

BFF276 If My People, Pray

For followers of Jesus, the ball is in our court. “If My people who are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face.” (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Let’s pray about praying.

Father, thank You for being near to us when we call. Thank You for encouraging us to pray. Thank You for encouraging us to keep our eyes up and believing, even when we can’t see things going the way we’d like to see them, help us to have faith. Help us to have some divine chutzpah, and I pray that you’ll help me today and help Scott and I to put together a podcast that’s encouraging to those that are listening, and give us that little oomph, that little exhortation, perhaps, to continue, to keep up the good work. In Jesus’ name, amen.

For the past year, as we have now been in this ridiculous state of COVID I keep thinking about 2 Chronicles 7, for two reasons. The first one is, the thirteenth verse which we very rarely read in conjunction with the fourteenth verse, at least in my experience. “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain” – God is speaking to Solomon – “Or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people” – there it is. Pestilence.

Perhaps God is behind this pestilence. I don’t know. I do know that as a country, we deserve a lot worse. If there was just a hundred abortions, to me that would be enough to call down fire from heaven. But the numbers are staggering. They’re behind my ability to comprehend them. I can’t even let myself think about murdering children too much because it’s overwhelming to me, the amount of blood and cruelty, and I can’t believe that we would treat the most vulnerable people this way just so that we can continue in the selfish pleasure of fornication and sin.

It’s mind-boggling to me, and I hope that it will always continue to be mind-boggling, and I hope I never become hardened to it. It’s abominable. But if this pestilence is a beginning of judgment, then – and here’s the thing that you have to get and hear, there’s two words in this whole prayer that we need to remember. “If” and “then.” “If” is the requirements. “Then” is what God will do.

“If My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways” – four things, humble themselves, pray, seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways – “then,” God says, “I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

This prayer has been reverberating in my heart now for some time, and I don’t know if I’ve spoken on it before, but it’s certainly been going over and over in my heart when I am praying for our country, that God will help us. And when I say “us,” that’s the second thing that’s encouraging to me about this prayer is that it’s addressed to “My people.”

I don't expect the whole United States to keep the National Day of Prayer. I don't expect everybody in this country to seek God. But I am hoping that "My people," those who are called by "My name," those people that have named the name of Jesus, those who are Christ-followers, Christians, believers, whatever you want to call yourself - I hope that we will take the responsibility, because this prayer is directed to us. It is not directed to the whole nation. "If My people who are called by My name."

Of course, contextually, it was addressed to the children of Israel, who were known to be followers of Jehovah. But for today, it's simply saying, "If My people who are called by My name" - the ball's in our court. We have a wonderful responsibility/opportunity to humble ourselves, pray, seek God's face, and turn from our wicked ways. I'm not looking at my neighbors. I'm not expecting that from them. I am expecting these from me.

Based on this passage we're going to talk about what does it mean to pray? What does it mean to "seek My face" and turn from our wicked ways? It's not that tricky of a prayer, really. I think the fact that you're even praying is a measure of humility. But perhaps He is calling for fasting. If God calls for it, God help us to follow through and do it.

And pray. You know, when I hear those words, you know what I think of? I think of the Lord's Prayer. I have prayed the Lord's Prayer more in the last six or eight months, I think, than I have in years. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." That's what I'm praying for over and over.

"Our Father in Heaven." I love passages like Deuteronomy, where it says that "the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other." That's Deuteronomy 4:39. "Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other." God rules not only in the heavens, but God also rules on earth by faith.

That's part of our job to pray that prayer. When I think about praying, the first thing that pops into my mind when I want to pray is to pray the Lord's Prayer and pray for God's will to be done on earth, just as it is in heaven.

"Seek My face." In the Hebrew, "seek My face" and "come into His presence" are identical. Same Hebrew words translated differently based on the context. "Seek My face." "Come into His presence." I'm hoping by the time this podcast is heard that that book will be in print, which I have just written, called "Come into His Presence" based on Psalm 100, I've talked about on this podcast. "Come into His presence with singing, enter into His courts with praise, give thanks unto Him, bless His name." When I apply that order from Psalm 100, I've been able to come into His presence. I've been able to seek His face. It's another piece of this prayer.

“Turn from their wicked ways.” Each need to be repentant. Repentance is a lifestyle. It’s lifelong. It’s not just one time when we walk down the aisle to receive Christ. We need to continue to turn and walk in the light, as He is in the light. And then we have these incredible promises that God will hear, forgive, and heal. Phew!

I’m just going to read some Scriptures now to encourage us and the first is from Matthew 18. “If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in My name” – there it is again, “My name” – “there am I among them.”

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” One of the prayers that I want to pray – and I’m going to pray before we’re done today – is, pray for God’s people to accept the mantle that God has placed on them. And I’m going to read this passage from Revelation 1 that explains that a little bit more.

This is John the Apostle speaking in the Spirit. He says, “Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.”

Scott, you and I have been made priests to God Himself, Who has loved us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and we’re not sitting in the back row of the congregation. We’re right up front. We’re front-row Christians now. And He says, “I want you to be a priest.” Priests pray.

Priests convey God to man, and they convey man’s requests to God. Priests are conduits, you might say, between earth and heaven, and that’s why we’re praying for God’s will to be done in heaven, that’s why we’re believing for the kingdom of God to come, “Thy kingdom come,” because we’re the links. We’re the conduits. We’re priests.

I feel like I’ve been tempted, personally, to be lethargic, to be isolated, to stare at screens – maybe a little one in my hand, maybe a big one on the wall of my basement. But, I don’t know about you, but I feel this pressure to be lethargic and just go with the flow. This morning, two passages came to me as I was preparing for this session. Romans 13 says, “You know the time, that 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. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

May God help us to wake from sleep, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The second passage that came to me as I was walking through my room this morning, “He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to

pray and not to faint.” I’m not dumb. I’m not unaware of what’s happening in the halls of power in our country, and it’s enough to make me faint. Naturally speaking, it’s enough to be discouraged. But I’m not going to be discouraged. I’m going to pray, I’m not going to faint, I’m going to wake from sleep, by God’s grace, I’m going to use God’s – what do you call it – His anointing as a priest, and I’m going to pray for our country.

I have to read one more passage before we pray, and it’s found in Ephesians 6, and I feel like I have to give you a little bit of Greek background here. Four times in this passage, the word “stand” or a form of “stand” is mentioned, and I want you to think for a second about the 12 spies that went to the land of Israel, sent by Moses, one spy for each tribe. They went into the land, and they came out, and two people stood by God, and the rest of them caved.

Ten of the spies saw the battle before them as overwhelming, all they could do was focus on the giants. They didn’t focus on God, and they didn’t stand. They quavered, and they fell. And there’s something about that word “stand.” It’s the same root word that’s found in James 4, where it says, “Resist the devil, and he will flee.” The same root word for “resist” is the same root word for “stand.”

Thus this standing is not just standing with your hands in your pocket and your legs crossed and you’re leaning up against the wall on the corner. This is an active word. This is a position of standing that I think of when Joshua was about to slay the mighty kings, and his own people were intimidated. Even when the kings were taken into captivity, they were intimidated by these kings, and he says, “I want you to go put your foot on their neck, because I want you to see that God is greater than these kings.”

When I think of that posture of standing, I’m thinking of Ephesians 6, where it says, “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.” Amen. “Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.” In the next verse, he says, “Stand therefore.”

I don’t want to overstate it, but there’s something about Paul’s set of soul there that we’re not of the ten spies that are quavering. We’re standing with Joshua, we’re standing with Caleb, we’re standing with Jesus, we’re standing as priests. In my morning Bible reading this morning, it was about the priests who stood in the Jordan River while the children of Israel walked through on dry ground, took Jericho. I love this picture of the priests who were standing in that Jordan River during spring rains, when it was overflowing the banks, when it was an overwhelming amount of water coming down that Jordan River, and these priests stood, and because they stood, the

children of Israel were able to come through. I'm inspired. Do you want to respond, or do you want me to just jump in and pray?

Scott: I could run a couple different directions with this, because I feel like prayer, at least in my life, has been... there have been seasons where I know I need to pray more, but there's the guilt of not praying enough, and that doesn't ever really help me much. I mean, I have a friend who is often the person in the prayer room at conferences, and she says if you want some peace and quiet at a Christian conference, just go to the prayer room. There's never anyone there. And like, wow, that is convicting, but it also just lays guilt on me. But I found, at least I used to think, having grown up in a tradition that did a lot of prayers that were just written and rote and you kind of did them every week and you didn't really even think about them, I used to think that was just meaningless. And it is if you don't, well, it's close to meaningless if you don't feel and of it and don't think about it. But I've found in recent years that having a structure helps me a lot. There are a couple of prayers that I do on a routine now that I use as a jumping off point, and they are written out, but I use them to expand from there, and it stirs my heart to pray more. And I think that's extremely helpful, and I was just going to ask you, what's helpful for you to actually pray?

Steve: Today's Tuesday. Tonight, I'm going to be part of an online prayer group, a wonderful group of people that God has brought back together again after many, many years apart, who are spread across the country, and we pray. Often before I pray, I appeal to the Holy Spirit to help me to pray, because it says in Romans 8, we don't know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes for us. So I lean on the Holy Spirit, number one.

Number two, as you know, I spend a lot of time in God's Word. I just do. Not only do I read - this morning I read John 14 New Testament, I read Joshua 1-3 Old Testament, then I prepared for this study, I've got a couple pages of Scriptures I've gone over. Romans 10 says that Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word of Christ, and the more I spend time in God's Word, the more faith I have.

I didn't quote it this morning, but I think of how bad America is, and I'm tempted to think I should go hide in a mountain and wait for Jesus to come back. But the other side of me remembers the reign of Manasseh, when it says the streets ran with blood. Yet God, after Manasseh, sent Josiah, and he turned them back to Him. I also recall how bad London was when God began to work through the Wesleys and the Whitefields and He turned that country back to Himself.

History encourages me to pray. I also know that every knee is going to bow and every tongue is going to confess that Jesus is Lord. When I stay saturated in the truth, I am storing up golden oil from His Word. I am also leaning on the Holy Spirit. When it is

time to pray I apply Psalm 81, which says, “Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.” I just pray. We’ve talked about prayer, now let’s do it.

Father, in Jesus’ name, I pray for our country. I pray for our country of over 300 million individuals, but probably closer, it should be, to 350 million if we’d all been allowed to be born. And I pray that You will heal our land and forgive our sin. I pray that You will turn our leaders back to Jesus. I pray that You will turn people in positions of authority back to Jesus.

I also recognize that flesh and blood is not our ultimate enemy. And so I pray, in Jesus’ name, that You will rebuke the evil one, deliver us from evil, as the Lord’s Prayer says. I resist him in Jesus’ name. I bind him in Jesus’ name. And I pray that You will answer that prayer and that You will bind him from heaven. And I pray for Your kingdom to come and Your will to be done on earth, just as it is in heaven.

I pray that You will revive Your people. Awaken us, quicken us. Deliver us from lethargy. Deliver us from slothfulness. Deliver us from condemnation. Deliver us from being beat up and accused by the enemy. I pray that You will encourage Your people to pray, that You’ll stir us to pray. I pray that You will pour out Your good Spirit on our country.

We know, ultimately, that Your kingdom is going to come on this earth, just as it is in heaven, and that every knee is going to bow, and every tongue is going to confess that You are Lord. If judgments are a part of that, so be it. And if You have to shake us until You bring us to our knees, so be it. But I pray that You will help us to turn to Jesus in a fresh way today and that You will forgive our sin, heal our land, and help us to see You afresh. In Jesus’ name, amen.