

**Introduction:**

- A. Illus.: Being jealous of other churches is an occupational hazard for pastors. It's usually unhealthy and sinful. But I heard about a church a long time ago whose ministry to this day is the one I think I'm most jealous of. In 1972 Jim Cymbala's father-in-law coaxed him to become the pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle—about 15 people meeting in “a shabby two-story building in the middle of a downtown block.” Things were terrible. Jim's health began to break and he lost almost all hope. One Sunday night he just stopped preaching and sobbed out of discouragement.

His family sent him to Florida to rest but while others relaxed he cried out to God. He writes, *“Then quietly but forcefully, in words heard not with my ear but deep within my spirit, I sensed God speaking: If you and your wife will lead my people to pray and call upon my name you will never lack for something fresh to preach. I will supply all the money that's needed..., and you will never have a building large enough to contain the crowds I will send in response.”* He returned to Brooklyn and on the next Sunday told his people, *“From this day on, the prayer meeting will be the barometer of our church. What happens on Tuesday night will be the gauge by which we will judge success or failure because that will be the measure by which God blesses us.”* [Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, pp.25-27]

To this day, the Tuesday night prayer meeting at the huge Brooklyn Tabernacle is the center of their life. You have to stand in line to get in... to a prayer meeting! God has done so many life-changing things there. The stories are amazing. That's the church I'm most jealous of.

- B. Turn to **2 Chron. 6**. After Solomon built the temple for the Lord in Jerusalem, and *“the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God,”* Solomon led his nation in prayer. **His prayer in 2 Chron 6:14-42 is about praying.** He speaks of praying 19 times. The temple was built as a focus the prayers of God's people. In fact, God said in **Is 56:7**, *“My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”*

Jesus repeated that when he drove the moneychangers out of the court of the Gentiles in the temple. **Nothing must stand in the way of prayer.**

- C. The measure of our church life is our prayer, privately and together. And there is no more wonderful expression of God’s love for us than that he *hears* when we pray. Ten times in these verses Solomon begs God, “*Hear... hear from heaven.*” **Our prayer together is the gauge of our success or failure as a congregation because prayer lays hold of God’s blessing.**

The cornerstone of this whole prayer is v.14, “LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.” If this were not true we could not pray as Solomon does. If this were not true, Jesus Christ would not have come nor died for us. But it *is* true! And all our prayers depend on it.

**I. WE PRAY BECAUSE OF THE LORD’S UNIQUE COVENANT OF LOVE WITH US, HIS PEOPLE (6:14-21)**

- A. What sets our God—the true and living God—apart from every other god of men’s imaginations is that the LORD makes and keeps his sacred vow—his covenant—to love his servants. That covenant is like a treasure chest holding all his promises. We pray in order to link our needs and opportunities to God’s covenant promises. “*O God, you have promised to love us and you always keep your promises, so hear our prayer!*” **Faith gets its footing by standing on the promises of God**—on his covenant with us, his vow of love.
- B. Because of his covenant of love God condescends to dwell among us. Vv.18-19... God has always shown his love for us by being among us. First, in the tabernacle in the wilderness, then the temple in Jerusalem. Then in his own Son, Jesus Christ, who dwelt among us. And now by the Holy Spirit how is in us. That’s why Paul writes to us in **Phil 4:5-7**, “*The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition,*

*with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

- C. But there is a caveat: “*you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.*” Our side of the covenant with God is wholehearted obedience. That’s why the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments were kept in the Ark of the Covenant at the heart of the temple. It is why Jesus said to his disciples, “*If you love me, keep my commands.*” **We don’t obey to prove our love. We obey in order to love.** When we *obey* God we change within to become lovers of God.

But, of course, there’s the rub. What believer do you know who “*continues wholeheartedly in God’s way*”? We all sin. So what is the first thing Solomon prays for? **V.21**, “*Hear the supplications of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive.*” I’m so thankful that God’s covenant of love welcomes our repentance and offers us forgiveness.

## **II. WE PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS LEST WE FORFEIT OUR COVENANT WITH THE LORD (6:21-31; 36-39)**

- A. Solomon knew God’s people would not continue wholeheartedly in God’s way. He knew, right from the get-go, that they would be disobedient. Talk about low expectations! What’s more, he knew there would be dire consequences when they rebelled against God. It is the main thing he prays about. Look at **v.24, 26, 28, 36-39...**

That very thing had happened and the Chronicler wrote to the remnant of Israel whom God had brought home. I imagine them hearing this and hanging their heads. “Been there. Done that.” We know the feeling, too, don’t we?

- B. God could not have a covenant of love with us were it not for his mercy. We are all “prone to leave the God I love.” **But repentance is our way home.** The Hebrew word means *turn*. And when we turn we’re met by the mercy of the Lord. Repentance, of course, doesn’t erase our sin nor earn God’s forgiveness. It simply stops the slide.

- C. Repentance is not only a matter of turning from our sin. We also return to honoring God. V.28, “...when they pray toward this place **and give praise to your name and turn from their sin...**” Repentant people get their minds back on God’s love and power. That’s why our worship together is so important, especially for those who are in the process of repenting—*turning*—from their sin. To see our sin is heartbreaking but Nehemiah told these people to stop their weeping “*for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*”  
**Repentance turns to health when we praise God.**
- D. God does *more* than forgive when we repent. V.27... God will “teach us the right way to live” (so this doesn’t happen again) “**and send rain on the land,**” a beautiful metaphor for the times of refreshing and nourishment that God gives us. V.39 prays, “*Hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause.*” Repentance brings God back to our corner; he is back on our side.
- E. Jesus Christ is our guarantor of God’s mercy. Heb. 4:16 says, “*Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*”
- F. Do you need this word today? Does our church? Part of our prayer, privately and together, is searching our heart and turning from our sin to God’s mercy through Jesus.

There are two requests in this prayer that I don’t have time to develop. But I want you to see them because they are important parts of corporate prayer. **Vv.22-23...**

### **III. WE PRAY THAT GOD WILL POLICE OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (6:22-23)**

Sin hides among us sometimes. Our prayers ask God to bring the truth to light so that we are not weakened by guilty people lurking unseen among us. We cannot be a holy people if the innocent among us are wronged. So we pray that God acts as Judge to assure justice among us.

Near the end of the prayer, Solomon prays for the days when Israel would be threatened: **vv.34-35...**

#### IV. WE PRAY THAT GOD WILL “UPHOLD OUR CAUSE” WHEN ENEMIES THREATEN US (6:34-35)

Later in 2 Chron. we will see a couple remarkable stories of how God did just that when Israel cried out to him. When our life as a church is threatened we pray for God to defend us.

I want to focus now on one other part of this prayer: **vv.32-33...**

#### V. WE PRAY THAT OUTSIDERS WILL SEEK THE LORD BECAUSE THEY SEE GOD’S GREAT NAME AMONG US (6:32-33)

A. Why would a foreigner come from a distant land to Jerusalem? How would they even know about God’s great name, mighty hand and outstretched arm? Remember the theme of this prayer in **v.14**: **“you who keep your covenant of love with your servants.”** That is what draws people to pray to our God. They see who God is—his great Name—by looking into our life together with him.

B. But remember, this is a prayer. They only see God’s greatness in us because we pray that that they will. Our elders, like many of you, want our church to be more effective in reaching lost people around us for Jesus. This next weekend we’re meeting together to pray and think through how we can do that more effectively. I don’t know if the Lord will have some specific tasks for us to tackle but I know three things for sure:

1. We influence others most when they see God’s covenant love at work in our lives, personally and as a church. The Lord’s love brings us blessings only God’s people have—righteousness, peace, loving unity, rest in the Lord’s love and power. We experience changed lives, marriages restored, strength given in terrible suffering, and hope that can say, “To die is gain.” God’s blessings on us are the most compelling reason for others to believe in him. **They see God’s “great name and mighty hand” displayed in his love for us.**
2. The second thing I know for sure about effective outreach is this: we must pray that outsiders will see and be drawn to the life we have in Christ. That’s what Solomon was praying for. **It doesn’t happen if we**

**don't pray that it will.** They won't be moved by our God-blessed lives alone. But when we pray that Christ's life in us would get the attention of those far from God, God answers that prayer. He makes us the poster children of his grace. In Acts 4, the church under pressure prayed, "*Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*"

3. Some outsiders, seeing God's love at work in us, will want to pray themselves. We pray with Solomon, "*when they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you.*" Tell others that you're praying for them. Tell them that they can pray and that God loves them and will hear. Ask God to answer their prayers.

Solomon saw this work when the Queen of Sheba came to him. She praised God for his love for Israel. Likewise in Acts 8 an Ethiopian traveled to Jerusalem to worship God and through a miracle, an answer to prayer, he met Christ.

- C. God says in Isaiah, and Jesus repeats in the gospels, "***My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.***" We aren't *in* God's house this morning. We are God's house, and nothing is more central to our mission as Christians than prayer. Prayer alone and especially *together*, in the same place at the same time, draws us into the mercy of God, lays hold of the righteousness of God, fortifies us with the power of God, brings a spotlight to the blessings of God among us, so that people far away from the Lord see God's great name and come to pray themselves.

## Conclusion

We have this idea that if we're going to amount to anything as a church we have to do something big—have some special program or something. But **the first and most important thing is**

**that God do something, and God acts when we pray.** Then he opens doors for all kinds of wonderful things to happen.

Perhaps you are satisfied with the church as it is, and we are surely a God-blessed congregation. Perhaps this is all you want. But as I said a couple weeks ago, **I think we are too easily satisfied.** Please, for Jesus' sake and for the sake of our church and community, resolve to pray together for the Lord's name to be made great among us. Illus.: Jim Cymbala writes,

During countless Tuesday night prayer meetings I find myself encircled by the sacred sounds of prayer and intercession filling the church, spilling into the vestibule, and overflowing from every heart present. As the meeting edges to a close, I overhear mothers petitioning for wayward children... men asking God to please help them find employment.... others giving thanks for recent answers to prayer... tearful voices here and there. I can't help but think, *This is as close to heaven as I will ever get in this life. I don't want to leave here. If I were invited to the White House to meet some dignitary it would never bring the kind of peace and deep joy I sense here in the presence of people calling on the Lord.* [p.53]

I'm jealous.