

The man walks into the store. He's there to get some new dress shirts for work. They'll be expensive, he knows. But it's okay. He makes a lot of money and wearing nice clothes is all part of doing business. There's nothing like having money he says to himself. She drives home in her new car. It comes with the latest safety features that signal a car in the blind spot, back up camera, and the car will even apply the brakes if she does something foolish. She's come to rely on this latest technology. There's nothing like having technology to keep me safe she says to herself. The teen enters the theater with a whole group of friends as the center of attention. Everyone wants to hang out with them, they're the funny one, the popular one. There's nothing like having popularity.

Nice clothes, a safe car, popularity. Alone these are perfectly harmless. They can also become so important, so depended on, seen as so powerful that people learn to trust them like there's nothing else. We have all fallen into that trap. Something became so trusted, so super important, so relied on that with it we figured we'd always be okay.

In the first lesson it's dedication day. The temple was recently completed by King Solomon. This permanent structure for God's special presence among the people would be a visible reminder of what was most important. Something, someone was most important among the Israelites. But as the Lord made the temple the visible reminder of his presence Solomon prayed and said just what we want to be able to say...

**Lord, there is no God like you  
Your name draws people together  
By your name you hear them**

King Solomon was given the special privilege from God to build the temple. You may remember that it was Solomon's father, King David, who first thought about a structure for God. Now it was finished and Solomon stood before the whole assembled group of Israel in a giant dedication service. Such a large number of sacrifices were offered they couldn't be numbered. Singing and making music filled the people's hearts with a sense of praise. The ark of the Lord's covenant, the traveling symbol of God's abiding presence, was moved into position inside the temple. Solomon began his prayer, **"O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below."** The magnificent structure of the temple everyone marveled at verified those words.

As the dedication prayer continued everyone heard Solomon say why they could be sure there was no God like the Lord. **"There is no God like you...who keeps your covenant of love with your servants."** The covenant of love Solomon spoke of was an agreement the people of Israel had with their God. It wasn't like a signed contract between basketball player and team. In that contract the player agrees to play and the team agrees to pay. This covenant of love was one sided. God agreed to do everything and the people were required to do nothing. It had to be that way because the people couldn't keep their side of any agreement. Every time they made a promise not to wander away from God, not to curse him, or that they would listen to his name they quickly broke their promise.

We've gathered to listen to the name of the Lord. It's proclaimed in music, prayers, in his Word. We hear about his covenant of love with us. So easily does the two sided contract come to mind for us too. God does his thing and we agree to do our thing. But what is our thing? What can we bring to the table? We might figure it's our choice. We decided to be here. We decided to follow Jesus. We convince ourselves that without that choice the covenant of love with God couldn't be completed. After all every basketball player has to sign and play for the contract to work. But have we really kept our side of the covenant. It would have to be completely, all day every day. Trust could never waver, doubts could never enter in, words always under control, actions always following God's laws, and thoughts always pure. Always. We've broken that covenant. We've contributed nothing. Our sinful selves have pulled away from God.

There is no God like the Lord. He drew you into a covenant relationship based on love. When you wander, his love comes after you. He made that choice. It was his mercy, one sided, all from the Lord to you. He made a covenant of love with you. He entered it through death. His own death. In the blood of the death of God's own son Jesus the covenant was signed. It was a promise like no other because he's a God like no other. God loved and your sins are forgiven. Lack of trust, doubts, words, actions, and thoughts that are sinful are all taken away from you in Christ. Over and over he's kept that promise to you. In love he's drawn you to himself. And as you are drawn to him, you are drawn toward each other. The Lord's name unites people in love for Christ.

God is one of a kind. His name has the power to draw people to himself and together with each other. Believers in Christ are unified in faith with each other. A group of believers united in faith was standing around listening to Solomon as he prayed. Solomon also was praying on behalf of those believers. That's what believers do. By the name of the Lord they pray and God hears them.

Everyone heard Solomon as he prayed different petitions. Praise to God for keeping his promises. A request that God continue to keep his promise. Acknowledgment that God could not be confined to the temple. Another request for God to hear prayers offered in and toward the temple. Asked that God judge between innocent and guilty. Put in a plea for forgiveness in recognition of Israel's sin and God's love. Petition after petition was offered until Solomon reached one that at first may sound out of place. **"As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name...when he comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from heaven."** The temple completely built by Israelites was being dedicated. It was for their God. What did any of that have to do with the foreigner?

Solomon prayed for the foreigner because of why the foreigner would be there. People from distant lands would come **“because of your name.”** When people from far away, people who weren't Israelites, heard the Lord's name they came, and the Lord's covenant of love was why they worshiped and prayed to the Lord who was like no other God. His name said love. His name said promise. His name said saving. The name of the Lord was why he'd listen, even to the foreigner's prayer offered in faith.

When we speak in prayer we should have no reason to think God's listening. Why would he? I might be coming with my prayer, but only after exhausting all avenues I know of to solve my own problem. I speak in prayer, but probably halfheartedly. If I get no response I question whether he listened. If I get a response I figure I'll not like it. In the end it's easiest if I just deal with my burdens myself. Why would God listen to a prayer offered with that kind of attitude? And that's from a person like you and me, in the church. What about those outside, those not unified with us, foreigners? Since all have sinned against the Lord, no one should expect he'll hear.

Why you and the foreigner can pray is what Solomon reminded us of in his prayer. **“Men will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm.”** You hear his great name. God's name is his full reputation, everything he has revealed about himself. It's a name of love and mercy for sinners. God's greatness is his demonstration of grace. He loves you even when you don't always love him. He is merciful. He came to this world to serve you in Christ. You see him demonstrate his mighty hand. God is the great provider, actively providing and protecting you. He puts his power to work for you. You have received from his outstretched arm. God is always at work in your life. He's never hands off, but always intimately aware of what is happening and involved in making it work for your eternal good. When God entered your existence and lived and died and rose again, he showed just how intimately involved in you he wants to be. He worked faith in your heart by his name, his grace, his covenant of love.

The Lord's name is to be proclaimed. God's covenant of love is what you share. You pray for others to hear and believe. You pray for opportunities. You take cues and you share God's Word. And the name of the Lord works. It works faith. Christ takes up his dwelling in people's hearts. He makes his presence in you and others. And he leads them to pray too. For that Solomon prayed. **“Hear from heaven...and do whatever the foreigners asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you.”** You know when God answers your prayer with a positive it does more to convince you he's listening. Still God will answer your prayer in the way that brings the results he intends. And any answer you receive can be used to proclaim God's name. A 'yes' and you can give thanks to God for his positive response and put God's name in a good light. A "no" and you can thank God for his promise of always doing what's best and put God's name in a good light. No matter what the answer, you have God's promise he hears you.

There is no God like the Lord. Nothing will substitute for him. No one can stand in his place in our hearts or in life. And we wouldn't want anyone to try. The Lord's name gathers us as believers unified to each other in his covenant of love. The Lord's name is also his promise to always hear our prayers. Lord, there is no God like you.