

*Then King David said to the whole assembly: “My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the LORD God. <sup>2</sup> With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God—gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble—all of these in large quantities. ... David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying,*

*“Praise be to you, O LORD,  
God of our father Israel,  
from everlasting to everlasting.*

*<sup>11</sup> Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power  
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,  
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.*

*Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom;  
you are exalted as head over all.*

*<sup>12</sup> Wealth and honor come from you;  
you are the ruler of all things.  
In your hands are strength and power  
to exalt and give strength to all.*

*<sup>13</sup> Now, our God, we give you thanks,  
and praise your glorious name.*

*<sup>14</sup> “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. <sup>15</sup> We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. <sup>16</sup> O LORD our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you. <sup>17</sup> I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. <sup>18</sup> O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you. (1 Chronicles 29:1, 2, 10–18)*

### **May God Keep our Hearts Loyal**

Have you ever gotten a loyalty reward? You know what that is, right? It’s a discount you get when you’re a return customer. There are all kinds of programs, from getting your 8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> purchase free to getting a discount on a new car. The idea, of course, is that the merchant wants you to keep coming back so he or she rewards your loyalty. What is loyalty? In the word of God that we have before us today, King David speaks of keeping our hearts loyal. What does that mean? Is it the same thing we mean when we say that a dog is loyal or soldiers are loyal or friends are loyal? In all those cases, we mean that someone stands by someone else, even when it’s tough. That probably is what King David had in mind. But the Hebrew expression that he uses here literally means to have your heart positioned toward God. If our heart is firmly fixed in God’s direction, then we are going to stand with him in all the challenges of this life. So King David spoke of a loyal heart. But he didn’t pledge that he or his people would always be loyal. He didn’t call on Christians of every age to commit themselves to being loyal. King David asked God to keep the hearts of his people loyal to him. We are also a part of God’s people. What David prayed for is something that each of us needs: hearts that are firmly fixed toward God. My friends, **may God keep our hearts loyal.**

#### **I.**

Loyalty in friends and family and coworkers is something we value. God values true Christian loyalty. That’s why he gives it. While it shows itself in what we do and say, it begins in our hearts and in our attitudes. **May God keep our hearts loyal. May he give us integrity in our faith.**

The words we're considering this morning are part of a prayer that King David offered near the end of his life. David dreamed of building a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. For five hundred years, God's worship facility had been a very elaborate tent, called the tabernacle. King David wanted to build a real edifice for God and for his people to worship him in. But God told him that he was not the man to do that. David was a warrior king. God wanted a man of peace to build his temple. So he promised David that his son, Solomon, would build the house of God. But God did allow David to make plans. Throughout his reign, David collected gold and silver and precious stones and rich building materials so that when the time came, Solomon would have everything he needed to build a house that was truly worthy of the God of Israel. This prayer came when David publicly commissioned Solomon to do that work. He made him king over Israel, called him to build the temple and then retired from public life.

David prayed, **"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand."** When you tally up all that David and the people of Israel gave to build the temple, it is an extraordinary amount. In today's money, it would total tens of millions of dollars. They gave almost 200 tons of gold. But David's greatest joy was not the richness of the gifts. He knew that God prospers his people and all that we give to him really comes from him. But David said, **"I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you."**

King David understood that when it comes to giving – indeed when it comes to serving our Lord in any way – the attitude of our heart is more important than the bottom line. God tests the heart. What does that mean? The word "heart" in the Old Testament means more than it does to you and me. We tend to think of it as the seat of our emotions, but in the Bible, the heart is the entire inner person. It's our intellect and our emotions and our will. God tests the heart. He looks beyond actions and appearances because God knows that we human beings are natural born actors. How many times in your life have you had trouble figuring out what a person was thinking or feeling? When I have people in my office for pastoral counsel and advice, sometimes I have to ask them what they're thinking or feeling because it isn't obvious from body language or even from their words. Sometimes people lie. They tell you they aren't upset when they are. They tell you that everything is OK when it's really a disaster. Unless we get some kind of clue from something they do or say, we can't really know for sure what's going on inside them.

But God tests the heart. He knows why we do what we do. Why did you come to church today? Because your parents made you? Because you don't want to fight with your spouse? Because it's a habit that you're in? Because you figure it will earn you some good will with God? None of those are good reasons to come here. We're supposed to come here because we long to hear about Jesus, because we want to have our sins forgiven and to know that God loves us. You know what? I can't tell from up here who came for the right reasons and who came for the wrong ones. But God tests the heart. He looks deep inside us and he knows what we're thinking and feeling, what we're planning and hoping for and why we do all that we do.

David says that God is pleased with integrity. The Hebrew word translated as "integrity" comes from a word that means to be straight. When God examines our hearts, he's looking for straightness. He's looking for us to live without guile or deception. He's looking for a life that flows directly from our faith in Christ. Now, is it possible for us to give that to him? No, not perfectly. And the way we were born, not at all. We were born as sinners and rebels. But when we were baptized, when we heard the good news about Jesus and God gave us faith, he changed us. Now, we have a New Man in our hearts. Now we have Christ living in us and inspiring us to live for God. We do have to grow in our Christian lives every single day. And there is always that Old Man in there and he sticks his fingers in everything that we do and he corrupts it all. But the New Man is there. And when he acts, God is pleased. Every day that we live in this world, God is working through the gospel to grow our faith so that we bring forth fruits in our lives. And those fruits aren't just the offering we bring. There're the way we treat our spouse. There're the way we raise our children. There're the way we work and play and even the joy that we find in all God's blessings here. Knowing Christ makes all that different than those same things would be for an unbeliever. Now, you can't always see the difference from the outside. But because God planted faith and the New Man in our hearts, we are different inside. And God rejoices when our words and actions and attitudes are "straight" from our faith.

He rejoices even though our efforts can never be perfect on this side of heaven. It's kind of like when the little kids sing in church. It thrills my heart even though it's imperfect. They can't all carry a tune. And sometimes, one or two of them is messing around or not paying attention. But we still rejoice to hear their songs of faith. God does, too. And because those songs come from faith, God chooses to see and hear them as if Jesus himself stood up here and sang them. He sees them as perfect. And he does the same for you and me, with every straight thing that comes straight from our faith: when we parent, when we work, when we pray, when we relax with our families, when we show kindness and love to our spouses. All those fruits of faith touch God's heart. God is the one who gives and blesses our faith so that those straight things come out!

## II.

That is true in every way that we serve the Lord. But we don't want to ignore the thing God points to in this reading: our offerings. The ability to bring a rich gift to God comes from the new heart he has given us.

**May the Lord keep our hearts loyal. May he make us generous in our giving.**

King David says, **"Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand."** He actually says it twice. All that we have to give, God gave us first. Do we always recognize that truth? We have a congregation of people who get up in the morning, get their kids to school, put in a full day's work someplace and then swing back and pick those kids up and help them with homework and cart them to practices and music lessons, get them dinner and still manage to find time for personal guidance and conversation. God has given us so much talent and energy that it might seem like we earned our money. But that's not a mature spiritual attitude. All our ability to work comes from God. And God hides himself in the world we live in, in the economy and our education system and our jobs and he cares for us day and night. All we have really does come from him.

David says, **"We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope."** The way we were born, when God looks at us, he sees foreigners and strangers. Why? Because of sin. Our culture tells us that we're all basically good people. But God's Word tells us we were born sinful. Unless God intervened in our lives, we would live out our days without a connection to him, frustrated and spiritually alone. We would have no real hope of eternal life. Now, we might try to hide that fact from ourselves. We might party and work hard and pursue money and popularity and fame. And we might achieve all those things here. But without Christ, none of it would do us any good. We would always be missing the most important part of our lives here. We would be doomed to eternal hell.

So God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to fill that need in our hearts. The Son of God entered the womb of the Virgin Mary and took on human flesh. He was born in Bethlehem and he died outside Jerusalem. During the years of his life, he gave his heart totally to the Lord. His Father examined his heart and found perfect integrity. Jesus lived that life in our place. His straightness takes the place of our sin. Then Jesus died on the cross to pay for all that's wrong with our lives, for that Old Man who lives in rebellion against God, for that sin that makes us strangers and ruins our lives here. Jesus died and he paid for everything that we are guilty of, that the whole world is guilty of. Then he rose and God declared that we are forgiven. He rose and God declared that all the sin of all the world is paid for.

Then Jesus came to each of us personally through the gospel. He reached into our hearts and he gave us faith. He planted that New Man who wants to live for him. He personally moved into our hearts to teach us the new life we're called to live. But first and foremost, he planted trust in our hearts. We know that we are forgiven for Jesus' sake. We have that comfort every time the Old Man wins. We are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb.

That faith makes us new people. That Savior dwelling in us fills us with a desire to serve our Lord. One way that we serve is to be generous with God. God has given you time. Give a generous portion back to him. God has given you a standard of living. It may be higher than mine. It may be lower. But within that standard of living, within the income he has given you, he calls you to be generous with him. And he gives you the faith that wants to do it. It's not about me browbeating you into a bigger offering. It's about you rejoicing in the love of Christ and willingly giving an offering of love back to him.

God makes us different than we were before we knew him. God turns our hearts to him and he makes us loyal. The test of loyalty is how we live here, where every day of our lives the world tells us that God doesn't matter. Live for Christ. Feed your faith so that your Christian life is not just going through the motions, but honestly reflects your trust in your Savior. And dedicate all that you are to him. Amen.