THE FLAME
A PRAYER DEVOTIONAL

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Becoming a House of Prayer

Part 2: Beyond the Obvious

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If you are curious about the row of "0's," let me give you a couple possibilities:

A. My cat was trying to read the screen while standing on the keyboard.
B. I was writing late and fell asleep, at least one finger near the "O," and another precipitously close to the space bar.

Of course, to know for sure you would need to find an eye-witness. Sorry to leave you with a bit of ambiguity, but all I can say is that you would need to talk with either me or the cat. One of us was actually there.

There is no measure of ambiguity, however, about Matthew 21:13. On that occasion, Jesus passionately remarked, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!" His words "house of prayer" has probably been repeated hundreds of thousands of times since that day. Most commonly they have served as a rallying cry to call God's people to a deeper life of prayer, and more specifically, congregations of believers to adopt the shared commitment to prayer.

Yet, while there is nothing uncertain about His words, there is in fact more to them than meets the eye.

Jesus was quoting specifically from Isaiah 56:7. The prophet, while sharing God's message for Israel, uses the expression "house of prayer" when referring to the Temple. The Temple was a pivotal part of the covenant relationship between God and His people. Exodus 25 - 40 provides extensive details for the Temple construction, compiling more specifics than for any other single event in all of scripture.

Why? Because it is, in God's own words, "a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell among [my chosen people]" (Exodus 25:8-9). And then in verse 25 he adds, "There I will meet with you; and…I will speak to you." The Temple is where God chose for His people to hear Him and encounter His presence.

When we hear Jesus quoting Isaiah calling the Temple a "house of prayer," we are encountering a truth that should fill us with awe and wonder. The privilege of prayer is about nothing less than being in the presence of the Holy One, the One who established the Temple with its Holy of Holies, the One who caused us to realize, as Isaiah later expressed, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man….Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven's Armies" (Isaiah 6:5, NLT).

But wait, there is more. After being touched by an angel to signify that his sins were cleansed, Isaiah hears the voice of the Holy God (verse 8) asking who would be His messenger to declare truth and grace to others. And Isaiah, responds "Here I am. Send me."

Taking Our Next Step Together

Lord God, Holy One of heaven and earth, revisit us with the awe of Your purpose and grace that cleanses us. Let our prayer lives be so centered on the wonder of who You are and the transformation You have provided for us that we will stand ready at Your bidding, to be Your instruments of grace. May we rise from our prayer closets and be emboldened by Your holy purpose to share Your heart of grace with those around us.

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