

Engage in Prayer
2 Chronicles 7:14
Rev. Brian Bill
September 17-18, 2016

Call to Worship

Our preaching passage today is found in 2 Chronicles 7:14. As a call to worship I'd like to read the first three verses of this chapter. The context is King Solomon praying after finishing the construction of the Temple.

Please stand and close your eyes: *“As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. ² And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD’s house. ³ When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, ‘For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.’”*

We're praying that the glory of God will fill this place today! Our service will have a different feel to it as we'll engage in the elements of praying, praising and preaching. Five different individuals will be leading us in intercession. We'll begin by singing "The Lord's Prayer" and then Jim Koehler, our deacon chairman, will lead us in reading the Lord's Prayer. Jim will then use these words as a paradigm for his prayer.

Song: "The Lord's Prayer"

Lord's Prayer: On Screen

Prayer: Jim Koehler

Song: "Always"

Prayer: Rylie Delay (Saturday), Gabe Rogers (8:00), Adrianna Holtam (10:45)

Prayer: Beth Bill (families and prayer for offering)

Offertory: "From the Inside Out"

Sermon

The cry of our hearts is to bring you praise, Lord. You are everlasting and never ending and your glory is above all. We now give you complete control. May justice and grace become our embrace. Do your work on the inside and then let it flow to the outside as we continue in our worship through this time of preaching. In Jesus's Name. So be it.

- The word “engage” means, “to get and keep someone’s attention and interest, to occupy, attract, or become involved in.” It can also mean to start fighting against an opponent.
- The word “disengage” refers to releasing or detaching oneself; to withdraw through complacency, to become bored and disinterested.

Team, now more than ever we must not be spiritual slackers! It’s time for us to awaken, to engage and to occupy! Pastor Brown did a super job last weekend challenging us to *prepare, pray* and be *purified* in light of the Lord’s return. Romans 13:11-12 says, “...***the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.***”

We’re beginning a brand new series this weekend called, *Engage*. Today our focus is on *Engaging in Prayer*. Next week will be *Engaging in Groups* from Galatians 6, followed by *Engaging with the Ordinances* as we consider what the Bible says about baptism and communion.

And I can’t wait for our Missions Festival on October 8-9! Our Go Team Partners to inner-city Fresno, Manuel and Kim Contreras will help us learn how to *Engage Glocally*. Manuel, a former gang member, will be speaking on “Cultivating Courage” at our Man Up Breakfast on Saturday, October 8th. As a next step from our festival, you’ll have the opportunity to serve in one of five different places on Saturday, October 15 – Youth Hope, Pregnancy Resources, World Relief, Safe Families or 180 Ministries.

Speaking of 180, Moody Radio (another Go Team Partner), will be doing a live remote in our lobby this Friday from 6:00 to 9:00 a.m. to encourage people to drop off socks for children living on the west end of Davenport. Stop by and say hello...and bring some socks with you (clean ones).

After *Engaging Glocally*, we’ll *Engage with our Families, Engage with the Holy Spirit, Engage with the Reformation, Engage as Citizens* the weekend before the election, *Engage with the Persecuted* and conclude our series by *Engaging with Thankfulness* the weekend before Thanksgiving.

Putting the Text in Context

Please turn to 2 Chronicles 7:14. We’re going to learn this truth: *If we follow God’s plan, then we will receive His promises*. This verse is often quoted in reference to the need for revival in America. Without a doubt it is the best known and most loved verse in all of Chronicles – in fact, it may be the only verse we know from this book! As we grapple with this section of God’s Word, let’s keep the context in mind so that we interpret and apply it accurately.

The second book of Chronicles records the construction of the temple under the direction of King Solomon. In chapter 6, Solomon knelt, spread his hands toward heaven, and broke out into an amazing prayer of dedication.

That had to be some kind of prayer! Can you imagine fire coming down from heaven and the glory of the Lord filling the temple? I love how the pastors were out of a job because God showed up in such a mighty way!

Don't miss that in this amazing display of God's power and glory, the people declared, ***"He is good; His love endures forever."*** This phrase is found five times in 2 Chronicles.

After offering a huge sacrifice, Solomon and all the people dedicated the temple to God. Everyone stood up, the priests took their positions, and the Levites gathered their instruments. After celebrating and praising God for over two weeks, 2 Chronicles 7:10 says that the people went back to their homes joyful and glad in heart.

The Lord then appeared to Solomon and said, ***"If 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 and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*** By the way, during Ronald Reagan's two inaugurations, the Bible he used was open to this passage.

God's People

The word ***"If"*** introduces a conditional clause: *If we follow God's plan, then we will receive His promises.* The next phrase identifies whom He is addressing: ***"my people, who are called by my name."*** This literally means, *"Upon whom my name is called."* This passage was addressed initially to the nation of Israel.

Contrary to how we may view ourselves as Americans, we are not God's chosen nation. Having said that, this verse certainly has application to us because 2 Timothy 3:16 says, ***"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."*** Romans 15:4: ***"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."*** The Old Testament is given to encourage us, to give us examples (both good and bad) and to exhort us.

In essence, this verse is calling for revival. As far as I've been able to count, 16 revivals are recorded in Scripture and 5 of the 7 churches listed in Revelation 2-3 are challenged to repent and return to the Lord. Here's one example from Revelation 3:2-3: ***"Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you."***

God knows that His people can lose their first love, that we can get soft in our spirituality, and that we can disengage from what He deems most important. The psalmist, in Psalms 85:6 earnestly requests revival: ***"Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?"*** In Habakkuk 3:2, the prophet prays, ***"Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known..."***

I like what the outstanding evangelist Billy Sunday once said, *“A revival does two things. First, it returns the Church from her backsliding and second, it causes the conversion of men and women; and it always includes the conviction of sin on the part of the Church.”*

Revival is not something to schedule on a church calendar, and it’s not really for lost people. *Biblical revival comes to God’s people who determine to follow God’s plan so that they can receive God’s promises.* Once we are revived and awakened, the overflow will spill into the lives of others.

BTW, I found it fascinating that one of our college students posted this on Facebook Thursday: *“You all be ready, I have a good gut feeling about the month of October...the start of a revival is coming soon.”* I say September would be great!

This verse gives us 4 conditions to follow. I’m going to state each one as a problem and couple it with a positive principle.

Following God’s Plan

1. The Problem of Pride – Be Dependent. The first condition is to *“humble ourselves.”* The root of the word humility comes from “humus,” meaning dirt or soil. It has the idea of *“bending the knee and neck in deference to another.”* James 4:10 says, **“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”** I heard someone put it like this: *“Humble yourself before the Lord...or He’ll do it for you.”*

I’ve heard my friend Ray Pritchard repeat a certain phrase countless times and have found it extremely helpful. He calls it the first law of the spiritual life: *“He is God and we are not.”*

This is the right place to start because we know that God does not hear the prayers of the proud. James 4:6 says, **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** Many of us overestimate our goodness and underestimate the pervasiveness of sin in our lives. If the truth were known, many of us think our sins don’t smell as bad as other people’s as we look down on those who sin differently than we do.

D.L. Moody once said, *“God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves.”*

Could I invite you to close your eyes as I read Isaiah 66:2? **“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”** Take some time right now to confess any pride and humble yourself. See yourself as lowly and desperate and see God as majestic and mighty.

2. The Problem of Prayerlessness – Be Disciplined. After humbling ourselves, we are commanded to *“pray.”* This means, *“to intercede”* and was the most common Hebrew word used to describe the general act of prayer, often employed when someone was in distress.

On Thursday I met with about 70 evangelical pastors and ministry leaders for our monthly Quad Cities Association of Evangelicals gathering. Pastor Melvin Grimes gave a very moving message

on how we can experience the presence, power and purpose of God when we pray. We then cried out for revival in the QCA and for each other.

I'm thrilled that Pastor Kyle is teaching 20 junior highers about prayer this weekend at their retreat. He'll be doing the same with the senior highers in November. Last week I was a chaperone for the Quad Cities Christian School retreat and heard students praying for revival and interceding for the persecuted church. See You at the Pole, where students gather around their flag pole for prayer, will be held on September 28th. We have a prayer time here on Tuesday nights and our Sunday Night services are focused on intercession as well. This Friday night we're hosting a nationwide prayer simulcast for women called, "CryOut!" to ask God to intervene in our nation.

Brothers and sisters, if we want revival then we must humble ourselves and pray. *If we want to receive God's promises then we need to follow God's plan.*

Let's be dependent and disciplined. That leads to the third principle...

3. The Problem of Priorities – Be Devoted. To "*seek God's face*" was used to describe someone searching earnestly and with great diligence. When you seek something of value, you rearrange your schedule and priorities until you find it.

Jeremiah 29:13 says that when we seek God with our whole heart, we *will* find Him. We're called to make God our primary focus and first priority. Revival does not come to those who seek revival but to those who seek God.

Would you notice we're not to seek God's hand but rather His face? Too many of us want what God can give us when He wants us to seek Him for who He is. Psalm 27:4 says, "***One thing have I asked of the Lord...to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.***"

In the Bible, this phrase is used of someone desiring an audience with a prince or with God Himself. This is how it is used in Psalm 27:8: "***My heart says of you, 'Seek His face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek.***" The idea is that we align ourselves with His will and His ways.

Are you rearranging your priorities so that you can come into His presence? As God's people we are to follow God's plan as we *dependently* humble ourselves, as we *discipline* ourselves to pray, and as we *devotedly* seek God's face. There's one more condition – we're to be *different*.

4. The Problem of Presumption – Be Different. We're called to "*turn from our wicked ways.*" The word "*turn*" is used over 1,000 times in the Bible! The order here is significant. As we humble ourselves and pray and seek God with all that we have, our hunger will be satisfied by the sight of God's face and we will no longer want to hold on to those things that grieve God.

The idea is to change the direction in which our heart is inclined. King Josiah is a good model in 2 Kings 23:25: "***Josiah turned to the Lord with all his heart and soul and might!***"

Psalm 66:18 is a powerful verse: ***“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”*** There’s really no way to soften the command to turn from our wicked ways. God accepts only one response to sin, not rationalizing, not excusing, and not comparing ourselves to others. He demands that ***“we turn from our wicked ways.”*** Proverbs 28:13: ***“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find mercy.”***

Have you been playing around with sin? Repent right now. Have you been withholding forgiveness from someone? Stop acting as their judge and free them from ever paying you back. Do you have some dark secrets that you’ve been trying to hide from God and your loved ones? Bring them into the light. Joshua 24:14: ***“Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped...and serve the Lord.”*** Admit your sin and then abandon it.

Receive God’s Promises

When God’s people follow God’s plan they will receive God’s promises. Let’s look briefly at the promises that come after the word, ***“then.”*** If God’s people do these 4 things, *then* He will do these three things.

1. God will hear. When we pray the way God directs us to pray, He promises to hear our prayers. Isaiah 65:24: ***“Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.”***

2. God will help. The second promise is that God will forgive our sins. To forgive means to “send away” or “to let go.” Psalm 103:12 says, ***“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”***

3. God will heal. The last promise has to do with national blessing for the nation of Israel. When God’s people committed to God’s plan, God sent healing to their land. During the reign of King Ahab the land experienced a bad famine, and only in response to the prayers of Elijah did the rains come. The word, “heal” means *“to repair, to restore, to stitch back together.”*

While this particular promise is to the nation of Israel, I see an application for us today. Many of us are in need of repair and restoration. We long for healing of our emotions, our spirits, and our bodies. Our country is certainly in need of healing.

Revival always starts among God’s redeemed people. It goes from the *Christian* to the *Church* to the *Community* to the *County* to the *Country* and then to the *Continents*. Are you willing for it to start with you? If so, *be dependent* by being humble, *be disciplined* in prayer, *be devoted* by seeking God’s face, and *be different* by turning from your wicked ways.

This passage ultimately points us to Jesus Christ. Solomon was the son of David but Jesus Christ is sitting on the throne of David right now. Solomon slaughtered thousands of animals in sacrifice but Jesus Christ is the final sacrifice. If you have not yet been saved, cry out to Him right now.

I'm thrilled that God has been bringing a number of Hispanics to Edgewood. In light of that I've asked Alex Diaz, a new member, to pray in Spanish for revival. He'll be followed by David Cannon, who will also be praying for revival.

Prayer for Revival in Spanish – Alejandro Diaz

Prayer for Revival in English – David Cannon

Closing Song: “Heal our Land”

Receive this benediction from Ephesians 3:20-21: *“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”*