

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

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Blank Walls

On August 21st, 1911, the Mona Lisa was stolen from the Louvre. During the 2¹/₂-year period before it was recovered and restored to the museum, more people came to stare at the empty space where the famous masterpiece once hung, than visited in the ten preceding years to view the painting itself.

There are many ways to spin this remarkable story but it partly reminds us of the power of nostalgia. Doubtless the people who came to see the blank wall dreamed of how wonderful it would be if only the canvas was restored. Once it reappeared however, it lost a bit of magic. Similarly, people will rush to read a newly discovered poem from a writer whose book of published poetry lays unread on the shelf. We yearn for what is not there and neglect what is there.

"Who is rich?" ask the Rabbis. "One who is satisfied with what he has." We all suffer from stolen painting syndrome. It is worthwhile remembering that when the thing we yearn for appears, we tend to take it for granted. That realization may help us cherish what we have, rather than stare, longingly, at a blank wall.

Rabbi Wolpe's new book *David: The Divided Heart* is available now.