



When God Says 'No' – Part 1

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Scripture: [2 Samuel 7:1-11](#)

Series: [A Leader You Can Follow \(7/9\)](#)

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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.” (2 Samuel 7:1-2)

Today we are going to look at the story of a godly man with a good heart and a great idea. David had it in his heart to do something great for God. But the good thing he wanted to do was not given to him. That opportunity was given to someone else.

It’s a story that speaks directly to something all of us will experience. What do you do when God closes the door on something good that you wanted to do for him?

You had a great idea. Good and godly people encouraged you to pursue it. You felt sure that this would be for the glory of God. But it didn’t work out. As if that was not hard enough, now someone else is doing what you hoped to do. And it is difficult for you when you see that God is blessing it and they are having great success in doing it.

You train for a particular career, but after all you have invested in training, the door into what you wanted to pursue does not open for you. You asked God to open the way, but for some reason that you can’t explain, the door remains closed.

As years pass, you find yourself looking back wistfully on what might have been. When you were younger, you had hopes and dreams. You wonder: *Why did God close the door on good things that were in my heart?* You wanted to marry or have children. You wanted to reach a certain place in your career, or gain a place on a particular team, or succeed in some area of ministry. It happened for others, but it did not happen for you.

We are looking today at one of the toughest challenges a Christian can face—when God closes the door on something good you hoped to do for him.

Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies... (2 Samuel 7:1)

David had been blessed. As he looked at what the Lord had done for him, God’s grace overwhelmed him. This man, who began life as a shepherd, the youngest brother, despised by his siblings, was now the king. How kind God has been to him!

He lived in a comfortable home that had been built for him by Hiram the king of Tyre, who, no doubt, was trying to curry his favor by sending the best cedar wood, along with carpenters and masons, as a gift (2 Samuel 5:11). David was enjoying a time of rest from his enemies.

Notice, the enemies were not gone. They were still “surrounding.” If you look at 2 Samuel 8 and 10, you will see that there were more battles that David would yet have to fight, but at this point in the story, there was some respite from the activity of his enemies.

As soon as there was a breather from all the conflict, David wanted to do something for the Lord: “God has done so much for me. What can I now do for God?”

Here we have the story of how David had it in his heart to build a temple for God, but God said ‘No,’ and gave that privilege to David’s son, Solomon, instead.

Why Did God Say, ‘No’?

Why would God close a door for David that he opened a generation later for someone else? We don’t find it easy to live with the mystery of God’s providence, so we go looking for a reason. Perhaps David did something wrong. Was pride the problem? Was David presumptuous? But nothing of that sort is stated in the Bible.

This is important, because when God closes the door on something good that you wanted to do for him, your first instinct may also be to say, “I must have done something wrong.” You may feel that God somehow has it in for you, and that he never really loved you.

1. The right concern

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.” (2 Samuel 7:2)

That was a right concern. David has a comfortable life—a house of cedar! He looks at how much has been spent on his own comfort, then he looks at what he has given to God and he says to himself: *I have been investing a great deal in myself and in my own comfort, it’s time I used the resources God has given me to invest in the work of God.*

That is what is going on in his heart and mind.

The process David goes through of comparing the comfort of his life with the work of God that is yet to be done in the world is exactly right. This was the same argument used by the prophet Haggai when God’s people returned to Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah: “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while [God’s] house lies in ruins? (Haggai 1:4). God has called us to advance the work of his kingdom in the world.

Can your conscience live with what you give to God in the light of what you spend on yourself? That is a right concern. David couldn’t live with it: “God has given me significant resources, and it is time for me to use them in a way that will honor him.”

2. The right goal

People who are looking for something that David did wrong, might say, “Well, putting up a great building was surely not the right way for David to invest his money. After all, God does not live in a house made with human hands” (Acts 7:48f, Isaiah 66:1f).

But God blessed Solomon with the privilege of building the temple, and the glory of the Lord came down and filled the temple. So when God says, “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in?’” (2 Samuel 7:5), the emphasis here is on the word *you*.

The point is not that God does not want a temple to be built. It is simply that David will not be the one to do it. Someone else will do it. Why not David? Because David’s son “shall build a house for my name” (2 Samuel 7:13).

3. The right heart

People who are looking to find some fault in David might say, “David wanted his own name on the temple.” But that cannot be the case, for this reason: God commends David for having this desire, which clearly indicates that David’s desire and his motive were good. “But the LORD said to David my father, ‘Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for my name, you did well that it was in your heart’” (1 Kings 8:18).

Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). When God looked at the desire in David’s heart to build the temple, he saw something good, and he commended David for it!

4. The right process.

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” (2 Samuel 7:2).

David sought wise counsel from Nathan the prophet, a man who, like David, walked with God. He tells Nathan his concern, and Nathan says, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you” (2 Samuel 7:3). What could possibly be wrong with what David wants to do? Nothing! So David’s wise counselor says, “Go for it!”

But then the same night, no doubt to Nathan’s complete astonishment, God speaks, and he says, ‘No!’ And the door closes on something good that David wanted to do for God.

I am so glad that this story is in the Bible. It speaks to the times in your life and mine when we set our hearts on doing something good, and for some reason the way does not open. And you are left wondering, *Why did God close the door?*

Why was David not allowed to do this, especially when Solomon was? Why did God give a blessing, an opportunity that you desired, to someone else and not to you? We are not told. “The secret things belong to the LORD” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

The one thing we *do* know is that God had a different plan for David. It wasn't the plan he thought. It wasn't the plan that he wanted. But it was the plan God had for him. It is worth remembering that building is something you do in a time of peace. Grand projects have to be put on hold in times of war.

David wanted to be a king who ruled in times of peace. As soon as he had respite from the demands of battling his enemies, he said, “Well, now I can build a house for God!” But David was not given that blessing. Instead, he was called to lead the way in one battle after another. You see that in 2 Samuel 8 and 10, and in the conflict with Absalom that followed.

David would spend years in battles that *had* to be fought for the protection of God's people. Notice the future tense in what God says,

- “I will appoint a place for my people Israel... so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more” (2 Samuel 7:10).
- “And violent men shall afflict them no more...” (2 Samuel 7:10).
- “I will give you rest from all your enemies” (2 Samuel 7:11).

The rest David enjoyed (2 Samuel 7:11) was only a temporary respite. There were more battles to be fought, and this was God's calling on David's life.¹ He was the one who would fight the battles to make God's people secure.

Solomon would be the one who got to be king in times of peace. When all the enemies were subdued, peace would reign, and Solomon would build the temple. That could not have been easy for David. David did all the hard work, and Solomon reaped the blessing of what David had sown!

So David had the right concern, the right goal, the right heart, and the right process, and yet God closed the door on what David wanted to do for him! God had something else for David. It was not what he would have chosen, but it was what God was calling him to do.

How will David respond when what is in his heart is not God's plan for him? How will you respond when what is in your heart is not in God's plan for you?

Two things stand out from this story: When God says ‘No,’ your faith will be tested. And when God says ‘No,’ his promise is sure.

¹ Then King David rose to his feet and said: “Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had it in my heart to

When God Says ‘No,’ Your Faith Will Be Tested

1. How well do you love God?

The first calling of God on your life as a Christian is to love him with all of your heart, all of your mind, and all of your strength. If it is really true that you want to do something for God, your love for the Lord will remain the same whether you get to do it or not.

Early on in our marriage, Karen and I went out shopping. I wanted to get her a gift. She asked me, “Why are we doing this? I don’t need anything. It’s not Christmas, my birthday, Mother’s Day, or Valentine’s Day.” I said, “We are doing it just for the joy of it.”

She came up with a wonderful phrase for it. She said, “Is it just a buck shee?” “Buck shee” is a British phrase that simply means “something extra”—something you want to give, not because of any particular occasion, but just because you want to do it.

So suppose Karen and I go shopping for a buck shee, and I find a necklace that I like, and I say, “I’d like to get this for you.”

She says, “No, if you are giving me a gift, I have something else in mind.”

Suppose I then say, “But this is what I want to give you.”

She says, “No, it’s really not what I want,” and I say, “But I insist!”

At that point I am no longer acting in love. Something has twisted the original desire to give a gift for the joy of the one to whom it is given. Love says, “I want to give you a gift. I have this idea, but if you want something different. I want to give what pleases you.”

David wants to do something for God, “Lord, this is what I want to do for you.” He has the right concern, the right idea, the right motive and the right process. But God wants something different for him.

And David gives us a marvelous example here. He really loves God, and so he says, “Lord, you choose what I will give to you. I wanted to build a temple for your glory but if you want something different from me, then I want to give to you whatever pleases you.”

Maybe the life to which God has called you is not the life you wanted to offer to him, but if you really love him, you will gladly give whatever he asks of you. David did not get the blessing of building the temple. But God had something else for him to do. Even though it was not what David wanted, it was the best thing that he could offer to God. Whatever the disappointments of your life, God has something for you to do.

God's 'No' to David building the temple was part of God's 'Yes' to the great contribution of David's life, which was to establish peace by subduing the enemies of God's people. Solomon could not have built the temple if David had not defeated the enemies and established peace. David could not have defeated the enemies and established peace if his time and energy had been taken up in building a temple.

What to you may be a great disappointment, may open the way to some other work that God may be calling you to do. That work may not be what you would have chosen, but if you really love the Lord, you will find peace in following the path that he has mapped out for you.

2. How well do you love others?

The second calling of God on the life of a Christian is to love your neighbor as yourself. That would mean loving your friend, your sister, or your brother, as much as you love yourself.

None of us are there yet, but one day, when God's work of grace is complete in all of us, we will have as much joy in a blessing bestowed on someone else as we would have had if it had been given to us.

- Imagine a soccer team in which you had you as much joy in someone else scoring a goal as you would have done if you had scored the goal yourself!
- Imagine a music program in which everyone rejoices in the success of the person who was given the solo part, as much as they would have done if that part had been given to them.
- Imagine a city in which pastors and leaders have as much joy in God's blessing on another church or ministry as they would have had if the same blessing had been given to their own.

That would mean no envy, and no jealousy – gone forever that horrible plague of “Why him or her and not me?” That's where we will be when God's work of grace in us is complete. Growth in love means moving in that direction.

If building the temple really is for the glory of God, it shouldn't make that much difference to David who builds it. To God be the glory! David would have had great joy in building a temple, but his joy was no less when that honor was given to his own son.

David is a wonderful example of what God's grace can do. He is tested and he shines in 2 Samuel 7. He is a marvelous example of what is possible for the person who really loves God and really loves others.

3. How well do you understand grace?

Grace is all about what God does for us—what he has done, what he is doing now, and what he will do for us through Jesus Christ. Grace means that all of God’s kindness to us and all of God’s gifts to us are given freely. They are not earned. It is not a response to what we have done. It is not a reward for the investment that we have made in his kingdom.

These verses that start out with what David wanted to do for God, end up overflowing with God’s grace toward David.

What God has done in the past

“I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel.” (2 Samuel 7:8)

God stepped into David’s life and took him from the shepherd he was to the king he became: “In case you ever forget, David, I took you from the fields and I brought you into the situation of my favor, in which you now enjoy.”

Christian brother or sister, God has stepped into your life. He has laid hold of you and made you his own. In Jesus Christ, you are a son or daughter of God. You did nothing to deserve this. That’s grace!

What God is doing right now

“I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you.” (2 Samuel 7:9)

God was with David at every step of the journey, including the times of his greatest disappointments. And—Christian brother or sister—God is with you. In all you face and all you endure, God says to you, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5)! That is God’s promise to you. God sticks with us, even when we are at our worst—that’s grace! And that grace is yours in Jesus Christ.

What God will do in the future

“I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.”
(2 Samuel 7:9)

“David, who you are and what will come from your life is safe in the hands of God. You don’t need to fret about an opportunity that didn’t work out for you. Your name will rest, not on what you accomplish for God, but on what God in Christ has done and will do for you!”

Brother, sister, for all eternity, who you are and what you will be will rest on Jesus Christ and all that he has done for you. That’s grace. And understanding grace takes the sting out of disappointment!

Do you see what God is saying? “David, you are in the very center of my grace. Don’t worry about that door that I closed. David, make sure that your joy lies not in what you hope to do for me, but in what I have done, what I am doing, and what I will do for you.”

Where to Find Your Joy

In the Gospels, we read about an occasion when Jesus’ disciples had been sent out on a mission. Remarkable things happened: People were healed, demons were cast out, and lives were transformed. When the disciples came back, they were full of joy and said, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” (Luke 10:17).

Jesus said in reply, “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). In other words, “Don’t find your joy in what you are doing for Jesus. Find your joy in what Jesus does for you.” Otherwise you will be distraught when disappointment comes and he closes a door that you hoped would be open.

The importance of these words came home to me through the biography of Martyn Lloyd Jones, who many regard as the greatest preacher of the 20th century. God gave him remarkable gifts and widespread influence around the world.

His friend and biographer, Iain Murray, visited him in the last days of his life, when he was no longer able to preach, had little strength, and was restricted to a routine of hospital visits and receiving a few friends.

“Our greatest danger,” said Lloyd Jones, “is to live upon activity. The ultimate test of a preacher is what he feels like when he cannot preach.”² That’s not just true of preachers! It is true for all of us when we are no longer able to do what we once did.

Then Lloyd Jones quoted these words of Jesus: “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

When you know what it cost the Savior for your name to be written in heaven, for your sins to be forgiven, and for your eternal future to be secured, you will find great joy in what he has done for you, irrespective of what you may or may not get to do for him.

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² Iain Murray, *The Life of Martyn Lloyd Jones*, p. 450, Banner of Truth, 2013.

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