

Praying for Revival
2 Chronicles 7:14

Please stand and listen to God's word as recorded in 2 Chronicles 7:11–18.

11 Thus Solomon finished the house of the Lord and the king's palace, and successfully completed all that he had planned on doing in the house of the Lord and in his palace. 12 Then the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. 13 "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, 14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15 "Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place. 16 "For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. 17 "As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, even to do according to all that I have commanded you, and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, 18 then I will establish your royal throne as I covenanted with your father David, saying, 'You shall not lack a man to be ruler in Israel.'

This is God's response to Solomon's prayer recorded in 2 Chronicles 6 (which is one of the longest prayers in the Bible). After the temple ("the house of the Lord") was completed, Solomon prayed a prayer of dedication, asking God to "hear" the prayers that were prayed "toward" the temple (see 6:20-21). Solomon's prayer reflected his understanding of Israel's tendency to wander away from God.

In a fascinating way, Solomon lays out seven scenarios in which He says, "God, if we, Your people, have sinned against You and find ourselves under your judgment/discipline (drought, famine, pestilence, exile, etc.), and if we confess our sin and return to You with all our heart and pray toward this house which I have built for Your name . . . hear from heaven and forgive our sins and restore what's been lost." Solomon prays preemptively, anticipating the day when they would need to repent and turn back to God.

This is a little bit like a dad telling his teenage son, "You must have the car back by 11 p.m. on Friday night," and the son says, "Dad, if I bring the car back at midnight and you catch me and discipline me. . . if I'm really sorry, will you forgive me so that I can eventually borrow the car again?" Solomon's prayer assumed that the people of God would sin and would be disciplined. And so ahead of time he asked God if He would forgive when/if they repent.

If you have lived long enough, you **know** that the body of Christ (the Church) needs this same assurance: we habitually bring the car back at midnight; individually and collectively we sin and wander away from God; our obedience is selective; we have sinful blind spots; we are obsessed with taking the splinter out of others' eyes while we have a log in our own.

Therefore we are always in need of a heavenly Father who is willing to forgive and restore. If we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit, we will live repentant lives, turning from our sin whenever it's exposed. But there are times when (individually and corporately) we have strayed far from God and need to turn back to Him in a serious, intentional, fervent way. And so Solomon's prayer and God's response are very relevant for us.

Listen again to God's response to Solomon's prayer:

13 "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, 14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

In verse 14 God tells "His people" how to respond when they find themselves under His discipline. He tells them to do four interrelated things; together they describe a comprehensive response of repentance.

Please understand that this four-fold response is NOT God's punishment. This response reflects the basic way of living that is taught throughout Scripture: humility, prayer, seeking God's face, and turning from sin. This is a life that is compatible with God's character; this is a life of blessing and peace and wholeness. As we think through these four conditions, please hear them as "good news" - as gospel, really - because these responses are possible for us because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Let's consider verse 14 in detail:

14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

To be "called by [someone's] name" means to be associated with someone. In Solomon's day "God's people" referred primarily to the Jewish nation, although chapter 6 acknowledged that when people came from other nations to worship YHWH, they were included in the covenant community. Ultimately the plan was for "all the people of the earth" to call upon the name of the Lord and to be called by His name. When we get to Jeremiah 31, the promise of the "new covenant" was "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33). The New Testament makes clear that this new covenant was established through Jesus' blood (Luke 22:20).

And so we, as believers in Jesus, can legitimately hear this promise to us because we are "God's people" who are "called by His name." We are called "Christians" or "Christ-followers." We are so closely identified with Jesus that His reputation rises or falls based on how we live and how we treat people (both inside and outside of the Church).

Our fourfold Repentance

First, God says if “My people who are called by My name ***humble themselves***. . .” When we walk in pride we basically say to God, “I don’t owe you anything; I am my own master and Lord.” When we humble ourselves we basically acknowledge to God, “Because You are my Lord and God, I submit to You and Your will.” To humble yourself is to adopt a stance of before God that aligns with the reality that He is Lord. Throughout Scripture we’re told that God notices whether we are walking in pride or humility. We read in Isaiah 66:2

2 . . . “But to this one I will look,
To him who is humble and contrite of spirit,
and who trembles at My word.”

Not caring what God says is arrogant. When we identify pride within ourselves, we can employ any number of practices in humbling ourselves before God. In Psalm 35:13 David wrote, “I humbled myself with fasting.” He went without food for a period of time as an expression of His submission to God and His will. We can humble ourselves by confessing our sins to one another (James 5:16).

Second, God say if “My people who are called by My name humble themselves ***and pray***. . .” In 2 Chronicles 6 Solomon asked that God would respond to their prayers of repentance. Here God assures Solomon that He will indeed respond when they pray. This is really the entire point of this sermon series: we have this glorious freedom to pray, asking God to do what we cannot do ourselves. Instead of merely hoping or assuming that God will act, He expects us and wants us to pray, asking Him to work. The last line of this verse suggests that this prayer is for forgiveness and healing (restoration of whatever has been lost).

Third, God say if “My people who are called by My name . . . ***seek My face***. . .” This is one of many examples of how the Bible uses anthropomorphic language to describe God. The Bible speaks of God’s face to express that God is a personal God (as opposed to being merely a force or a power); it’s a way of reminding us that God sees and hears, that God speaks, that God has emotions. When we “seek God’s face” we intentionally notice these things about God.

If you have a dog, chances are that s/he “seeks your face.” Sometimes I’ll be sitting in my chair reading a book and I’ll look up to find Molly standing there staring at my face. She’s waiting for me to look at her because she wants something. Or if I whisper, “Molly!” she will sit up and lock in on my face; she studies my face to know whether I’m happy or angry or whatever.

In an analogous way we are to be that attentive to the face of God. As opposed to ignoring God, we make eye contact with Him, we lean in close to hear what He might be whispering to us, we try to discern whether He’s pleased or annoyed or even angry at how we’re living our lives. When we seek God’s face, we seek to have a personal encounter with the one true living God. If we are “people of the word” this won’t merely be an exercise of the imagination; we will experience God as He is revealed in

Scriptures. We will experience Him as the father who is looking down the road waiting for the prodigal to come home; we will experience Him as our Savior with tears streaming down His face at Lazarus' tomb; we will experience Him as the One who said in sadness, "You of little faith. . ." As repentant people, we are to seek His face.

Fourth, God says that His people should "**turn from their wicked ways.**" This is a common way that the Bible speaks about repentance. When we repent, we turn **from** our sins ("our wicked ways") and turn back **to** God. The premise throughout Scripture is that we are responsible to turn from our sins. We don't do this independent of the Spirit, but we do engage our wills and turn from our sins; nobody can do this for us. Of course we enlist the prayers and encouragement and wisdom of others in the body of Christ. But the responsibility lies with each of us.

When was the last time you thought of a sin as "wicked" or "evil"? We're more likely to think of our sins as "struggles," aren't we? If you know me, you know that I don't advocate self-condemnation and self-loathing when it comes to our sins. But there is a certain power and clarity in naming our sins using biblical terms such as "wicked ways." If you see your sin as "wicked/evil"- whether sensuality or judgmentalism or materialism or pride - you are much more likely to understand its destructiveness; and you are much more likely to "turn from" that sin in mind and body.

God's threefold Response

God promises to do three things when His people repent. First, God says "I will **hear from heaven.** . ." To "hear" means to hear **favorably**. Throughout our study of prayer we've seen that God "hears" our prayers only under certain conditions; it's not the case that anybody can pray anything and expect God to hear and answer. But God is on record that if His people come to him in genuine repentance, we can be confident that He will "hear from heaven." This is consistent with what we read in I John 5:14-15.

14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

When we repent in the comprehensive ways we've been discussing, we can be confident that God will hear from heaven and respond in mercy and grace.

Second, God says "**I will forgive their sin.**" When God forgives a person's sin, He says, "You have offended Me but I am never going to make you pay for it." There is no residual anger; God doesn't hold grudges. When He pronounces forgiveness, the relationship is restored and there is newfound freedom and fulness in that relationship. When God's people who are called by His name repent corporately, they experience a newfound freedom and fulness with God corporately. In the new covenant, we understand that our forgiveness flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Third, God says "**I will heal their land.**" In the original context "their land" was the Promised Land (the land of Canaan). Depending upon the type of discipline that the people were under, this healing might involve God sending rain or ending some

pestilence (see verse 13). "Healing their land" involved restoring whatever had been lost.

How might this apply in the new covenant in which "God's people who are called by His name" are scattered throughout the nations? It's hard to say exactly what type of healing God might bring, but the testimony of history suggests that when the body of Christ in any location experiences God's fulness and blessing, there is often a ripple effect in their communities and in their nations.

Honestly, I am just beginning to study and understand what happens when God brings revival to a city or a nation. But the accounts are fascinating. There was a revival in the country of Wales in 1904-05. Most accounts trace the beginning of the Welsh Revival to a prayer meeting attended by 18 young people on October 31st, 1904 in Loughor (in the south of Wales). In response to the question, "What does Jesus Christ mean to you?" one young woman responded "I love Jesus with all my heart." Her simple devotion to Jesus melted the hearts of everyone else in the room. They experienced a newfound freedom to pray and to talk about their relationship with Jesus.

A prayer movement was ignited. It spread to churches of all denominations in cities all over Wales. It was common to have prayer meetings that lasted until late into the night or into the early morning. Those that preached stressed the need for holiness and the need for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit. In other words they were turning from their "wicked ways" and they were praying for God to do something extraordinary.

Listen to one account of the impact of the Welsh Revival (by Dr. Alvin L. Reid, <http://www.openheaven.com/library/history/wales.htm>):

Within six months, 100,000 souls were converted in Wales.

Social impact was similarly reported. Judges were presented with white gloves signifying no cases to be tried. Alcoholism was halved. At times hundreds of people would stand to declare their surrender to Christ as Lord. Restitution was made, gamblers and others normally untouched by the ministry of the church came to Christ. In fact, esteemed G. Campbell Morgan recalled a conversation with a mine manager about profanity. The manager told him, "The haulers are some of the very lowest. They have driven their horses by obscenity and kicks. Now they can hardly persuade their horses to start working, because they have no obscenity and kicks."(5)

Church historians tell us that for the next 20 years churches in Wales felt the effects. The Welsh revival sparked an awakening that spread across the entire world, including the U.S. J. Edwin Orr, an historian who studied revivals extensively, says that in normal times Christians seek out non-Christians to share Christ (as we should - our commission is to "go") but that during times of revival non-Christians seek out Christians, seeking to learn how to know God.

Can you imagine God doing something like that in our community in our day? The overwhelming sense we get from Scripture is that God is very eager to act when His people are living in a way that's compatible with what He wants to do. You just don't find people who are loving God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and God says, "Yeah, I'm not in the mood to do anything extraordinary. . ." I'm not suggesting that we can force God's hand and dictate exactly what He has to do. We don't know His timing; we don't know everything that is happening in this world (much less the unseen spiritual world). But we have this assurance that God will respond when we - as a people - turn back to Him in repentance.

This corporate call to repentance is challenging for many of us. We tend to think of ourselves in isolation and to think of our relationship with God independent of other believers. Consequently, you may never have considered whether your pride and disobedience might hinder what God might want to do through this church and through the body of Christ here in Manhattan. But numerous passages urge us think about ourselves as one body with many members. It's not enough for some of us to respond. Whether or not **you** are walking with God matters! Your walk with God affects the health of this church and it affects whether or not God will do something extraordinary in our town.

As you've heard, next Sunday afternoon we are going to gather for prayer at 4 p.m. We are going to pray in light of 2 Chronicles 7:14. We are going to come together and humble ourselves and pray and seek His face and turn from our wicked ways. We will do this through music and Scripture and prayer. Between now and then, would you pursue repentance in any way necessary? On behalf of our elders, I am asking you if at all possible to come back at 4:00 for prayer. God is on record:

14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.