



My guess is that most of you were not coerced or cajoled to come to church today. You're here because you want to be here. You want to behold your king, because nothing else can compare to him. You want – *you long for* – *God's presence in your life*. Psalm 105:4 says, "Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his presence continually!"

Now, in one sense, God is always present because he's omnipresent – he's everywhere. And God is present with believers in a special way in that he has promised to be always with us and never forsake us (Heb. 13:5). But when Scripture says, "seek [the Lord's] presence" continually, it's calling us to seek and enjoy an ongoing awareness of God's awesomeness – his supreme greatness, power, glory and worth.<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 11:6 says, "Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." So, seeking God's presence is good and proper.

But how we go about that is important. This is a lesson that David and the Israelites had to learn, and the Holy Spirit has included this account in Scripture for our sake. So, let's turn to 2 Samuel 6. It's on page 241 in the pew Bible. The title of today's sermon is:

**BE CAREFUL HOW YOU WORSHIP**  
**2 Samuel 6:1-23**

In the previous chapter (2 Samuel 5), David became king and conquered Jerusalem, making it the capital city of Israel. David wants it to be not only the political capital but also the *religious* capital. So, in 2 Samuel 6, David brings the "ark of God" to Jerusalem. This would further unify the nation because the ark represented the very presence of God, his power and blessing upon his people. So, at the beginning of 2 Samuel 6 we read,

<sup>1</sup> David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. <sup>2</sup> And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim.

This is a big deal! A momentous occasion! Thirty thousand of David's men accompany him on this monumental trip to Baale-Judah (also called Kiriath-Jearim) to transport the "ark of God" to Jerusalem, a distance of about 7-8 miles.

This is the first time the ark has been mentioned in Scripture since 1 Samuel 7, back in the days when the prophet Samuel was a young man and became judge of Israel. Seven

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, "What Does It Mean to Seek the Lord?" *Desiring God*, 19 August 2009 [online]. Retrieved on 12 April 2023 at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-does-it-mean-to-seek-the-lord>; Internet.

months earlier, the Philistines had captured the ark when they defeated Israel in battle and had slaughtered, ironically, thirty thousand soldiers (1 Sam. 4:10). The Philistines had taken the ark and brought it to Ashdod, one of their five major cities, into the shrine of their god, Dagon. But the next morning they found the statue of Dagon toppled flat on its face before the ark of God. So, they set Dagon back up, but the next morning they found him flat on his face again, this time with his head and arms broken off and strewn across the shrine's entrance.

The Lord God – the one and only true God – was sending the Philistines a message. And he reinforced it by devastating the citizens of Ashdod with tumors and plaguing them with swarms of rats. Everyone became deathly afraid, so the Philistine leaders moved the ark to another one of their major cities, but the same thing happened. So, they took the ark to a third city, but the people there said, “No way. Get that thing out of here. Send it back to where it came from.” So, the Philistines put the ark of God on a new cart led by oxen, which God providentially led to the Israelite city of Beth-shemesh. Picking up the story at the end of 1 Samuel 6 and the first part of chapter 7, we read,

<sup>19</sup> But the Lord killed seventy men from Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark of the Lord. And the people mourned greatly because of what the Lord had done. <sup>20</sup> “Who is able to stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?” they cried out. “Where can we send the Ark from here?”

<sup>21</sup> So they sent messengers to the people at Kiriath-jearim and told them, “The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord. Come here and get it!”

<sup>7</sup> So the men of Kiriath-jearim came to get the Ark of the Lord. They took it to the hillside home of Abinadab and ordained Eleazar, his son, to be in charge of it. <sup>2</sup> The Ark remained in Kiriath-jearim for a long time—twenty years in all. During that time all Israel mourned because it seemed the Lord had abandoned them.

- 1 Samuel 6:19 – 7:2

So, the ark represented the presence of God – the Lord God of Israel. It was called by his very name. and the narrator reminds his readers in 2 Samuel 6:2 that the Lord sat enthroned on the cherubim.



This wooden chest, which was covered inside and out with gold was also called the “Ark of the Testimony” or the “Ark of the Covenant” because it contained the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written (Exodus 25:16).

The lid of the ark was also made of gold and formed a seat – called the Mercy Seat – between the two cherubim mounted on either side. The Lord had told Moses, “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I

will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites” (Exodus 25:22). Throughout Scripture, the cherubim are portrayed as angelic beings who praise and God. They also point to the majesty and glory of God. Regarding the sculpted images of the cherubim on the lid of the ark, the mercy seat, the *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* says, “Their purpose seems to have been protective – to prevent, perhaps only symbolically, unauthorized individuals from entering space where they were not allowed.”<sup>2</sup>

The ark was placed in the most holy place in the tabernacle, where only the high priest could go once a year to sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed animal (Lev. 16) to atone for the sins of the people. Through it all, God was painting a picture to help us understand what is required for sinful man to come into the presence of a holy God<sup>3</sup> – a requirement that was uniquely and fully met in Jesus Christ, who kept God’s law perfectly and shed his blood as an atoning sacrifice for all who would trust him to save them from their sins.

- ⇒ The symbolism of the ark in salvation is seen even in Jesus’ resurrection. When Mary Magdalene came to the tomb seeking the body of Jesus, she saw two angels on either side of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying (John 20:12).
- ⇒ Just as two cherubim sat on the on either end of the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant, so two angels sat on either side of the One Great Sacrifice for the sins of the world.<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, no mention of the ark is made during the reign of King Saul. This seems to suggest that Saul showed no interest in the ark. And we already know how he treated the priests. Clearly, Saul did not honor the Lord and seek his presence like David did.

So, the ark remained for many years at Baale-Judah (Kiriath-Jearim) in the house of Abinadab until David came with 30,000 choice men to bring the ark to Jerusalem. Continuing on in verses 3-10 we read,

<sup>3</sup> And they carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart, <sup>4</sup> with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark.

<sup>5</sup> And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. <sup>6</sup> And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled.<sup>7</sup> And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God. <sup>8</sup> And David was angry because the Lord had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. <sup>9</sup> And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and he said, “How can the ark of the Lord come to me?” <sup>10</sup> So David was not willing to take the ark of the Lord into the city of David. But David took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite.

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<sup>2</sup> *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eds. John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> “What is the ark of the testimony?” *Got Questions: Your Questions. Biblical Answers* [online]. Retrieved on 13 April 2023 from <https://www.gotquestions.org/ark-of-the-testimony.html>; Internet.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2012), p. 1151.

A time of celebration with singing and music and dancing soon turned to shock, anger, and fear. In fact, I almost titled today's sermon "The Day The Music Died."

What went wrong? What was Uzzah's error, and why did God judge him so severely? Well, the problem didn't start with Uzzah but with how the ark was being transported in the first place. The Lord had given explicit instructions that the ark was to be carried on poles, supported on the shoulders of the Kohathites, a clan of the tribe of Levi (Num. 7:9). God further stipulated that the ark was not to be touched – or the penalty would be death.

By carrying the ark on a new cart, the Israelites were imitating the Philistines instead of obeying God. Had they done what was right in the first place, the oxen wouldn't have stumbled and Uzzah wouldn't have died. Specifically, we are told in verse 7, "Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God." The Hebrew word translated "error" is used only here in Scripture. The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains* defines it as "an act of transgression of the will of God, implying either a rash, imprudent act or an irreverent act." It can also refer to "accidental wrongdoing." Such was probably the case with Uzzah. Nothing in the text indicates a deliberate sin on his part. When the oxen stumbled and the ark was in danger of falling to the ground, Uzzah instinctively reached out his hand to steady the ark. "Uzzah touched the ark, and *wham!* God exploded in fury."<sup>5</sup> So writes the late theologian R. C. Sproul in his classic bestseller, *The Holiness of God*.

Someone had given me a copy of Sproul's book during my senior year in college thirty-three years ago. It had been published only five years earlier. Now it's considered a classic. His explanation of God's judgment on Uzzah made such an impact on me, that I never forgot it. If you don't have a copy of Sproul's book, get it. If you have it, read chapter six, "Holy Justice." At the end of the chapter, Sproul writes that when God killed Uzzah, "it is as if He were saying, 'Be careful. While you enjoy the bene-fits of my grace, don't forget My justice. Don't forget the gravity of sin. Remember that I am holy.'"<sup>6</sup>

This message wasn't simply for the Old Testament saints. The same God we meet in 2 Samuel 6 is the same God we meet in the New Testament. Paul writes in Romans 15:4 that "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us." Even in the New Testament there are instances where the Lord exercises his holy justice.

⇒ The other day I was reading Acts 5, where Luke records the historic account of a couple that lied and died. Their names were Ananias and Sapphira. It had been a time of great growth for the church. The gospel was being boldly proclaimed, God's grace was powerfully at work, and "all the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. ... There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need" (Acts 5:32, 34 NLT). Ananias and Sapphira got in on the

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<sup>5</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, second edition (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998), p. 127.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

action too. They sold some property and brought some of the proceeds to the apostles, but they claimed it was the full amount. And God killed them for it. Let this sink in for a moment: Here they were giving to the church, and all they did was give the impression that they were giving more than they really were. And God struck them dead. God's grace was powerfully at work, but in this instance God was telling his people: 'Be careful. While you enjoy the benefits of my grace, don't forget My justice. Don't forget the gravity of sin. Remember that I am holy.'

When Uzzah died, David became angry and afraid. The text doesn't say that David was angry *at God* but that he was angry over God's outbreak against Uzzah. I think David was angry at himself for being so careless and confused about how the ark was to be transported. According to the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 13, David consulted with his officials but not with the Lord. David should have consulted the Scriptures because there God had already given explicit instructions about how the ark was to be carried.

Carelessness led to catastrophe. Uzzah was the son of Abinadab, in whose care the ark of God had been for twenty years. Uzzah grew up around the ark and over time became too casual with it, too familiar, too comfortable, too careless. And it cost him his life.

When Ruthie and I moved to Nova Scotia in the mid-90s, it was a new way of life for me. Most of the men in the church worked in the woods or on a farm and were used to handling power tools and machinery. I wasn't. But I figured this would be a good opportunity to learn some basic skills while connecting with the men in my church and community.

One day I was working with an older man in the church who was constructing a home. He wanted me to cut some boards, so he handed me a circular saw. I was nervous about using it, afraid that I might not hold it right and lose one of my fingers or cut my leg. Then he told me something that has always stuck with me. He said, "It's okay to be a little nervous, because that makes you more careful in how you handle it. It's the guys who have been around power tools all their lives and end up becoming too casual and careless with them that are the most prone to injury or death."

The same can be true for us who have grown up in the church and been around the word of God for a long time. Like David and Uzzah, we can have a genuine desire to seek the Lord's presence but become too careless in terms of how we go about it. God's word goes in one ear and out the other, or we don't consult Scripture at all.

⇒ A 2023 Lifeway Research study revealed that although 65 percent of Protestant churchgoers spend time alone with God daily, only 39 percent read the Bible during that time. This past Thursday at our monthly Reformation Society meeting, Reid Ferguson presented a timely paper titled "Gospel Assumptions and the Rise of New Age Spirituality." A chief concern Reid addresses in his paper is *subjectivity*, that is, allowing "impulses, impressions and feelings guide us apart from the Word [of God]. ... Everyone hears God for themselves, and everyone interprets what they hear from a wholly personal perspective. Then, Scripture is marshaled NOT to evaluate the truth claims, but only to substantiate them."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Reid Ferguson, "Gospel Assumptions and the Rise of New Age Spirituality," an unpublished paper

⇒ This can happen on *corporate* level, as churches aim for emotional experiences, because they “equate emotionalism with a genuine work of God, the presence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> David and the whole house of Israel were singing and dancing when God struck Uzzah dead because of disobedience. Amid all the celebration, God’s word was being ignored. So mere emotion is no indication of true worship.

Dale Davis writes, “The application of the text is clear: you dare not trifle with a God who is both real and holy. ... We forget that there is heat in his holiness.”<sup>9</sup> That’s lesson #1:

### **1. We are to seek the Lord’s presence reverently.**

David got the message loud and clear. Thankfully, this wasn’t God’s last word about the ark. Continuing on to verses 11-13, we read:

<sup>11</sup> And the ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household.

<sup>12</sup> And it was told King David, “The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God.” So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing. <sup>13</sup> And when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal.

- 2 Samuel 6:3-13

Previously David had asked, “How can the ark of the Lord come to me?” and had left the ark in the house of Obed-Edom. But once he heard how the Lord had blessed Obed-Edom and all that belonged to him, David wanted to get in on the blessing too! Apparently he consulted the Scriptures and answered his own question, “How can the ark of the Lord come to me?” – because the parallel account in Chronicles 15 says, “Then David said that no one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, for the Lord had chosen them to carry the ark of the Lord and to minister to him forever” (v. 2).

So, David went to get the ark a second time, and this time he was determined to do so carefully, according to God’s word. After those bearing the ark walked the first six steps, David offered a sacrifice to the Lord.

When I read this part of the text, I thought of a certain episode in season two of *Gomer Pyle: USMC*. Some of you might remember that show that aired in the late 60s. It was a spin-off of *The Andy Griffith Show*. Gomer Pyle was a private in the U.S. Marine Corps, and in this particular episode his sergeant, Vince Carter, invites him to a family dinner. Sgt. Carter says, “Just wait till you taste my mama’s Italian cooking. ... Tonight we’ll probably have some of her chicken cacciatore.” “Chicken what?” Gomer says.

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presented at the Reformation Society of Western New York on April 13, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Zac Hicks, “Thinking Pastorally About Emotions in Worship,” *Doxology & Theology* [online]. Retrieved on 15 April 2023 from <https://www.doxologyandtheology.com/blog/thinking-pastorally-about-emotions-in-worship>; Internet.

<sup>9</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*. Focus on the Bible Commentary Series (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999, reprinted 2018), 24.

“Cacciatore. Go ahead, you can say it.” “Oh, I couldn’t ever.” “Oh, come on. Come on, try.” So, Gomer says, “Chicken ... how’s that so far?”<sup>10</sup>

I think that’s what David was thinking as they took those initial steps with the ark of God: “How’s that so far?” Once they took their first six steps without incident, David offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord for his apparent approval.<sup>11</sup> Then in the next verse we read, “And David danced before the Lord with all his might” (v. 14a). David was able to resume his rejoicing, this time with unabashed zeal, because he knew he was worshiping God according to his word. Within the parameters of Scripture, there is plenty of room for celebration. In fact, Scripture gives us every reason to celebrate! “This lavish and unabashed celebration of the Lord is an appropriate response to his character and glory.”<sup>12</sup>

We’re also told in verse 14 that “David was wearing a linen ephod.” David apparently laid aside his royal garments and clothed himself in an apron-like priestly garment in order to participate in the procession. The Hebrew words indicate that David’s dancing was an exuberant, energetic leaping and whirling about. Ancient Near Eastern literature provides no other examples of kings dancing in such processions. David was an apparent exception. As such he typifies the ultimate condescension of the Son of God, who laid aside the glory of heaven to become one of us and dwell among us. In chapter two of Hebrews, the writer says that Jesus is not ashamed to call believers his brothers (v. 11). Then the writer quotes Psalm 22:22, attributing the words of this Messianic psalm directly to Jesus, saying, “in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise” (Heb. 2:12; cf. Psalm 22:22).

This takes us to lesson #2.

## **2. We are to celebrate the Lord’s presence joyfully.**

David got this, but his wife didn’t. Continuing on in verses 15-23, we read,

<sup>15</sup> So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn.

<sup>16</sup> As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart. <sup>17</sup> And they brought in the ark of the Lord and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. <sup>18</sup> And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts <sup>19</sup> and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed, each to his house.

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<sup>10</sup> Gomer Pyle: USMC (1964-1969): Season 2, Episode 19, “Arrivederci, Gomer” – Full Transcript [online]. Retrieved on 15 April 2023 from [https://subslikescript.com/series/Gomer\\_Pyle\\_USMC-57752/season-2/episode-19-Arrivederci\\_Gomer](https://subslikescript.com/series/Gomer_Pyle_USMC-57752/season-2/episode-19-Arrivederci_Gomer); Internet.

<sup>11</sup> *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eds. John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), p. 522.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel C. Emadi, “1-2 Samuel,” *NIV, The Grace and Truth Study Bible*, gen. ed. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), p. 389.

<sup>20</sup> And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, “How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!” <sup>21</sup> And David said to Michal, “It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord—and I will celebrate before the Lord. <sup>22</sup> I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor.” <sup>23</sup> And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

It's noteworthy that the narrator refers to Michal as “the daughter of Saul” three times. She was the wife of David but is referred to as “the daughter of Saul.” That's because she was more like her father than her husband. Michal was all about appearances. We can imagine her make-up just right, not a hair out of place, not a crinkle in her dress as she despises David in her heart and criticizes David with her lips. “A king has a certain image to maintain and he shouldn't put himself on a level with the, well, riffraff.”<sup>13</sup> David tells Michal that the servant girls aren't his audience. God is. David's singing and dancing wasn't a performance for the people. It was a genuine expression of praise to the Lord. David calls Michal out, exposing the resentment in her heart. Then he says, “If dancing to God's glory makes me look like a fool, then I'll gladly be far more humiliated than this.” At the end of the chapter we're told that Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no children to the day of her death – a sad and sobering reminder that “a critical spirit stifles fruitfulness.”<sup>14</sup>

**The Lord is to be worshiped  
reverently *and* joyfully.**

I'll close with these powerful words of application from Dale Davis who writes,

In our churches there are any number of folks who are concerned with services and externals and procedures and mechanics and meetings and decency and order but who really can't understand anything of the joy of the Lord. There are some who can muster enthusiasm and gusto over professional sports but who somehow cannot fathom anything but professional detachment over Jesus Christ. Exuberant praise and tears of repentance are strangers to them. W. G. Blaikie has carefully draw the bottom line:

*There are, doubtless, times to be calm, and times to be enthusiastic;  
but can it be right to give all our coldness to Christ and all our enthu-  
siasm to the world?*

Does the presence of God ever move us?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Davis, 79.

<sup>14</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, edited by Art Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), p. 330.

<sup>15</sup> Davis, 79-80. The quote source from Blaikie, as cited by Davis, is W. G. Blaikie, *The Second Book of Samuel*, *The Expositor's Bible* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, n.d.), 96.