

**Southport Presbyterian Church**  
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**Praying for America**  
**2 Chronicles 7:11-14**

**2 Chronicles 7:11-14:** <sup>11</sup>“When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace, <sup>12</sup> the LORD appeared to him at night and said:

“I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.

<sup>13</sup>“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, <sup>14</sup> 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.” (2 Chronicles 7:11-14, NIV)

Our nation is clearly in the midst of a number of crises, many of which have moral and spiritual underpinnings. So how do we as Christians respond to these issues?

By praying for our nation for God to heal and renew it.

Our text for today gives us guidelines on asking God for this renewal. This verse is often used for a National Day of Prayer. It is a verse that calls upon God’s people to pray so healing may come to their land. The context of 2 Chronicles 7 talks about drought, locusts, and plagues coming upon Israel because they have turned from God. God promises, however, in verse 14 that: **“...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, and then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”** (2 Chronicles 7:14, NIV)

What we have in our land today are not so much physical plagues as much as spiritual plagues as evidenced by the moral and ethical failures in major corporations, government, in fact, in almost all areas of life. We need a heart transformation in our land—a transformation that only God can do when people open their hearts to Him.

**2 Chronicles 7:14** has a rich amount of topics we could cover concerning spiritual renewal, but there are three points which we are going to focus on today.

The first of these areas concerns Christians humbling themselves. Healing of our land starts with us. **“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves... and turn from their wicked ways...”** (2 Chronicles 7:14, NIV) It takes humility to stop and examine ourselves, our lives, before God.

This humble spirit of self-examination is best seen in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector which Jesus told in **Luke 18:10-14:** **“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like all other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’**

**“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me a sinner.’**

**“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** (Luke 18:10-14, NIV)

Spiritual pride like that of the Pharisee sees no wrong, no sin, in themselves. Humility - a humble spirit - like that of the tax collector recognizes their sinfulness, their short-comings, and seeks God's forgiveness. That's what God is calling His people to do - to humble themselves and turn to Him. So what are some ways we need to change, to repent of, when we humbly look at ourselves?

One area we need to look at is how the church in America is not so different from the rest of the culture. Just read the words and tone of some public opinion letters in the paper, and you see we are not much different than our culture in what we say and how we say it.

Often surveys reveal that in many areas such as television viewing habits, etc., we are more like the culture than different from it. Our conduct and behavior isn't much different from the people around us. For the number of evangelical Christians in the U.S. - anywhere from 70-80 million plus or minus - you don't see a correspondingly significant influence or impact on US culture or moral climate.

Part of this problem, I believe, stems from the kind of discipleship we do in America - which focuses more on correct doctrine or belief and Bible memory verses which is important but is done to the exclusion of applying what is learned in the Bible in how we are to behave and live Christ-honoring lives. Discipleship in America is often a journey of the head and not a journey of the heart and mind together. We need to humble ourselves and repent of this.

Another area that the church in America needs to look at very seriously is its unity. When I travel in other countries, I see much more unity among evangelical Christians than I do in the U.S. In many nations evangelicals are a minority, and they can't afford to be divided, especially when facing the spiritual challenges of the nation they live in, especially if they live in a nation that persecutes them.

Some evangelical Christians in America criticize other evangelical Christians over worship styles, evangelism methods, secondary points of theology over which there are, have been, and probably always will be, legitimate differences just as there have been for hundreds of years on these matters.

But here we are in this nation thinking we have the luxury of criticizing and being divisive on these and other issues when the spiritual issues we face concerning our culture are looming larger and larger such as growing secularism and the increased presence and acceptance of Islam in the U.S.

Perhaps we need to listen afresh to Jesus' words in John 13:34-35 when he said: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35, NIV).

Please note that Jesus did not say here that the mark of a Christian would be found in agreement on all things. No, it would be found in love for one another - which means loving each other in spite of legitimate disagreements on issues.

He also said in **John 17:22-23**: "**I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**" (John 17:22-23, NIV)

Indeed, as Francis Schaeffer says in his book, The Mark of a Christian: "The world has a right to question whether I am a Christian. And more than that, let me say it again, if I am not willing to do this very simple thing [of loving a fellow Christian], the world has a right to question whether Jesus was sent from God and whether Christianity is true." (Francis A. Schaeffer, The Mark of A Christian, pg. 22)

Perhaps if evangelical Christians humbled themselves, sought to live lives that are different from our culture, and sought unity rather than division, we might see a powerful movement of God in our nation.

American Christians need to humble themselves and turn from their ways to the ways of God.

A second step toward bringing renewal involves God's people not only humbling themselves but also to "pray and seek my [God's] face..."

Indeed, the words "seek my face" in **2 Chronicles 7:14** are very important "... the face of a person" in the Bible "became synonymous with" the person's presence. It also conveyed intimacy when used in the context of phrases such as "face to face." (The New Bible Dictionary, pg. 410)

So in **2 Chronicles 7:14** God is calling on His people to seek His face, to meet Him face to face, to be intimate with Him in prayer. He wants us to share ourselves and our deepest longings, the deepest part of ourselves with Him and also allow God to be intimate with us as well.

Intimacy with God, I believe, is key in the process of renewal and can often be a stumbling block to a powerful movement of God if it is absent. Why? Because many times we Christians are fearful of intimacy with God. We keep our feelings and thoughts to ourselves, never sharing deeply or openly with God even though He knows our thoughts and feelings any how. Some of us are afraid to hear God's voice for fear of what He might say to us. This is a stereotype of God. He's not out to get us. He's not out to nail us to the wall but to nail our sins to the cross. Even if He has words of correction, they will be spoken in truth, love, and grace.

God desires that we seek His face, to seek intimate fellowship with Him, for Him to speak our name, to encourage us and guide us and lovingly correct us.

Oswald Chambers wrote on intimacy with God. He said: "It is possible to know all about doctrine and yet not know Jesus. The soul is in-danger when knowledge of doctrine out steps intimate touch with Jesus. Why was Mary [Magdalene] weeping? [at the empty tomb of Jesus on that first Easter morning]? Doctrine was no more to Mary than the grass under her feet. Any Pharisee could have made a fool of Mary doctrinally, but one thing they could not ridicule out of her was the fact that Jesus had cast seven demons out of her; yet His blessings were nothing in comparison to Himself. Mary "saw [the resurrected] Jesus standing and knew not [did not know] that it was Jesus...;" [until she heard His voice call her name "Mary."] immediately [when] she heard the voice, she knew she had a past history with the One who spoke. [and she replied] 'Master!' ...

"Have I a personal history with Jesus Christ? The one sign of discipleship is intimate connection with Him, knowledge of Jesus Christ which nothing can shake." (Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, pg. 229)

We need to seek God's face and have an intimate relationship with Him.

Finally, what then can and should we pray for so that God will forgive and heal our land?

First, we can pray for a change in America's moral climate - that once again we hold to absolute truth absolutes in morality. This is imperative for our souls. It is imperative even for the economic well being of our nation. The loss of absolutes affects not only how we live personally - our own personal morality - but also how we live corporately and economically. For example, Robert Morrison of the Family research Council recently wrote in the Indianapolis Star: "When fathers don't pay for their own children's upbringing, increasingly the uncle pays, Uncle Sam... When there's a dad in the home who acts as a father should, the children of blacks, whites, Asians and Hispanics compete readily in school. . .

"Bill Bennett poignantly called the breakdown of the family 'the broken hearth.' Millions of these broken hearths are breaking state and federal budgets" (Robert Morrison, "Daniels blind to morality's link to prosperity." Indianapolis Star, June 27, 2010, p. 12)

The loss of moral bearings in many corporations two years ago rocked our stock market and our economy. Does it take an economic shake up to wake us up that truth, that morality, matters in all dimensions of our life? Chuck Colson has written: "A decade ago, the eminent theologian Michael Novak argued that Western... democracy is like a three-legged stool. Political freedom is the first leg, economic freedom the second and moral responsibility the third. Weaken any leg, and the stool topples." (Charles Colson, "The Wages of Secularism", Christianity Today, June 10, 2002, pg. 64)

Secularism which believes in a godless, material, moral-free universe is behind this lack of morality as well as being behind attempts to remove God from the Pledge of Allegiance and from other public presence and discussion. We need to pray that God will turn the tide regarding secularism in our nation.

Second, we also need to pray concerning the increased presence and even sympathy towards Islam in our nation. Islam is growing fast in the U.S. But in addition to its presence, Islam is increasingly getting a sympathetic hearing in the media and on college campuses.

We need to pray that Christians, while opposing the religion of Islam itself, will still reach out in Christian love to the people who follow it. In dealing with Islam we need to make a distinction between the religion itself and the people who follow it, remembering what Paul said about the difference between people and the spiritual powers that use them. He said in **Ephesians 6:12**: **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** (Ephesians 6:12, NIV)

Finally, we must also pray for our nation’s spiritual well-being as a whole. That people will turn to God Himself and trust Him - and not anything else for our sense of security.

This means we need to pray that the church in America has the same passion and concern for our nation as Christians do in other lands who are even persecuted by their countries. Listen to this story of Iranian Christians from earlier this year, by Tom White of The Voice of the Martyrs: “Earlier this year my wife, Ofelia, and I were able to talk to a group of Iranian Christians. These young adults sitting together on the carpet were new Christians, converts from Islam. They welcomed us warmly, and we were filled with joy as we watched them singing, clapping and praying for each other.

“During our meeting, thousands of Iranians outside on the streets were protesting the harsh laws and lack of freedoms in the country. Blood ran in the streets,...

“... here were these new Christians clustered together in an apartment, living in the middle of such a tumultuous time politically, socially and spiritually. I was eager to ask them what they considered critical in their lives, what really motivated them and made them tick.

“When they stopped singing, Ofelia and I asked them some questions. ‘What does it mean for you to win?’ I asked. ‘I mean to win in life, what is a win?’ It looked like many of their friends out on the street were losing.

“Smiling, the entire group, in a burst of sound, shouted one word – “SALVATION! ...”

“Although converts to Christianity in Iran are sometimes beaten, raped or imprisoned, these believers continue to introduce their families and friends to the marvelous Kingdom of Light, salvation from an eternal hell of darkness. They know that the way to transform their beautiful nation is for them and their families and friends (and *their* friends) to become new creatures in Jesus Christ.” (Take Up Your Cross, by Tom White, The Voice of the Martyrs, April 2010, p. 2)

That is also what America needs to be transformed - for our family and friends to become new creatures in Jesus Christ.

These are only a few of the needs for prayer for our nation and for us. We can all think of more as we pray.

But in all this, we are being called by God to intercede for our nation - to pray on their behalf - much like Moses interceded and prayed for the people of Israel in Exodus 32 when they were displeasing God.

This all may seem overwhelming and extremely challenging. But our nation and our churches need to be revived and renewed by God for the sake of the souls of lost people, not only in our own country but in other parts of the world as well.

But we have hope. You see, the words of **2 Chronicles 7:14** are a promise from God that when His people humble themselves, pray, seek His face and repent, He will forgive and heal their land. That’s a promise from God. He will do it if we do our part. Perhaps this brief story from 1800s will inspire us to have hope and to pray for our nation and for the church in America. During the 1800s the British Empire was involved in the slave trade. Many Christians in Britain opposed the slave trade and fought against it.

“William Wilberforce was a Christian member of Parliament who fought to abolish slavery in the British Empire. During a crucial moment in that campaign he said that his hope for Britain depended “not so much on her navies and armies, nor on the wisdom of her rulers, as on the persuasion [belief] that she still contains many who love and obey the gospel of Christ, that their prayers may yet prevail.” (Charles Colson, “Wake-up Call”, Christianity Today, November 12, 2001, pg. 112)

May that be our hope for the United States as well – that the prayers of Christians in this nation will prevail, that the Lord will heal our land.

Amen.