

God Promises to Hear and Forgive

After Jayden ended the call, he swatted away the uncomfortable feeling. But it flitted back again and landed in his heart.

Jayden had just hung up from talking to his “whole” brother, Martell. The two brothers, the only two boys of their mother, were close. The introduction of Lemarcus, their father’s other son, into their lives had been unsettling for Jayden.

Lemarcus had discovered who his father was about one and a half years ago. From the beginning, Martell had been welcoming. Jayden had not. It seemed to Jayden that he was losing some of Martell’s love, though Martell assured him he was not. Still, Jayden had subtly begun a campaign to disparage his half-brother. Doesn’t he have a criminal record? So, he’s a Christian now?

To Jayden’s last question, Martell had been quick and stern with his response. “Aren’t you? Where is your love?” Where indeed? Of course, Martell was right. Jayden didn’t want to stay in this place of insecurity, criticism, and dislike for Lemarcus.

“You don’t have to hold on to these feelings and actions,” Martell told Jayden. “You can repent. Be honest with yourself, and be honest with God.”

So, Jayden dropped his head and his guard against his brother and humbly went to the Lord. “I’m sorry, Lord,” Jayden prayed. “Please forgive me for ugliness toward Lemarcus, and help me to love him.”

1. *What does it mean to be truly humble?*

2. *Can you think of an instance where repentance changed your behavior?*

3. *How can we be sure that God accepts our repentance and forgives our sins?*

The Lord Promises Relationship

2 Chronicles 7:12-16, KJV

12 And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice.

13 If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people;

14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

15 Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.

16 For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.

2 Chronicles 7:12-16, NIV

¹²The LORD appeared to him at night and said:

“I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.

¹³“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, ¹⁴if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

¹⁵Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

¹⁶I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.”

After Solomon finished constructing the Lord’s temple in Jerusalem, he assembled the Israelites and prayed for a special blessing from God. The king asked that God’s presence would reside in the temple and He would always keep a covenant relationship with His people. Fire fell from heaven immediately after Solomon’s prayer

(2 Chron. 7:1), showing God had heard his request, but several days passed before He fully answered Solomon.

The Lord assured Solomon that He had “chosen” the temple as the place for people to make sacrifices to Him (vs. 12). According to the law, sacrifice was central for safely having a relationship with a holy God, whether for covering sin, establishing vows, or simply expressing love and gratitude. The sacrifices meant the Lord wants to personally interact with those who seek Him.

When God made a covenant with Israel, He promised that if the nation faithfully depended on Him alone, He would provide for its physical needs as a symbol of spiritual blessing (Lev. 26:3-10). Therefore, when those whom He called “my people” tried to depend on someone or something else, their land would suffer (2 Chron. 7:14). Yet we see in verse 14 that this was not meant to be a punishment for its own sake, but rather to remind the people of their dependence on Him for provision.

Every one of God’s instructions for humble repentance was for restoring the people’s relationship with Him. The Hebrew term for “humble themselves,” for example, carries the idea of surrendering to their God. The term for “turn” means “turning back” to their former relationship.

The Lord then assured Solomon of this covenant relationship again, explaining how He would be present in the temple. Not only would His “eyes” and “ears” be open to worshipers, but His Name and “heart” would be there (vss. 15-16). The Lord is not only willing to receive the prayers of His people—He would act on them.

4. *What did the Lord say was the purpose of the temple?*

5. *What did God promise He would do when the people repented?*

6. *What did the Lord instruct His people to do for the land to be healed?*

7. *What three things did the Lord say would “be there” in His temple?*

Blessings and Judgment

2 Chronicles 7:17-22, KJV

17 And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments;

18 Then will I stablish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel.

19 But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them;

20 Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations.

21 And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house?

22 And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD the LORD of their fathers, which

2 Chronicles 7:17-22, NIV

¹⁷“As for you, if you walk before me faithfully as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws, ¹⁸I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel.’

¹⁹“But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, ²⁰then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.

²¹This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and say, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?’ ²²People will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other the gods, worshiping and

brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

...serving them—that is why he brought all this disaster on them.”

Just as the Lord’s first covenant promised Israel that a good spiritual relationship with Him would bring blessings on the land, He promised if Solomon was faithful, he would have a long rule, and his family line would continue as kings. Then the Lord gave the people a strict warning: if they served other gods, He would ruin them altogether. He clearly promised that He would accept His people’s repentance when His punishments on the land turned their hearts back to Him. Yet if their repentance wasn’t genuine—or wouldn’t happen at all—the Lord would uproot the people from the land He promised to them. Further, the temple with His “Name”—meaning His character and reputation—would then be a “byword”—a horrific example of the Lord’s fearsome judgment on those unfaithful to Him (vs. 20). The “heap of rubble” (vs. 21) would symbolize the relationship the people had shattered.

The people’s shameful reputation, however, would not extend to the Lord Himself. Those who saw the destroyed temple would instead remember the God’s faithfulness, that He “brought them out of Egypt” (vs. 22). So, their disdain would be for the ones who completely ignored the Lord’s goodness to them and loved useless idols instead.

8. *What did the Lord promise to Solomon in particular?*

9. *What is the difference between Israel’s attitude toward the Lord in vss. 13-14 versus vs. 19?*

10. *What did the Lord say that the temple would become after the Lord rejected it?*

11. *What would people think about the Lord when they saw the ruined temple?*

Seize the Treasure

If someone says, “Don’t think about a pink elephant,” what’s the first picture that pops into your head? Chances are good that it’s a pink elephant. Sometimes, when we are stuck in a pattern of sin, turning away from that sin feels like thinking about pink elephants—the more you try to forget it, the stronger it pulls at you.

Thankfully, God offers us an escape plan: in 2 Chronicles 2:13-14, it’s important to note that the Israelites weren’t just told, “Stop sinning!” God also commanded them to dive into prayer and to actively “seek” a relationship with Him. He’s not simply taking something away from them; He’s offering something better.

Repentance may be a difficult process. Writer Rosaria Butterfield says that the first few months of giving up her old, sinful lifestyle felt more like a “trainwreck” than a transformation! Yet even if repentance can be painful, those who know God’s goodness will find out that it’s joyful, too. In Matthew 13:44, Jesus tells of a man who found treasure hidden in a field. He then sold everything he had in order to buy that field. You might picture the man with tears in his eyes as he sells off his prized family heirlooms. But Jesus shows us a different picture—the man does this because of joy. He knows the worth of what he’s discovered and will happily do whatever it takes to get it.

When you feel tempted, ask Him to show you His power and beauty in new ways. Then ask Him to show you what you need to do to pursue Him instead of your sin, and for the strength to do it. Only then can we joyfully toss our sins aside for the sake of the greatest treasure.

12. *What are some of the benefits of genuine repentance?*

13. *What are some of the consequences of insincere repentance?*

14. *What are some practical ways that we can “seek God’s face”?*

Temples of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit lives inside of each Christian! This means that our bodies are each a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). We—through Jesus' grace—must strive to be holy in everything we do, say, and think!

► *Take a few moments to think deeply about an area of your life where you've been falling short of God's commands. Write out a prayer to ask for His forgiveness and for help to turn away from this sin. Finally, create an action plan for pursuing God instead.*

► *What I Need to Turn From:*

► *My Prayer:*

► *How I'll Seek God's Face Instead:*

KEY VERSE

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. —2 Chronicles 7:14, KJV

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. —2 Chronicles 7:14, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of January 2 through January 8

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 43:14-28—God's Blessing, Israel's Unfaithfulness.
- Tues.** Ezekiel 37:1-14—Dry Bones Shall Live.
- Wed.** Ezekiel 37:15-28—Israel Will Be God's People.
- Thurs.** Hosea 11—God's Compassion.
- Fri.** 2 Thessalonians 2:3-15—Stand Firm in the Spirit.
- Sat.** 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5, 13-17—The Lord Is a Faithful Protector.
- Sun.** Isaiah 43:1-13—God's Chosen Witnesses.