

IF

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Wrote E.M. Bounds: “All revivals are dependent upon God, but in revivals, as in other things, He invites and requires the assistance of man, and the full result is obtained when there is co-operation between the Divine and the human. In other words, to employ a familiar phrase, God alone can save the world, but God cannot save the world alone. God and man unite for the task, the response of the Divine being invariably in proportion to the desire and the effort of the human.”

And what is the human effort that contains and expresses that desire to God? How shall we “unite with God” for the great task of saving souls and transforming our world, if not through prayer?

Jesus taught that people “*should always pray and never give up*” (Luke 18:1-8).

The Apostle Paul was even more pointed, “*In every place of worship, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy*” (1 Timothy 2:8).

Today, let us turn once again to the ancient wisdom of Solomon, who himself led the nation of Israel into such a period of revival. At the dedication of the Temple which he had built for the worship of Jehovah, he prayed, requesting a covenant with God for His gracious providence and faithful care. The covenant that he proposed, acknowledged that human part—prayer—as the trigger for God’s blessing and provision.

And God’s response could not have been clearer.

2 Chronicles 7:13-16 (NIV)

¹³ “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, ¹⁴ **if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.**

¹⁵ Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. ¹⁶ I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

God warned that things would not always be easy for His people—even though they were God’s people (that’s illuminating!)—but promised that He would be attentive to their prayers. That’s huge!

At the heart of this response is an enduring principle, a conditional promise, that God's people of every generation may count on, whether the Temple stands in Jerusalem, or not. It is, for us, a lesson in effective praying.

Let me try to break it down for you...

If

This Big little word introduces God's conditional logic. If we respond as God describes, then He will respond as He promises. If we do not... then we have broken away on our own and He is under no obligation to us.

What an amazing thing this is, that Almighty God would even place Himself in the position of obligation to us! He does it because He loves us, because He really wants to unimaginably bless us.

My People

This promise is not given to all people, but solely to God's people—those who are called by His name. And these conditions are not the requirements of others, but of we who call ourselves His followers.

Contrary to popular opinion, humans are not all “children of God.” One is not part of “God's people” just by being born, but by being born again (John 3:7).

There is a likeness that only His Spirit can generate in us. And to us He has made this awesome promise.

Humble Themselves

The first condition is humility, but more than an attitude—this requires a physical response. Most often, the call to Israel to humble themselves was a call to fasting—specific periods of time in which the people were to abstain from eating, and instead, give themselves to seeking and worshipping the Lord.

No eating (just water)—humbling themselves before the Lord. Anyone who has fasted in this way knows how humbling it can be, revealing all kinds of humiliating thoughts and feelings. This is why it should always be done “before the Lord,” where we can find the mercy and grace to lift us up again.

The aim of Biblical fasting is primarily to deepen relationship and communication with the Lord.

Some fasts are private—individually undertaken—but most fasts in the Bible were public—when the whole community or nation was called aside from the normal daily routine to acknowledge the Lord.

More generally, of course, fasting includes abstaining from any ungodly attitudes and behaviors that dishonor and displease the Lord.

Fasting is not a strange thing—though it may be unfamiliar to you. Humbling oneself is the first condition of personal spiritual revival.

Pray

We are not to fast idly; we should try to fill the time normally spent preparing and eating food in prayer.

Philippians 4

*⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. **Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.** ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

To pray is to ask God for the things we need—spiritually and materially—and the things others need, and the things that God wants to do in and through us.

Many people are more familiar with affirmations. In fact, far more people make affirmations, than pray. Affirmations, after all, are self-flattering, and therefore easy. But prayer is humbling and requires faith. For example, Jesus told this story about two men who went to the Temple to pray.

Luke 18

¹¹ The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like everyone else, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. ¹² I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get."

Notice, he "said this prayer to himself." It was not a true prayer. It was an affirmation of self-worth. He asked God for nothing; instead, he told God how pleased he was with himself. Jesus said he was "not justified" by this effort.

Affirmations—even Biblical affirmations, if not arising from true prayer and a humble heart—only inflate hollow, deceptive pride. They may make you feel better briefly, but like inflating a tire with a leak, you'll have to do it repeatedly, just to stay even.

However, God has committed Himself to the one who learns to pray. It is neither easy nor swift, but its success is guaranteed.

Seek My Face

God is looking for a face-to-face relationship with you, beyond an intellectual acknowledgment, or mental agreement. This kind of relationship He calls worship.

Last month, I spent several weekends talking with you about worship and how we can take ours to the next level.

“Face-to-face” is a most intimate and vulnerable relationship. It means standing eye to eye and mouth to mouth with another person. This is trusting and tender and truthful.

Sometimes, God will get “in your face,” and that will put you face-down before Him.

Other times, you will be face-up in His presence, enjoying His smile and “kissing the Son.”

In every case, worship is fundamental to our calling and life with Christ. Develop this fragrant atmosphere, with the praises of God always in your mouth.

Turn From Their Wicked Ways

Everyone has “wicked ways” from which they need to turn. If you’re just seeking the Lord, or recently been found by Him, this is no surprise to you. But no matter how long you have been following Jesus Christ, there will still be some issues that arise between you and Him.

Repentance is not just the motion of a seeker, who is coming to Christ for the first time. It is part of the ongoing lifestyle of all those who belong to Christ—always keeping our consciences clear and our hearts clean.

Sometimes, we are inclined to draw an imaginary line, as if to say, “Okay, that’s enough change for me. I don’t do those BIG sins anymore, so these “little” things can’t matter that much.

Just because they are subtle, and no one else may be aware of the specifics, Jesus knows, and He will not ignore the matter. Here is what He thinks about it:

James 4

⁴ *Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.*

⁷ *So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* ⁸ *Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.*

¹⁰ **Humble yourselves** before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

Notice, we have now come full circle, back to “humbling ourselves.” The order of these elements is not important, but that they are all present is—fasting, praying, worshiping, repenting.

THEN

If-then. It is a simple premise of conditional logic.

The former is the necessary condition of what follows. When the former is present, the latter always follows.

The former is the human part; what follows is divine.

Hear From Heaven

God’s promise to hear (all the way from Heaven) is no small gift!

Psalm 116

¹ *I love the Lord because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy.*

² *Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!*

Everyone who has prayed knows what it is like to feel as though you are only talking with yourself (meaning, no one else is listening!). But God is listening—always—only His response is conditional.

Are you asking humbly?

Are you asking for God’s glory?

The world teaches us to make affirmations, because the world has no one to pray to (since they do not acknowledge God). Jesus teaches us to talk to God, because He is listening.

He is listening for the voice of the ones who humble themselves and repent, worshipping and calling on His name.

Forgive Their Sin

Who does not need forgiveness? Who has done nothing in their lifetime for which they are ashamed? Even little children are familiar with shame, and need God’s forgiveness. Affirmations cannot take the place of forgiveness. But forgiveness requires repentance (affirmations do not).

And who can forgive sin but God? But how can we be sure that God *will* forgive our sins? Well, here's a story to assure us.

Mark 2:1-12 (MSG)

After a few days, Jesus returned to Capernaum, and word got around that he was back home. A crowd gathered, jamming the entrance so no one could get in or out. He was teaching the Word. They brought a paraplegic to him, carried by four men. When they weren't able to get in because of the crowd, they removed part of the roof and lowered the paraplegic on his stretcher. Impressed by their bold belief, Jesus said to the paraplegic, "Son, I forgive your sins."

Some religion scholars sitting there started whispering among themselves, "He can't talk that way! That's blasphemy! God and only God can forgive sins."

*Jesus knew right away what they were thinking, and said, "Why are you so skeptical? Which is simpler: to say to the paraplegic, 'I forgive your sins,' or say, 'Get up, take your stretcher, and start walking'? Well, **just so it's clear that I'm the Son of Man and authorized to do either, or both...**" (he looked now at the paraplegic), "Get up. Pick up your stretcher and go home." And the man did it—got up, grabbed his stretcher, and walked out, with everyone there watching him. They rubbed their eyes, incredulous—and then praised God, saying, "We've never seen anything like this!"*

Jesus Christ has been authorized by God to forgive our sins, having paid for them all by His death on the cross.

But His forgiveness is conditional. He forgives those who humble themselves and repent, worshipping and calling on His name.

And His continuing forgiveness is also conditional. He continues to forgive those who pay it forward, forgiving those people who have hurt and offended them.

Is there any joy or peace to compare with the certainty that your sins have been forgiven and your guilt washed away?!?

Heal Their Land

Healing and restoration signify the renewal and rebuilding of what had been broken or lost. It is the grace of God that takes our wasted years and turns them to productive gifts of ministry.

Has God shut up the heavens so that no rain fell on your life? Or, have you been visited by a devourer, or by a plague? Don't think it strange.

The very promise that God made to Solomon that night—the promise He makes to all of His people—assumes from the start various difficulties and trials that result in certain heartache and loss. We get neither more nor less than others in the world, but the chal-

lenges in a Christian's life hold a promise that the world does not enjoy: healing and restoration.

It is conditional (based on our response), but it is backed by all the resources of heaven.

How do you respond to hardship?

Do you *humble* yourself? Or, do you gripe and fight against it, as though you were deserving and entitled to something better?

How do you respond to hardship?

Do you *pray* to God for wisdom and help? Or, do you battle it on your own, with affirmations and determination? Exhausting, isn't it?

How do you respond to hardship?

Do you *worship* the Lord? Or, do you complain? How different would things be if you really rested in His goodness and grace, and were grateful?

How do you respond to hardship?

Do you *repent* of your attitudes and behaviors that have contributed to the trouble? Or, do you see only how others have wronged you, misjudged you, and used you?

We have an AMAZING promise from God! It is conditional, but it is no less amazing.

If you're serious about your faith...

If you're serious about discipleship to Christ...

If you're serious about spiritual growth...

If you're serious about honoring God...

If you're serious about revival...

You'll pay close *attention* to 2 Chronicles 7:14. You'll make it your aim to *practice* 2 Chronicles 7:14.

To assist, I want to present you with a simple guide to what we call 7:14 Prayer. Use it every day this month, and genuine revival will surely visit your heart and home. (Note: If you would like a copy of this prayer guide bookmark, simply contact us and request a copy.)