and success or the way we sometimes treat people in our lives, based on fear or scarcity rather than grace and mercy.

When we try to put God into a box of our making we no longer have God as our resting place, God as the one we come home to and in whose Spirit we live and breathe. We loose our home base. And with no home base, we have no peace, no rest for our bodies or souls. limit God, as if we could, as if even King David could.

The way to protect ourselves from the temptation of boxing God in is to remember that wherever you are, God is with you. God is available to you, to consult with in prayer. God is surrounding you, to protect you. God is equipping you and empowering you and inspiring you, for the work of God’s people.

And when your work is done, God is there for you to take your rest. God renews us each day for our daily tasks – no more and no less. That is sufficient with God – rest enough for another day, if we would only allow God to be God, and be content with us being us.

If you ever forget who’s who when it comes to God and us, remember that God is always there to remind us. The best way to remember our place in the sight of God is to check in with God.

And if you do forget or somehow fail to do this, then at least check in with one of God’s people as a starting point – myself or any person in whom you see God working and living.

Amen.

## Pastoral prayer

What a gift it is to be able to speak to you, O God, to know that you hear us, and that you care so deeply about us. We have so many concerns.

Our hearts ache with the struggle of friends and family who are hurting and sick.

We thank you for the Spirit and miracle of healing and restoration, and ask you to work your miracle now for both of these dear people, and for all who are in pain or battling illness.

We see, also Lord, the brokenness in the world, and we cry out to you for salvation. Thank you for the ways that our prayers can change our perspective. Thank you for reminding us that you are in charge, and that we are not forgotten.

We lift up our prayers to you, and trust that you will hear us and respond. Not our will, but yours be done.

We pray all this in the name of the one who promises us a life of miracles, of peace, of hope, of eternal blessings beyond what we can see or understand. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive  
our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,  
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**