

My paternal grandmother lived in the house with my father's oldest sister. Accordingly, that was "the house." That was the house where the family dinners were eaten; where the family assembled when someone arrived from out of town; where we could be in the presence of the matriarch of the family. As such, delightful memories are associated with and meaningful interactions occurred in the house for family, and for friends and neighbors. No matter who you were or from where you came, you were welcomed, you would feel at home and would feel at peace in the house.

David, reflecting on the house of God, acknowledged how lovely it was and how he deeply longed to be present. David's heart and flesh cried out for the living God. Although he acknowledged God as the Lord of hosts – that is, the commander and chief of God's army – he also experienced God's loving and caring side that generated the delightful memories of God's presence. Memories including birds making nests and raising their young there.

One can imagine, if birds can find a home in God's house, anyone can find a home in God's house. Because of God's love and God's care for us, there is peace in God's presence. What are your memories of God's house? Are they delightful? Are they meaningful? I do understand that some do not have the best memories of God's house because of the people who were there. I encourage you to release the people memories and restore the delightful and meaningful memories of God's presence. If birds can make a home and raise their young in God's house, you can find a home and raise your children there.

HOW CAN I SAY, "NO?"
Isaiah 6:1-8

April 8, 2023

Several years ago, one of my mentors invited me to accompany him to a denominational resource conference in Nashville. I was initially reluctant to attend as I internally considered the numerous items on my calendar and the limited time to accomplish them. However, as I looked outward to consider what he poured in to me and the potential blessings I would receive from my time with him and my participation in the conference, I asked myself, "How can I say, 'No?'" I went to the conference and was tremendously blessed.

Isaiah experienced an amazing encounter in the presence of God. In that encounter, all of his human faults and frailties quickly overwhelmed him as he stood in the presence of the Lord of hosts. After the seraphim touched his lips with the hot coal, purging his guilt and sin, God asked, "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" I am sure Isaiah said to himself, "How can I say, 'No?'" He quickly raised his hands and shouted, "Here am I. Send me!"

As we have had amazing encounters with God, we similarly ask, "How can I say, 'No?'" when the invitation is extended to join God in Kingdom work. As we consider every battle that God has won for us, may we quickly raise our hands and shout, "Here am I. Send me!" If you have not had an amazing encounter with God, simply ask and God will faithfully comply.



You prepare a table before presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over

THE LORD OF HOSTS
(JEHOVAH SABAOTH)

WE DINE WHILE OUR ENEMIES WATCH
Psalm 23:5

April 2, 2023

When I coached basketball in an elementary school, I discovered that the 6th grade students were teasing and taunting the 5th grade students regarding their playing skills. Of course, the older students were better players. After all, they were older, more mature and more experienced. The older students thought their skill level gave them leverage, however, I was the coach. At the game the next Saturday, they were surprised and upset that I had them sit on the bench while the younger players played. Imagine their dismay that although they wanted to play, they were forced to sit on the bench and watch the younger players play, and they were unable to do anything about it.

David is no doubt reflecting on a time when a wolf came to take one of his sheep for lunch. David had provided a luscious green pasture for his sheep to eat and lie down, and refreshing, still waters for them to drink. As the wolf approached, David stood firm between the wolf and his sheep with his rod in his hand. The wolf, admitting defeat, was forced to stand there and watch the sheep calmly eat, drink and rest while unable to do anything about it.

God our shepherd is our Lord of hosts – that is, the commander and chief of God's army. As such, the Lord of hosts will turn it around for us. As wolves come to attack us, God prepares a table [a bountiful banquet] before us in the presence of [over against] the wolves. Our shepherd is standing between us and the wolves, rod in hand, taunting the wolves. Although the wolves come to eat us, they are forced to watch us eat. Even more, our shepherd will anoint [to be fat, satisfied] our heads with oil and continue to nurture us until our cups run over [satisfaction], and the wolves cannot do anything about it.

WORDS CAN INFLICT DEEP WOUNDS
1 Samuel 1:9-20

April 3, 2023

After having been disciplined for initiating a physical fight with someone after they had offended us with their words, many of us had to endure further insult by hearing the person who disciplined us say, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” The phrase asserts that words do not hurt, especially as compared to sticks and stones. While we had no power to challenge that phrase at the time, yet we understood that words do have power and the power of words have a way of inflicting deep wounds.

Hannah was in deep sorrow because she was not able to become pregnant and bless her husband with children. Adding to her sorrow was the continual taunts from her husband’s other wife, Peninnah. Her taunts were intentional and meant to irritate and inflict deep wounds as she had given birth to several children. As Hannah prayed, she appealed to God as the Lord of hosts for comfort in her distress and for her to have a son, vowing that she would give him back. God heard Hannah, blessed her with a son named Samuel and he would be one of Israel’s most significant prophets.

Yes, words have power and have a way of inflicting deep wounds. What a joy to know that God stands in between us and our mental/emotional enemies just as God stands between us and our physical enemies. Because God is our Lord of hosts, those who inflict the mental/emotional pain on us will have to stand back and watch God significantly bless us.

SUCCESS WITH THE LORD OF HOSTS
1 Samuel 17:38-51

April 4, 2023

Several years ago, we sought to have a particular ministry in one of our properties. To facilitate the use, we needed the support of a city official who, unfortunately, refused to give it. Recognizing that I had no power to force him to support us, I said, “God is going to bless us to do this without you.” I prayed and God sent me to a city department where I spoke with a city employee (who had much less authority) and she was able to find a clause in the city ordinance that permitted us to start the ministry without needing the support of the official. He came in the name of his position, however, our success came because we came in the name of the Lord of hosts who was on our side.

David faced Goliath, who was the Philistines most celebrated warrior. David was only a youth and Goliath was a warrior since his youth. How could David expect to win against this nine-foot giant? David came in the name of the Lord of hosts. For David, the size of Goliath only meant he was too big to miss. With one stone, and the Lord of hosts (whose battle it was) on his side, David brought Goliath to the ground, beheaded him and Israel was victorious.

As you face your giant, shift your focus from how big, how strong, how successful, and/or how connected your giant may be to the Lord of hosts who is with you and fights the battle for you. Shift your focus to the commander of the Lord’s army who has never lost a battle, and who will force those who fight against you to stand back and watch you flourish in your success.

THE LORD OF HOSTS IS BIGGER
Psalms 46:1-7

April 5, 2023

In elementary school, as children are bullied by someone bigger than them, there is a common response that many resort to – they get their older siblings who are bigger than the bully to fight the bully for them. Since their sibling is bigger than the bully, they find the refuge and the strength to assist them in standing as their sibling fights and wins the battle for them.

In the face of circumstances that would cause others to fear and tremble, the psalmist declared, “Therefore, we will not fear...” How could the psalmist make such a declaration? Because his God was his refuge and strength. His God was an ever-present help. No matter how big the problem, including the shaking of the earth, the crumbling of the mountains and the roaring and foaming of the waters, the psalmist knew that his God was bigger than the problems and with God he could find the refuge and strength to be victorious.

Some proclaim, “God may not come when you want him, but he’s right on time,” which suggests that God is not always present. We, on the other hand, proclaim, “God is an ever-present help. Our God is right here.” We may not know when big, earth-shaking problems will enter our lives. However, we do know that our God is bigger than our problems. We also may not know from where mountain-crumbling problems will descend upon us. However, we know that we can go to our God, at any time, for refuge and strength.

HANDS RAISED AND HEART OPENED
Psalms 24:7-10

April 6, 2023

My mother was the eldest of 13 children. Some of them she helped raise, others she taught in school and others she rescued and guided through their life’s storms. Whenever she came onto the porch of my grandparent’s home, her siblings would scramble to give up their seats so she could sit. Their respect for her, in reverence of who she was and what she did for them, translated into them honoring her by standing up so she could sit down.

As the King of glory was coming into the city, the gatekeeper partially opened the gates and doors. The psalmist desiring more honor shouted, “Lift high the gates and open wide the doors for the King of glory to enter.” The gatekeeper asked, “Who is the King of glory?” The psalmist replied, “The LORD strong and mighty...” The gatekeeper, still not knowing the King, opened them a little more. The psalmist knowing even more honor was deserved shouted, “Lift high the gates and open wide the doors for the King of glory to enter.” The gatekeeper asked, “Who is the King of glory?” The psalmist replied, “The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory.” Now, knowing who was entering, the gates were raised high and the doors opened wide.

Do you know who the King of glory is? Do you know that he is the LORD strong and mighty in battle and deserving of our respect and honor? Have you submitted to him as your Lord of hosts, knowing who he is and what he has done for you? If you have, lift high your hands and open wide your heart for the King of glory, the Lord of hosts to enter in.