

What you're doing is less important than How

-My Mom has always been the queen of the inspirational newspaper clipping. A couple weeks ago, she sent me, my brother and our spouses a story written by Mike Kerrigan, an attorney from North Carolina. Mr. Kerrigan describes his ride on a shuttle bus from the Hertz rental car lot to the Denver airport. You know how you can come back from vacation with your head down in your phone, dreading every undone task calling your name? But Mike was surprised awake first by the music – A Groovy Kind of Love - then by the ‘festive bunting’ he say, then by the driver, Dave Moller’s, announcement that he had been piloting shuttle buses for Hertz for 45 years. The people applauded. Dave Moller told them humorous, comfortable-in-his-skin stories that spanned four decades. When they arrived at the airport, this driver jumped up from his driver’s seat and (as if he hadn’t done this over and over and over) moved suitcases to curbside with a joyful lightness of heart and foot. It got Mike Kerrigan thinking about daily work and its influence on those watching. He writes: ‘whatever a [person’s] vocation in life happens to be, *what* [they do] is scarcely more important than *how* [they do] it’ (emphasis mine).

-And *that*, it turns out, is the theme of the chapters from God’s redemptive story that we open today as we come to Solomon, son of David and Bathsheba, and his vocation to build the Lord’s Temple in Jerusalem.

I’m going to share a longer-than-usual selection of verses from 1 Kings chapters 5 – 8. And I invite you to consider both *what* Solomon has been called to build, and *how* he has been called to build it.

The Message: 5 ¹⁻⁴ Hiram king of Tyre (in present day Lebanon) sent ambassadors to Solomon when he heard that Solomon had been crowned king in David’s place. Hiram had loved David his whole life. Solomon responded, saying, “You know that David my father was not able to build a temple in honor of God because of the wars he had to fight on all sides, until God finally put them down. But now God has provided peace all around—no one against us, nothing at odds with us.

⁵⁻⁶ “Now here is what I want to do: Build a temple in honor of God, *my* God, following the promise that God gave to David my father...(that his son would build the Temple). And here is how you can help: Give orders for cedars to be cut from the Lebanon forest; my loggers will work alongside yours and I’ll pay your men whatever wage you set....”

¹⁰⁻¹² In this way Hiram (king of Tyre/Lebanon) supplied all the cedar and cypress timber that Solomon wanted. In his turn, Solomon gave Hiram 125,000 bushels of wheat and 115,000 gallons of virgin olive oil. He did this every year. [here note the perfect irony of the people of Lebanon working collaboratively to build Solomon’s Temple in Israel]

¹³⁻¹⁸ King Solomon raised a workforce of thirty thousand men from all over Israel. He sent them in shifts of ten thousand each month to the Lebanon forest.... Solomon also had seventy thousand unskilled workers and another eighty thousand stonecutters up in the hills—plus

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thirty-three hundred foremen managing the project Following the king’s orders, they quarried huge blocks of the best stone—... for the foundation of The Temple....

6 ¹⁻⁶ ... The Temple that King Solomon built to God was ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, and forty-five feet high.... ⁸⁻¹⁰ ... Solomon built and completed The Temple, finishing it off with roof beams and planks of cedar.

¹¹⁻¹³ The word of God came to Solomon saying, “**About this Temple you are building—what’s important is that you *live the way I’ve set out for you* and *do* what I tell you, following my instructions carefully and obediently. Then **I’ll complete in you the promise I made to David** your father. **I’ll personally take up my residence among the Israelites—I won’t desert my people Israel**”....**

¹⁹⁻²² The Inner Sanctuary within The Temple was for housing the Ark of the Covenant.... This Inner Sanctuary was a cube, thirty feet each way, all plated with gold. The Altar of cedar was also gold-plated. Everywhere you looked there was pure gold—walls, ceiling, floor, and Altar. Dazzling! ²³⁻²⁸ Then he made two cherubim, gigantic angel-like figures, from olivewood. Each was fifteen feet tall.... ²⁹⁻³⁰ He then carved engravings of cherubim, palm trees, and flower blossoms on all the walls of both the Inner and the Main Sanctuary.... ³⁷⁻³⁸ ... It took Solomon seven years to build it.

8 ¹⁻² Bringing all this to a climax, King Solomon called in the leaders of Israel... to bring up the Ark of the Covenant of God from ... the City of David....

²²⁻²⁵ Before the entire congregation of Israel, Solomon took a position before the Altar, spread his hands out before heaven, and prayed,

O God, God of Israel, there is no God like you ... who unswervingly keeps covenant with his servants and relentlessly loves them as they sincerely live in obedience to your way....

NRSV: 27 “Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven ... cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!...³⁰ Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; hear and forgive.../ ⁴¹⁻
⁴³ And don’t forget the foreigner who is not a member of your people Israel but has come ...because of your reputation. ...Listen from your home in heaven. (and) Honor the prayers of the foreigner so that people all over the world will know who you are and what you’re like and will live in reverent obedience before you, just as your own people Israel do....

This is the Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.* Let’s pray: O, Lord what a great work it is that you have called us to. Show us the way, even as we strike out to build your kingdom, to be faithfully yours in the building. Amen.

-OK so a couple things to notice:

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First. What is the great work of Solomon's life and calling? His great end (or purpose)? To ascend to the throne of David means it is his vocation to build a Temple for the Lord. To steward the power of his reign to build something beautiful, to bring his very best. Did you hear the scope of the endeavor? Could you feel the scale and grandeur of it - the international partnership, the thousands of artisans and foremen, the burden of care to bring the finest materials and artistry to bear in building something worthy of God?

It may be worth pausing to ask: what is the work you have been called to? The vocation that demands your very best?

Second. Did you notice what Solomon prays in dedicating the Temple? He prays that the Lord God might hear the prayers of God's people Israel. That God might meet them here. That when they pray toward this House, the Lord who cannot be contained, might choose to close the distance between heaven and earth to be *present*, to heed Israel's prayers, in particular their cries for forgiveness. Solomon prays that this Sanctuary might be the touchpoint of God's grace for God's people, the lightning rod between heaven and earth, where their relationship with God is energized.

But there's more. Solomon prays not *only* that the Lord will hear the prayers of *Israel*, but that the Lord will hear and heed the prayers of *foreigners* to Israel, quote 'that people all over the world will know who you are and what you're like and will live in reverent obedience before you, just as your own people Israel do.'

It's an evangelical prayer. That through this work, not only God's people Israel, but also those *other* to Israel would come to know the Lord of mercy who heeds their prayers. Do you remember the promise to Abraham? Are you holding on to this redemptive thread that stitches the Old and New Testaments together? What was it? That the Lord would bless him, and through his descendants, as many as the stars, all the nations of the world would be blessed.

What's going on here? Solomon has been called to build a Temple, yes, but in building the *Lord's* Temple, he has been called to build something for the *blessing of all people*. And this is not only *Solomon's* calling, but the promise and calling of Israel. The promise and calling fulfilled in Christ. The promise and calling being built in and through those who follow Christ. For we, too, are stars lit for Abraham. Foreigners drawn to the Lord's mercy in Christ. We are heirs of God's promise and calling. Blessed to be a blessing. Called to be building the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. This is the great end of our prayer, the great end of our labor.

-OK. So I asked you to listen for not only for *what* Solomon is called to build, but *how* he is called to build it. There's a verse tucked in the middle of all the construction work that could be easy to miss. Maybe you heard it: The word of God came to Solomon saying, "**About this Temple you are building—what's important is that you live the way I've set out for you and do what I tell you, following my instructions carefully and obediently.** (repeat) Then I'll complete in you the promise I made to David your father. I'll personally take up my residence among the Israelites...' (my emphasis).

In all the busy chaos of construction, all the checklists and budgeting, all the relational and organizational challenges – in all the stress and striving toward the big end of building something worthy of God – there’s this quiet word *from* God to center the whole endeavor: ‘About this Temple you are building,’ says the Lord, ‘the *means* are as important – even *more* important – than the *ends*. While you’re building, remember what’s important. And what’s important is that you live the way I’ve called you to live.

Love God with all your heart. Love your neighbor as yourself. Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly. Love your enemy. Pray. Wash feet.

Can you think of instances where people of faith have chosen to pursue ostensibly holy ends, but have justified less-than-faithful means to reach those ends? We could think more glaring examples like colonialism and conversion by sword. Or we could think more subtly, perhaps...

I used to get all angry at my dinner table trying to get my boys to close their eyes and be quiet so we could pray. To just settle down. Invariably there was a snicker or the sound of chewing or even a sneaky lunge for food or physical struggle that made me want to blow a gasket. But exactly how full of good news is it to yell ‘Would you just shut up so we can pray?!’

I tried to change strategies. What if I *lived* as the Lord set out for me to live while trying to build my boys’ lives? What if I simply practiced praying genuinely before meals? And what if they came to know their father to be someone who, not because of his job, not because he wanted to control them, *desired* to become a man of prayer? Would that build something?

I love this invitation to self-inspection inserted in the story of what Solomon is doing (even doing ostensibly for God) because I think it reminds us, reminds *me*, that *what* you and I may be trying to build, is, in kingdom terms, scarcely as important as *how*.

-So. What is the grand thing you are doing? And how are you doing it?

Are you pursuing an education, investing in relationships, building a career, raising a child, electing a president? What are you doing? And just *how* are you going about getting there? Will you live the way our Lord has set out for you and will you *do* what our Lord tells you, following his Word carefully and obediently? Because ‘about this thing you are doing,’ no matter how grand it may be, what’s *important* is allegiance to Jesus.

In a world where so much arrogance, insult, falsehood, prejudice and violence has become normal and can come to seem acceptable, it’s important for us to hear the good news of this Word hidden at the heart of Scripture: That the ends, no matter how great, do not justify the means. Solomon’s kingdom will fall. And so will the Temple. It is only *discipleship* that builds God’s unending kingdom.

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-Watching Dave Moller pilot his shuttle bus made Mike Kerrigan think of a question Bernard of Clairvaux put to himself often: 'What does it matter in light of eternity?' As Kerrigan writes, 'Asking this frequently of oneself reminds [us] that all earthly tasks, from bus driving to lawyering, are comparatively small. All that matters in the end is the love with which we do them.'

Maybe you will wish to build this little question into what you are building? 'What does it matter in light of eternity?'/

-Today we celebrate All Saints Day. It's a day to honor and give thanks for the communion of saints in heaven and on earth who have tried to keep recalling that what's important is to live for Jesus. It's a day to give thanks for imperfect persons who have, in light of God's grace and a vocation to bear blessing to everyone, lived asking how their little daily choices might add up to a taste of Christ's forever love.

All Saints Day, then, is a celebration of *discipleship*, through which God will bring blessing on all nations.

From the Apostle Paul:

2 ¹⁻² ...[H]ere's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering' (Romans 12.1-2).

He might have added: because *what* you do is scarcely as important as *how* you do it.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.