

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: When The Answer Is No

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Scripture: 1 Chronicles 28: 1-7

¹ David summoned all the officials of Israel to assemble at Jerusalem: the officers over the tribes, the commanders of the divisions in the service of the king, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of all the property and livestock belonging to the king and his sons, together with the palace officials, the warriors and all the brave fighting men.

² King David rose to his feet and said: "Listen to me, my fellow Israelites, my people. I had it in my heart to build a house as a place of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God, and I made plans to build it.

³ But God said to me, 'You are not to build a house for my Name, because you are a warrior and have shed blood.'

⁴ "Yet the LORD, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole family to be king over Israel forever. He chose Judah as leader, and from the tribe of Judah he chose my family, and from my father's sons he was pleased to make me king over all Israel.

⁵ Of all my sons—and the LORD has given me many—he has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel.

⁶ He said to me: 'Solomon your son is the one who will build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.

⁷ I will establish his kingdom forever if he is unswerving in carrying out my commands and laws, as is being done at this time.'

Transcript:

Hello to those of you who are at home online, thank you for joining us. And for those of you in the room, it's great to have both in-person and online to worship.

Let's start with prayer. Jesus you're good morning, noon and night, even when we don't always understand, even when we don't always see it. Lord, have your holy spirit use these next few minutes as we turn to scripture to help us see your goodness, and follow you because of it, in Jesus name, amen. Well, the scripture comes from 1 Chronicles and it says this, "David assembled at Jerusalem, all the officials of Israel, the officials of the tribes, the officers of the divisions that serve the king, the commanders of thousands, the commanders of hundreds, the stewards of all the property and livestock of the king and his sons, together with the palace officials and mighty men and all the seasoned warriors." He just brought a bunch of people together.

"Then King David rose to his feet and said, 'Hear me my brothers and my people, I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord and for the footstool of our God, and I made preparations for building.' But God said to me, 'You may not build a house for my name, for you are a man of war and have shed much blood.' Yet the Lord God of Israel chose me from all my father's house to be king over Israel forever. He chose Judah as leader, in the house of Judah, my father's house, and among my father's sons he took pleasure in me to make me king over all Israel. And of all my sons, (for the Lord has given me many sons) he has chosen Solomon my son to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel. He said to me, 'It is Solomon your son who will build the house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son and I will be his father.

I will establish his kingdom forever, if he continues strong in keeping my command and my rules as he is today." And in that text that I just read, there's a sequence of words that I think all of us can relate to in one way or another. The background is that King David has fought a bunch of battles and has defeated all of Israel's enemies, and for the first time in Israel's history, it is secure, from all of our enemies. So David then decides, I'm going to build a temple to God. And he says, "I made plans to build it, but God said to me, you are not to build a house for my name." I made plans, but God. We're doing a sermon series on that phrase, but God in, the Bible. And I think that sequence of words, I made plans but God, had other ideas for my life.

Can you ever relate to that? Have you ever had those experiences? I made plans, But they didn't work out. I plan to go to this certain college, but I didn't get in. I plan to be married by now, but I'm not. I planned to have this certain job, but I don't. I made plans for the future, but I got cancer, but a loved one died, but my finances went South, but stupid COVID came along and took a year of my life away. And often the things that we plan for, the things that we pray for,

they're good things, like marriage and jobs, and those are all good things. And still sometimes the answer is, no. And sometimes it's God that tells us no, other times it's not God that tells us no, it's just life or circumstances or other people. But whether it's God that says no, or just our circumstances, either way there are blessings to be found when the answer is, no.

Back in February my wife and I were watching the Super Bowl, where Tom Brady, yet again won one more Super Bowl yet again, because he leads another one. And we were watching him celebrate and my wife just sighed, and she said, "For some reason just seems really important to God's eternal plan that Tom Brady get everything he wants." Like it seems that way. Like here Tom, here's your perfect life, here's your greatest quarterback of all time and your perfect kids and your supermodel wife and you disgust me. For the rest of us non Tom people, life doesn't usually work out that way, and we encounter, no. So when the answer is no, how do we respond and what blessings do we find? Because here's one of the most important things to remember when the answer is no, behind every no there is always God's greater yes.

Behind every no there is always God's greater, yes. When we hear no, it doesn't mean that necessarily that God is punishing us, it doesn't mean that He doesn't love us, he does. God is always guiding us to his greater yes. So the first question we have to ask when we encounter some kind of no in life is, what is the greater yes Jesus, that you are leading me to? One of my favorite verses in the Bible says, "For Jesus Christ was not 'yes' and 'no', but in him it has always been, 'Yes.'" For no matter how many promises God has made, they are all yes in Christ. I love that verse. And this is true of God's commandments. When we come to God's commands we often hear the no, the prohibition, that thou shall not, but we don't always hear the greater yes, that's behind it.

No sex outside of marriage, that's the prohibition, but what's the greater yes? Well, a fulfilling relational and sex life that is best found with someone who has made in a covenant, that they're never going to leave you. No gossip, but the greater yes is, a community where you don't have to worry about what people are saying behind your back. Behind every no, there's a greater yes, behind every can't do, there's a get to. Because see, and this is another thing to remember when we encounter a no, second thing, God answers prayers one of two ways yes, or better. And the story we read, David planned to build a temple, but through the Prophet Nathan, God says this to David, "The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you, David. I will raise up your offspring to succeed you." God's talking about David's son, Solomon. "He's the one who will build a house for my name. And I will establish

the throne of his kingdom forever. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever."

And God's playing of the double meaning of the word house, both in English and in the original Hebrew where it can mean a structure or it can mean a family, a dynasty, like in Romeo and Juliet, the house of Montague, the house of Capulet. God says to David, you won't build me a house, I'm going to build you a house. A legacy, a dynasty, and it's going to last forever. And in fact it does because Jesus is a direct descendant of David. See God answers prayers one of two ways, yes, or better. Here's the irony of this passage is, in some ways it's one of God's bigger noes in the Bible. Like this is King David, a man after God's own heart, and he wants to do a good thing, building the temple, that's a good thing and God says, no. It's one of the bigger noes in the Bible.

Yet it is simultaneously also one of God's bigger yeses, because he promises David that he's not going to build just a temple, but a legacy, a dynasty. So God's no, was simultaneously one of God's bigger yeses. God had something better in mind for David than David had planned for himself. Now it needs to be said, some noes are incredibly painful. People who've lost a child or suffered injustice or painful relationship problems, those noes are incredibly painful. And it's not something that you can just say, "Well, there's a greater yes behind that." That's trite and trivial. That said though, so many people I know who have gone through incredibly painful situations like those, have experienced God's presence in ways they never have before.

It's what Adrian was praying, like when the world is so unhappy, somehow God's presence can make us joyful. And I gave him hope, and it gives people courage and it's not a consolation prize. It was a huge blessing for so many people I know out of a terribly painful no, comes these bigger yeses of God. I'll give you an example in a bit. Behind every no, there's a greater, yes. God always answers prayers yes or better. Third thing to remember when we encounter a no, is that God has a bigger perspective. God can see the future, we can't. God can see the domino effects of what we do and say, "We can't." As I said last week that job didn't get, that relationship that didn't work out, maybe it was going to be a disaster, maybe you dodged a bullet that you couldn't see coming, but God saw it. Or maybe the thing you're asking for is going to have negative consequences on some of the people around you, and you can't that, but God can.

God says to David, I'm doing so much more than just building the temple here David, I'm establishing a dynasty through you, that is going to bless the entire world. David is not just about you and your plans, I'm doing something much

April 25, 2021

bigger here than just you. I mentioned last week that a person on our staff, McCayla Butler, she oversees our care team, helped me find a place to get vaccinated last week, because it's hard to do, but she's really good at it. And she texted me last week, "I'm looking for a place for you to get a vaccine." And I texted her back and I said, "Thank you, but don't spend too much time on it, I'm sure you have other things to do." She jokingly texted back to me, "No. Finding Scott Dudley a vaccine is my number one priority in life right now. It's my life's calling. Everything I've done in life has prepared me for this moment, nothing else matters. I don't even know where my kids are." Now that's funny. The humor of that, she was joking I think the.

The humor of that is obviously there are more important things in this world than finding me a vaccine, it's not all about me. Although she did find me a vaccine, I'm grateful. God sometimes says no, because he's doing something bigger than just us, and just our life. And there are consequences we can't see. It's not all about you, it's not all about me. Now that said, he's often also not just doing bigger things in the world, but also often doing bigger things in our lives than we're even asking for. Which brings me to the next point, look for God's greater yes, God answers prayers yes or better. He sees a bigger picture. Next point, when God says, no, he's clarifying our motives and our purpose.

God says to David, "You are not to build a house for my name because you are a warrior and have shed blood." That makes it sound like God's punishing him for being a warrior. But in the larger context, if you look at it, that's not what God is saying at all. God is saying to David, your job, the chapter of this ongoing story I'm asking you to write, your purpose David is to make Israel secure from her enemies for the first time ever in their history. That's your purpose, not to build the temple. Elsewhere in the Bible, God tells David, "I've been with you wherever you have gone, and I've cut off all your enemies from before you. I will provide a place for my people Israel so that they can have a home, and wicked people shall not oppress them anymore."

In other words no David, building a temple, that is not your purpose. Now look on the bright side, it means you don't have to do a cup of campaign, so there's that. Bounces out, but no, you don't get to build the temple. David, that's not your purpose, your purpose is to make Israel secure. Your son, Solomon will build the temple, that's his purpose." See sometimes God says no to us, because we're trying to do someone else's purpose. Sometimes we don't get to be captain of the team, don't get to be the most popular kid in school, don't get to be the one that gets promoted, because those things might not be our purpose. And so when God says, no, he is clarifying our purpose and also our motives.

Because David's motives here, they're not entirely pure building this temple thing.

When David first planned to build the temple, God said to him, "Did I ever say, David, 'why have you not built me a house of cedar?' Did I ever say that, David? No, I didn't. So David, who is this about, me or you? It's about you, David, this is about your plans. I didn't ask you to do this, it's about your ego." Because he back, then the way king showed off and showed how important they were, was they built big building, they built giant temples. So David's got some mixed motives going on here. And God says no to clarify his motives and his purpose. So then how does David respond to this no? This big no, does he throw a fit? Does he pout? No. This is what he says, "How great you are sovereign Lord, there is no one like you. You just told me No, I don't get what I want."

It's kind of this counterintuitive response. He responds with praise and joy, he doesn't feel shoved aside. The no is, you can't build the temple, the greater yes is, you get to establish a dynasty, and you get to be the one to empower your son, the next generation, to build the temple and fulfill his purpose, and you get to stand behind him and do that. After God says no to David, the text goes on to say, I didn't read this part, but it goes on to say, "Then David gave Solomon the plans of all the spirit had put in his mind for the temple of the Lord. David designated the weight of gold for all the gold articles and the weight of silver for all the silver articles, the weight of gold for the gold lampstand, with the weight for each lampstand and its lamps." And it goes on and on in mind numbing detail, for an entire chapter about all the things David bought for the temple.

And the point is, David doesn't get to build the temple, but he does get to prepare the way for the temple, and mentor and empower his son, Solomon, the next generation to fulfill his purpose. Sometimes you get to lead, and sometimes you get to support. And if you can't support, you can't lead, because good leaders are always good supporters. The message to David is not, you fulfilled your purpose and I'm shoving you aside, the message is, your purpose has changed, but you still have a really important purpose. I think that people in this church, many people in this church who've retired, and their job changed, but they still have an incredible purpose by how they are helping others, by giving their time and their talents and their skills by often mentoring and empowering the next generation.

I remember the first time I met my predecessor here, Dick Leon, who had retired from this job. And I asked him, the first time I met him, I said, "If you had not retired, if you had stayed another five years, where do you think God was taking this church?" And he said, "Missional church." I think God is calling BelPres to

move out into the community and make a big difference out in the community. And he said, "I just knew that wasn't my chapter to write. I got to write a lot of chapters, but that one wasn't mine to write. It was mine to prepare for, but not to write."

In fact, he did prepare for that chapter. The reason this was built on his watch, this community center, was so that it could be available to the community, which it still is, well, other than COVID time still is. He led an assault on poverty so that this church could make a difference in the lives of people who were under-resourced. He prepared the way, and those things paved the way for what came after, like Jubilee REACH, and Eastside Academy, and KidREACH and Auto Angels. Do you know who I called constantly for support and advice? Him. He wasn't sidelined, to me he was mission critical. And since he died, not a week has gone by that I don't miss him. Man, especially this last year, I was just like, "I wish I could talk to Dick. How would he lead through COVID?" I sometimes watch videos just to hear his voice because it makes me feel better.

God said no to David, because God had another purpose for David, which David embraced with joy. God will never let your prayers interfere with your purpose. God will never let your prayers interfere with your purpose, he loves you too much for that, and that's good news. Practically speaking, how do we respond? What do we do when we encounter a no in life? Whether it's God that says no, or it's just our circumstances, practically what do we do? A couple of things, first grieve. Some noes are very painful and you need to take some time to grieve and lament and pour out your feelings to God, grieve. Second, discern. Discern whether this no is from God or not. Discern whether the no is something you need to accept, or is it a no that you just need to keep pushing on to break through it. Because some no's are not meant to be accepted, they're just obstacles we have to overcome. If you're looking for a job, you keep getting no, you have to keep looking.

And the way we discern is through prayer and listening for those thoughts, that aren't our thoughts, through scripture and through talking to other Christians who can help guide us. Discern, and for that matter discern the yeses, because not every yes is from God either. Just because you got into the college or got the job doesn't mean you should do it. Third, grow. There's a lot to learn in the school of no, God uses noes to clarify our purpose, our motives help us get closer to him. Don't waste the no, use it to grow. Pray, Jesus what are you trying to teach me? And then fourth, keep looking to the cross, keep reminding yourself of the cross, because the cross is proof that everything God does, he does in love.

April 25, 2021

Because see, there's another place in the Bible where God says no. On the night before he was crucified, Jesus prayed, "Father if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me yet not as I will, but your will." And God looked at Jesus and said, "No." And the cross shows that God loved us so much, he came himself in the person of Jesus, died the death we deserve to pay the price for our sins. And what that means is everything God does, he does in love. One of the things that inspires me is, the faith of so many African-Americans I know who have in their life encountered some noes that were not from God, they were unjust, unfair noes. And talking with some of them this week, about how meaningful it was for them to see accountability for bad cops in the Chauvin verdict, for that matter good cops, appreciate that as well, and they were talking about how knowing the love of God, the cross, how looking at the cross and knowing that God loves them is what has sustained them through some of the most difficult times in their lives.

It's helped them to persevere, which brings me to the last practical thing. Grieve, discern, grow, look to the cross, which helps us do this last thing which is to persevere in trust. If God loves us enough to die for us, that means everything he does, he does in love, and he is always guiding us toward good things for us in our lives. Because when we get the noes, it's important to remember that, because when we get the noes, Satan comes along and says, "God, doesn't love you. If God loved you, he would have given you what you wanted. God doesn't love you." But God is always motivated by love even when we don't understand it. So persevere in prayer and scripture, community, until you really can trust that God is always using everything for good, even the bad. One of the shows my family and I binge-watch recently is WandaVision, is part of the Marvel series and turned out better than I thought it was going to be.

And there's this one episode where the character named Vision says to Wanda, "What is grief if not love, persevering? Is a really nice line, what is grief, if not love persevering? Except my kids kind of spoiled it for me, because they said it's created all these online parody, memes of that sentence, things like, what is yogurt, if not milk persevering? And things like, which I thought was kind of funny. What is faith, if not love persevering? Trusting, persevering in prayer and scripture, and worship, and community to trust that God loves you and is always working for your good. The president of Princeton Seminary Craig Barnes tells a story of how, when he was 16, his father abandoned the family. And Craig said every time they would try to find him, and if they found him, he would just disappear again. And eventually he died alone in a trailer park. A neighboring pastor took several days to try to figure out how to get ahold of the family because he didn't know their names.

And Craig said, "My dad missed all the important events of our lives, the graduations, the weddings, the birth of our children, our ordination services, our PhD ceremonies, and it's so painful." Craig said, "I prayed that he would return to us. I used to yearn for the day that he'd show up in a congregation where I was preaching, and after the service he'd come through the line and shake my hand and say, 'Good job son.' But it never happened, he never came." And Craig said, "At my dad's funeral, I just stared at the casket, and wondered what happened to all those prayers I prayed. Were they just lying around on the floor of heaven somewhere unheard, unanswered unresponded to?" And Craig said, "When the service was over, my brother and I went to my dad's trailer to try to piece together some of his life." And he said, "That's when we received a great gift. Because sitting on his kitchen table, was a devotional journal where he had written all of his thoughts about different Bible passages over the years."

Craig said, "I was so relieved to see that he abandoned us, but he didn't abandon his faith." And he said, "Then I came across a dog-eared tattered page with the title, daily prayer list, on the top. And the first two items on that list were my brother's name and my name." Craig says, "I will never understand the lonely madness that drove my father away from everyone that loved him and that he loved. But I'm so thankful to know that to his dying day, he never forgot us, and talk to God about us every single day. Even though for some reason, I don't understand, he couldn't talk to us. And there was enough grace in that to get me through.

And the grace wasn't that I receive what I wanted, I didn't find my father and it turn, the grace was that Jesus never abandoned him. And for me, the grace was, it was then that I realized that over all those years, as I was praying and praying about my father, I was actually forging a relationship with my heavenly father who will never leave me or never forsake me, and that was enough for me." Craig didn't get what he wanted, didn't get what he asked for. And in this case, it wasn't God that said, no, it was his father's brokenness saying no. But God used the no to help Craig grow in his faith and gain more compassion for people who are in pain. And the greater yes of God was that through all of his praying, without even knowing it, not even seeing it prayer by prayer, year by year, Craig was forming a close relationship with his heavenly father who is better than any earthly father can ever be, because he'll never leave us, and he'll never forsake us.

I know that sometimes sounds like a consolation prize, you didn't get what you want, but you got to the presence of God. But for people who experience it, no, it is a wonderful yes coming out of a no. And God's love is the most secure thing

April 25, 2021

in the world because it's never going to be taken away. And when you really experience it, you have indestructible hope knowing that nothing that happens can take away the thing that gives you your ultimate joy and hope, which is God's presence. God will always use it for good. Craig's earthly father said no, but his heavenly father said, yes. Because of all the promises God has ever made, they're always yes in Jesus. So where are you encountering a no, in life? Whether it's from God or just circumstances, grieve, discern, grow, look to the cross and through all of it, trust that God may meet you in a different way than he met Craig, but he'll meet you somehow and he will lead you to his greater yes.

Most of us can look back over our lives, and see times when God did not give us what we asked for. And we are so grateful He did not, because what we were asking for wouldn't have been the best thing for us. One of the biggest unanswered prayers in my life, one of the biggest noes, one of the biggest unanswered prayers in my life is, you guys. You are not what I prayed for, and that sounds terrible. So let me explain, as soon as you know, I've shared this with you before, for years I prayed and prayed, "Please God don't ever make me a pastor. Please and really God, whatever you do, really don't make me a senior pastor. Whatever you do dear God, please no, not that. In Jesus name, amen." You all are one of God's biggest noes in my life, and simultaneously one of his greatest yeses, because I love you. And being one of your pastors is such a gift for me, and it is just the privilege of my life.

God knew what I really wanted, even more than I knew what I wanted. And so in love, he said, "No Scott, I am not going to give you what you want, I am going to give you better." So when you encounter a no, trust that though it may take time to see, behind that no is God's greater yes and someday, you will be able to say, in the wonderful words of that great American poet, Garth Brooks, "Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers." So Jesus, thank you for unanswered prayers. Thank you, you love us enough to say, no. And so Lord I ask that you, as we encounter those noes Lord, ask that you would please help us to trust you and continue to follow you, knowing that you are always working for good, and there's a greater, yes coming. We ask this in your name Jesus, amen.

Discussion Questions: Read all of 1 Chronicles 28. For more background read 2 Samuel 7.

Opening Question:

- Icebreaker: What movie or music are you a little bit embarrassed to admit that you like?
- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions - Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions:

- How Does David respond when God tells him he cannot build the Temple? Why do you think David responded the way he did?
- How do you respond when you encounter a "no" in your life to something you wanted to do?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?