

# A Powerful but Dangerous Prayer

*3-Year Bible Reading Plan*

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**Bible Text:** 2 Chronicles  
**Preached On:** Sunday, March 29, 2020

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Tonight we're gonna find ourselves in the seventh chapter of 2 Chronicles. Now we're going to spend a lot of time around the seventh chapter because we're gonna utilize these characters that the Bible gives us, these kings in the north, these kings in the south, these individuals who at times follow the ways of the Lord, and at other times not so much. But there is one other passage in the Old Testament that we're going to spend a little bit of time in, that's the book of Nehemiah 9.

So I want to give you just a little advance warning, primarily find ourselves in 2 Chronicles 7, and tonight we're going to address a very powerful but dangerous prayer. You know, very strategically throughout the Scripture there are these prayers that we find, 2 Chronicles 7 is one of those, there's the Nazirite blessing of the book of Numbers, there's what we commonly refer to as the Lord's Prayer among many, but tonight there is a prayer that is mentioned here in 2 Chronicles that is so appropriate and has been spoken so frequently in these very uncertain days. Tonight, I want to call your attention to 2 Chronicles 7. I'm gonna begin in verse 13. It says,

13 If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; 14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall 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 mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.

It's an incredible prayer of promise that if we, the people of God, will humble ourselves, seek his face, turn from our sin and call out, he will bring healing in the midst of what we are walking most assuredly through. I want to look at this very famous prayer and I don't want really want to analyze it tonight as much as I want to just approach it from a full spectrum of ideas, and the first one is this, I want to issue caution.

Now I would issue caution any time we are addressing the subject matter of prayer. Now don't think I'm contrary to being bold in prayer because what we know in the book of Hebrews 4:16, the Lord encourages us when we need mercy, when we need grace, to

come boldly before his throne of grace. One of the blessings of 1 Timothy 2:5 is that there is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and because of Jesus Christ's shed blood, because of Calvary and the resurrection three days later, we don't have to find ourselves in a certain situation, in a certain environment with a certain individual to hope that our prayers may reach the throne room of God, you and I have the privilege tonight, in fact, we have the privilege every moment of our existence of going straight to the throne room of God and the Bible says that we are to do so boldly. However, just because we are bold with something does not mean that we necessarily are approaching it in the proper manner.

Before we dig into 2 Chronicles 7, I want to issue two aspects of caution when it comes to our prayer life in general, specifically in a moment we'll talk about this specific prayer, but anytime we seek the things of God, anytime we communicate with the Lord, anytime we desire to hear from the Lord, and most assuredly address and speak to the Lord. The one area of caution that I want to address is that when we have our prayer life, when we communicate with the Lord, we should not see prayer simply as a good luck charm.

Allow me to extrapolate that. One of the famed movies of the 1980s and I understand that I'm somewhat dating myself as a child and a teenager of the 80s, is a movie entitled "Ferris Bueller's Day Off." Now if you've ever had the privilege of seeing that little story, it's a story of a young man who, by the way with a series of shenanigans and an unfortunate host of lies, finds himself skipping school and in the process of skipping school, he makes his way to downtown Chicago where he lives in the outside suburbs of, and he is somewhat dancing around not only getting in trouble by the school officials but being caught by his very parents. His dad works downtown and there's a scene in the movie where he finds himself and his girlfriend and his best friend in a taxicab and they look over in the midst of a traffic jam and his very dad, his own dad who he is trying not to be discovered by, is seated in the taxicab with the window rolled down right next to him. Of course you can imagine there is instant shock upon their faces. The very next scene, it cuts to him and his best friend on the floor of the taxi and they have a rabbit's foot, which oftentimes in culture is considered lucky, and they are rubbing that rabbit's foot as vigorously as they can and then they give it to the next one and he rubs it back and forth, just hoping that they won't be discovered, hoping that they'll make it, hoping that the plan and the plot will not be revealed.

I think sometimes when we talk about prayer, no matter what type or style of prayer, specifically in a moment 2 Chronicles 7, I think we need to be cautious that our prayer life is not treating God as a lucky rabbit's foot, that when things aren't going the way we hope they would go, all of a sudden we run to prayer, something which we hadn't participated a whole lot in, something we haven't given a whole lot of value, but now things are bad and I'm going to rub, rub, rub, I'm going to pray, pray, pray, and then as soon as that taxicab rolled away, guess what? The rabbit's foot went back in the pocket. As soon as the economic engine of the country starts back up, as soon as the jobs return, as soon as the gatherings come back, all of a sudden that desire, that need, that want for prayer subsides. So I just want to issue caution. We go boldly before the throne of grace, we have access through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, but we should never treat our

prayer life like it's a lucky rabbit's foot that if we rub it enough and at the strategic time and moment, it will get us through whatever we're walking through.

The second thing that I want to air caution to and it's kind of the same aspects from a different angle, is making sure that our repetition or our intensity of volume does not become the focus. You know, when I was in high school, I had a baseball coach that we were experiencing a losing streak. We had lost to some teams that we shouldn't have lost to and we were struggling hitting the ball, and all of a sudden he had the bright idea that before the game we should start reciting what we know as the Lord's Prayer in unison together. Now why is that a cautionary term? 1. I doubt looking back if he was even a believer. 2. What would saying the Lord's Prayer in repetition by a bunch of guys who most of them don't even believe it anyway, how is that going to help you win a ballgame? You see, sometimes we think that if we say it over and over again, or if we say a certain series of words, somehow it will bring us the answer, or in some cases the fortune that we desire.

One of the things that has caught my spiritual antennas as of late, and I want to qualify what I'm about to say, I think those who are putting this information out, those who are encouraging the behavior I'm about to talk about, I think they mean well, I think their heart is pure, I think they love the Lord, but I want us to exercise caution. If we're going to enact a prayer like 2 Chronicles 7, we've got to be cautious that we're not trying to rub the rabbit's foot of the Lord's throne and we've got to make sure that we're just not in a series of endless volume of repetitions. How many times have you gotten a post on social media, an email, or even I've received a text in days late, and one of the communications that I noticed that came by way of my eyes was, and I don't know who came up with it originally, it was just being passed on, that somebody came up with the idea that if a million people said the Lord's Prayer all at one time, the coronavirus would disappear from planet earth. Now, I think there were probably good intentions behind that, I think there was fervor and zealotry behind that, but can I throw some caution out? I want you to hear me, I'm not trying to be overly negative, I just want to be cautious with you. When we think that a certain number of people praying together, or when we believe that if we say a certain prayer over and over and over again, that that will finally give us the answers we want and get God's attention, even if we have good intentions, we're actually practicing Baal worship.

And I can prove it. In the book of 1 Kings, remember when Elijah the prophet is on Mount Carmel, that famous scene where they're calling down fire from heaven to devour the sacrifice, over 450 Baal priests and there's Elijah alone. I'm sure you're familiar with the story, eventually Elijah will win the battle of the day, the one true God shows up, he consumes the sacrifice, even the water had been poured all around, and for the first time in three and half years the drought will be dismissed with rain. But what did those 450 Baal worshipping priests do? When their god did not answer their prayer, they started shouting louder. They started shouting in unison. They started going to great extremes, that while we shout, if we cut ourselves, while we shout, if we dance this will happen. And I think one of the things we need to be cautious of, any time that we are talking about prayer but specifically one like we find here in 2 Chronicles 7, we need to be

careful that we're not just trying to treat the Lord like a lucky rabbit's foot to get us out of a situation that we don't like, and we've got to be cautious just because a certain number of people would begin to recite a certain prayer over and over and over again, does not necessitate God's response as we desire. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount in what we know as Matthew 6, Jesus warned us about prayer of vain repetition.

So I just read and you read in whatever environment you find yourself tonight, one of the most famous calls to prayer in all of the Bible. "If my people." And today as you read that and you hear about pestilence in the land, and healing being promised by God, I think it is the content of this prayer that each and every one of us desires in our personal life, in our family's life, in our community's life, in our culture's life, shall I say the entirety of the globe, we would desire to see healing in the land. Again, let me exercise caution. It's not going to happen if we just get fervent for a moment, or if we gather a bunch of people to just repeat things over and over again. One of the things the Bible says is that prayer is a cry of the heart, not just a vain repetition of the lips.

The second thing I want to call your attention to tonight is the context that we find this call to prayer. Any time we're reading Scripture, it doesn't matter if it's in 2 Chronicles or the Gospel of John, it doesn't matter if it's a verse that we're not familiar with or one that we absolutely have memorized, we have to look at it in the context of where and when and how it is given unto us. And so tonight because the entirety of our worship experience is a Bible study, I want to go back into verse 1 of chapter 7 and I want to read all the verses leading up to this call of prayer.

Where do we find ourselves? We find ourselves in the dedication of the temple. We find ourselves on the backside of this building that had been desired for so long to house what you and I know as the ark of the covenant. This will be the centerpiece of worship for not just years but for centuries to come, and as we discussed last week as we talked about the temples of God throughout time, it is a desire placed even today of those who are faithful to the Jewish faith.

So beginning in verse 1 of chapter 7, it says,

1 Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. 2 And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house. 3 And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. 4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. 5 And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. 6 And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of musick of the

LORD, which David the king had made to praise the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever, when David praised by their ministry; and the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood. 7 Moreover Solomon hallowed the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the brasen altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, and the meat offerings, and the fat. 8 Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt. 9 And in the eighth day they made a solemn assembly: for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days. 10 And on the three and twentieth day of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people. 11 Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the LORD, and in his own house, he prosperously effected. 12 And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. 13 If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; 14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall 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.

Now in the context there as I shared earlier, this is the worship service, this is the dedication of the temple. The people have gathered together. For seven days they have fasted, they have prayed, but I want to call your attention to verse 9. There is something that happens in verse 9 that only happens 12 times in the entirety of what we know as the Old Testament.

It says, "in the eighth day," so they had been praying for seven days, pretty similar to what we see in the book of Acts, remember they prayed and waited for seven days and then the Holy Spirit descended in Acts 2. "In the eighth day they made a solemn assembly." Now a solemn assembly is a particular special worship service that we find among the Jewish people in the Old Testament that as I mentioned, only occurs 12 times. It is a very particular way of worshiping and tonight I want to call your attention to one of the briefest descriptions of a solemn assembly, it's found in the book of Nehemiah 9. Hopefully again you have a copy of God's word with you, when you find your way to Nehemiah 9, allow me to set the context. The Israelites have spent 70 years in captivity because of their sin. Remember the northern kingdom was taken by the Assyrians, the southern kingdom 586 by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. Because of the rebellion, the rejection of the prophets and the word of the Lord, for 70 years they were in Babylon. This was when Ezekiel, the great prophet of God spent the majority of his ministry, Jeremiah the latter part of his ministry, whom we know as Queen Esther and Daniel, Shadrach, Meshech, Abednego, Nehemiah, Ezra, some of the great figures of the

Bible either existed in or came out of the 70 years of captivity. They make their way back to Jerusalem. Cyrus had declared they could go home. We know the book of Nehemiah most famously for rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem so not only could the people have security physically but they could have a place spiritually to worship. After they built the wall, after they established the city, with the help of Ezra the priest, they discover the ancient scrolls and in Nehemiah 9 we have a worship service, to be honest with you, it's a solemn assembly. I'm going to read the first few verses of Nehemiah 9 and then I want to explain to you what a solemn assembly is because it explains the context behind this very famous prayer in will 2 Chronicles 7.

Beginning in Nehemiah 9:1, it says,

1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. 2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.

Now that is a brief description of what you and I know as a solemn assembly. Allow me to kind of unpack what that would look like. It is as described, it is a gathering of people for a very solemn, serious, sincere purpose. Notice what they did in the book of Nehemiah, they for one fourth of the day, by the way, that would have been for three hours, they stood and they listened to the word of God being read, and then for the next three hours, they confessed their sins, not just their personal sins but the sins of their fathers.

Allow me to share with you the significance of a solemn assembly. When a solemn assembly was called in the Old Testament, they would gather together and they would confess the sins of even those who were deceased, the sins of which they were living the consequences thereof. They would confess the sins of their corporate body even if they personally did not participate in them. You see, a solemn assembly was laying all the cards out on the table. A solemn assembly was literally becoming prostrate before God and saying, "Those who went before us have sinned, there are those among us who have sinned, even I have sinned," and everyone who took part in the solemn assembly was not only feeling the effects of others' sin but willing to confess sin on behalf of a community that they themselves did not necessarily commit.

Now you and I live in a culture and a community today where we have a hard time owning up to our own sins, owning up to our own misgivings, misfortunes and shortcomings. A solemn assembly is where the people would gather together and they would confess the sins of their culture, they would confess the sins of their community, they would confess that which they took part in personally and they would confess that which they allowed to happen and never spoke up against.

Why did it only happen 12 times in the entirety of the Old Testament? Because you know how hard it is to gather as an entire community and confess the sins of those who have gone before us as well as those who are beside us? Why was it prevalent here in Nehemiah 9? I'll tell you why, because the Israelites had just returned out of 70 years of captivity, they saw with their eyes the impact and the effect of sin and they no longer wanted it to be a part of their lives. Why did it happen here in 2 Chronicles 7? Because it was because of the behavior and the sins of those that had gone before them that Israel found themselves, shall we say, in the proverbial mess that they were in, and they were willing to confess the sins of their forefathers. We don't know exactly what they confessed here in 2 Chronicles 7. Did they confess that they put up with all of Saul's misgivings and actually made excuses for him? Did they confess to all the leaders that they allowed to take part in behavior that they never stood up against? Did they confess for manners and behaviors and celebrations that were attributed to Baal and Ashtaroth and other things?

Let me ask you a very honest question: what would a solemn assembly look like in today's context? Let me ask you a very difficult question: you may have never participated in them, you may have never advocated them, you may have never celebrated them, but if you and I and the people of faith were to gather corporately, and I know we can't technically do that right now, but if we were to gather corporately and confess the sins of our culture, the hard question is where do you start and where do you end? I mean, think about what is taking place and has taken place not just in recent days but in the last decades. Think about the debauchery. Think about the blasphemy that has occurred. Think about the indifference to God's word. Think about the innocence that has been lost and the guilty that has washed their hands. Think about what has happened, what we've advocated as a culture. Think about decisions that have been rendered in high places. Think about positions that are now contrary to the word of God that are now legal in our culture. I want you to think about that.

You see, 2 Chronicles 7 is an incredible prayer, "If my people, if they will humble themselves and seek my face, I'll heal their land." Yes, that is true but you cannot separate this prayer from a solemn assembly and one of the things that I want you to see in just a moment, we're going to walk through the conditions, what does God require of you and I in this prayer, and what does he promise on the backside of this prayer will occur if we begin to do this, because in your home and my home, in your small sphere of today 10 or less people and in mine, if we begin to take 2 Chronicles 7 seriously, then we've got to do some serious business not just about what's going on around us but what's gone on before us.

You know, one of the individuals that in recent days has grown near and dear at least to the Opelika community is a man by the name of Franklin Graham, the President and CEO of Samaritan's Purse. Over 100 of their volunteers lived in our basement a little over a year ago as the tornadoes ravaged our area and they brought all types of help not only physically but emotionally and spiritually. Many of you are aware that in recent days, kind of on the front side of this global pandemic, he had set up a series of large Gospel meetings in what you and I know as Europe and he was declined from having those

because of his biblical position on a series of issues. Some years ago, many of you may remember that Franklin Graham went on a tour of the United States. It wasn't a speaking tour, it wasn't a preaching tour, it was a prayer tour, and he went to very strategic cities, in fact, he tried to go to the state capital in each of the states of which this tour would encompass. My wife and children and I were privileged several years ago, we lived in the vicinity of a state capital in which he would be in, and we went downtown with the masses of people to that prayer gathering. You know, that prayer meeting was very unusual because he treated it almost like a solemn assembly. Do you know what he had us do? He had us confess the sins of our forefathers. He had us confess the sins of those that we know about but never have met them personally. He had us confess the sins of our community leaders. He had us confess the sins of our national leaders. He had us confess the sins that we personally had enacted in our lives as well as the sins of neglect in our life. Interesting that as thousands of people descended on that state capital, the majority of the time spent in prayer was not on asking God for anything but on confessing to God the sins of those that have gone before us as well as the sins that are those among us, as well as ourselves looking in the proverbial spiritual mirror.

The reason I wanted to spend so much time not only on caution but on context is I think 2 Chronicles 7:14 oftentimes becomes a rabbit's foot, so to speak, that when there is pestilence in the world, when there is disease in our home, when there is economic downturn, we go to this as many verses and think this is the key, and it may rightfully be so but understand you cannot have the effectiveness of this prayer without the confession of sin, not just your sin and my sin, but our culture's sin, our community's sin, our country's sin. Until we're willing to call out the sin that this country and our culture advocates on a daily basis, then do not expect God to bring healing to a global pandemic. You cannot have healing of disease until you call out sin that wrecks everything in humanity's life.

You see, everybody today wants a vaccine, everybody today wants an answer, everybody wants an economic stimulus, and everybody's crying for prayer. I hear all over the place people are gathering to pray here and pray there, but you know what I haven't heard a whole lot of? I haven't heard a whole lot of people willing to call out the sins of our culture. Until we realize that we have sinned, until we realize that we have gone contrary to the will, the way and the word of God, how dare we ask him to bring healing to our land. I want you to understand that in this time of uneasiness, I'm hurting as you are too. These are difficult days and I promise you, I'm not trying to throw salt on the wound but I think oftentimes we look for the provision of God without the context of his provision.

That being said, as we go to this specific prayer in verses 13 and 14, I want to look at the conditions and I want to see what does God ask of us, what does he promise in return, and then look at some of the individuals kind of in the area of 2 Chronicles and how either they did or did not respond to this call.

The first thing that we hear in this passage, "If my people." Now if I were to be overly doctrinal tonight and if I were to kind of split hairs, the term "my people" has never been applied to what we call the church of Jesus Christ. "My people" are the descendants of



Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. "My people" are the 12 tribes. "My people" are specifically that branch that we call Judaism or the Jewish faith. Now I understand and hopefully you do as well, that the church of Jesus Christ was a natural, shall we say, transition from Judaism. After all, Jesus Christ was of the 12 tribes, he was prophesied of the Old Testament. You and I in the New Testament are never called "my people," you and I are called "the sons and daughters of God." But I don't want to split hairs tonight and get into the difference of the specific doctrine of Israel in the Old Testament versus the church in the New Testament, I just want to apply this prayer as you and I today, because tomorrow morning we're going to wake up to a world that looks so different than it did four weeks ago and we've got to navigate and we've got to hit our knees and we've got to walk through this pandemic as people of faith.

So how does he begin this prayer? "My people." In other words, the promises that we're about to read, the healing of the land, the healing of the disease, hear me clearly, does not come through human legislation. It does not come through global politics. I appreciate what our international leaders are doing, I appreciate their communication with each other, but if we want the promises of verse 14, it has to come through the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ, those who are believers in Jesus Christ and guess what's happening, folks? This is where it gets real and this is where it gets raw: you and I as believers in Jesus Christ are actually beginning to be blamed for this global pandemic. Don't believe me? Go read this weekend's editorial in the New York Times where it claims that those of us who believe in Jesus, those of us who believe in the Bible, because of our, shall we say, being contrary to the means and ways of the world, they're actually beginning to say that we helped cause and spread this. That's a little research project for you.

What the world is doing is turning on the church of Jesus Christ. What God says is, "If my people." You realize that for the provisions and the blessings of what we see in verse 14 to happen, it's got to be the people of God, believers in Jesus Christ. Congress can do all the stimulus they want, it may add money to your bank account but it will not bring healing to our land. There's a big difference.

So the first condition: "my people." So you realize that this prayer even though it will impact the global world has to be strategically done through the means of the children of God, those who are the sons and daughters, those who have called on the name of Jesus Christ. Then what does he say in particular? He says, "if they will humble themselves." I don't think it's accidental that the Lord began with humility. Why? Because it may be the thing that we struggle with the most. We can seek God and be proud. We can pray and be proud. But humility is kind of the foundation to all of this. That first thing we need to do is say we don't have the answers. The first thing we've got to do is say, "God, I've got nothing to contribute except the confession of my sin."

I want to encourage you to turn over at least just a page or two in the Bible and I want you to see the story of Reheboam. I alluded to it a little bit this morning. Reheboam, as many of the leaders in Israel, found himself in a mess. He found himself again with those coming from the outside wanting control over them, desiring finances and, shall we say,

military victory over them, and I want to pick up the story in verse 6 of chapter 10. This is Rehoboam, one of the sons of Solomon. It says,

6 And king Rehoboam took counsel with the old men that had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What counsel give ye me to return answer to this people? 7 And they spake unto him, saying, If thou be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever. 8 But he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him, that stood before him. 9 And he said unto them, What advice give ye that we may return answer to this people, which have spoken to me, saying, Ease somewhat the yoke that thy father did put upon us? 10 And the young men that were brought up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou answer the people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it somewhat lighter for us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. 11 For whereas my father put a heavy yoke upon you, I will put more to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

Now again, that was tribute that was being paid by these enemies of Israel and the wisemen came to Rehoboam and said, "It's time to let up, it's time to humble yourself." What did the young men say? "Oh no, it's time to drive the stake deeper." What do you see not only in the young men in this story, what do you see in Rehoboam? You see pride, that not only are we going to continue to get what we're getting but we're going to even do it in a greater fashion. It's the same thing that we saw in Pharaoh. Remember when the Israelites desired to go and worship for three days and he wouldn't let them go, he got upset and got angry with them, so then he said, "Aha, now instead of making great buildings, you're gonna have to make your own bricks too." You know, Proverbs says that pride goeth before destruction. It happened in Pharaoh's life, it happened in Rehoboam's life, and it easily happens in ours. The first quality for the people of God is to humble themselves, that means we don't seek revenge, we don't desire gain, that we don't want to profit off of those. You see, the confession of our culture's sin, the confession of our own sin isn't so they'll lose and we'll win, it's so that we can come clean before God and allow him to do as he desires and he leads in our life.

The second thing obviously is to pray. "If they will humble themselves and pray." All throughout 2 Chronicles, in fact, all throughout Scripture, you see men and women calling out to God and one of the things that I want to draw your attention to tonight is how you approach your prayer life. Now many of you have heard me use this acronym before, it's not only well-known to me because I learned it in fourth grade, many of you are very familiar with it, it's called the ACTS acronym: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. Just in brevity tonight, when we enter into a time of prayer with the Lord, the first thing we do is adore him, recognize him for his qualities. We confess our sins to him. We thank him for the blessings of life. And then we seek what we need or desire or want in life. And one of the things that I've learned throughout the

years is the more time I spend on A, C and T, the less of the S that I ask for. And when it says that they prayed, one of the things that I want to draw your attention to is when we pray, you do understand prayer is not to change God, prayer is for God to change us. You see, that goes back to the rabbit's foot, "God, I don't like what I'm going through. I don't like this. I want to change it, change it, change it." But what do we see of men and women of prayer in Scripture? That the Lord would give them the strength to endure their situation. You know, you get to John 17 and what we call the prayer of Gethsemane or the high priestly prayer, it's really the technical Lord's Prayer because it's the prayer of Jesus Christ, and one of the things that he prays for in John 17 is not that we would be removed from this world but that we would be kept from the evil one. In other words, oftentimes we pray, "God, get rid of this. God, get rid of that. God, remove this. God, add that." When actually in humility it should be, "God, give me the strength to weather this. Give me the peace to walk through this. Give me the courage to stand fast in the midst of this." You see, our prayer shouldn't be, "Oh, I need to change God and my circumstances," our prayer should be, "God, change me in the midst of my circumstances."

Third, seek his face. Now remember this is after we humble ourselves and after we pray not for God to change but for God to change us. A few pages again to the right in chapter 12 of the book of 2 Chronicles we find ourselves again not only in the life of Rehoboam but, shall we say, in the life of his disobedience, misbehavior and ill decision-making. There comes a time where all of his shields of gold are removed, in other words, those items that were of great strength and great flexibility, they not only displayed the opulence of how God had blessed his people but they served as a miraculous fighting tool, and I want you to see what happens in verse 10. In verse 10 it says,

10 Instead [instead of the gold] of which king Rehoboam made shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king's house.

Now this is a whole different message for a whole other day, but essentially what Rehoboam did is he exchanged shields of gold for shields of brass. Now we understand that they are completely of different value, and we understand that the gold is flexible and the brass not so much, that the gold would have allowed them incredible flexibility and speed and the brass would not of. In other words, what do we see in Rehoboam's heart? "If I can't have it the way I want it, at least I'm going to make it look that way." Because you can shine brass enough to almost look like it's gold and you can pretend you're where you're supposed to be, and you can pretend you have what you desire, in other words, what happened in Rehoboam's life as we studied just a few moments ago is God wouldn't change his circumstances but he refused to change.

I want you to go down to verse 14, it's a very quick summary statement. It says,

14 ... He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD.

In other words, what do we see here in the life of Rehoboam? We see him changing the shields that had been dismissed from gold unto brass looking the part, appearing to be the part, but a heart that did not care for the things of God.

You say, "Well, how do I know if I'm truly seeking God?" I think we need to go to Isaiah 6, it's a very famous story. Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up and how does he respond? "Here am I, Lord, send me." He didn't ask where, he didn't ask how, he didn't ask the means, he just said, "God, send me. I'll go anywhere." Do you remember what God's response was? "Congratulations, you are now enlisted as a prophet of mine and one tenth of the people you speak to will convert." One tenth, a tithe. You know, that's actually where we get our term for giving 10 percent of our resources, that a tithe is 10 percent, we get that, shall we say, definition from this story. One tenth. Imagine if on the very forefront if the Lord had come to him and said, "Okay, who will go," knowing less than 10 percent will convert? I wonder if Isaiah's hand would have gone up? In fact, later he says that he will preach, this is in chapter 20, for three years and not one single person will be converted. You see, when we seek the face of God, it comes out of our prayer life, not changing God but changing us, that we just want God's will no matter what it looks like, no matter how it impacts us, no matter how it affects us, no matter how it changes our circumstances, we just want God honored in our lives.

This is a powerful prayer but it's dangerous. It requires us as the people of God to confess sin, it requires us not to want God to change our circumstances but for us to be changed in the midst of our circumstances, and it requires us to desire his will more than even our comfort or preferences. Last but not least, turn from your wicked ways. This morning if you are not a part of our broadcast and our online worship service, we studied the life of Asa. We studied a man who in chapter 15 was this incredible man of God, but in chapter 16 it went sideways quick. Why? Because he entered into a contract with Benhadad rather than the covenant that he had with the Lord and God sent him a seer, he sent him a prophet, he sent him somebody to get his attention. Did he turn? No, he actually put him in prison and told him to quit talking. You see, when it says that we turn from our wicked ways, you would think that that would be a natural inclination or response from being humble and praying and seeking God, but it is tough, it is difficult not to listen to, abide by or seek the desires of the flesh. It took Asa a different path than he needed and should have gone. It's taken many men and many women a different path.

Turn from their wicked ways. That means we no longer desire, we no longer seek, we no longer long for the things this world provides. This world provides for us security. It provides us satisfaction. It provides us experiences. In other words, we are more willing to just have peace with God than prosperity in the world, that we no longer seek that which the world often promises.

You know, just as an aside, the world will promise you the world and it will deliver much less, it will tell you it will last a lifetime and it may give you a good 15 to 20 minutes, it tells you that all the world will be behind you and then you look back and there's nobody there. It's much like the famous prodigal son in Luke 15. Remember when he found himself broke and with no friends? He eventually ended up in the pig slop. Why?

Because when his influence went by the wayside, when his money went by the wayside, no one desired to be around him. You see, the world told him if you'll do it the world's way, if you'll go to the world's places and enjoy the world's entertainment and be satisfied by the world's offerings, you'll have everything you want. But the money ran out and so did his friends and he found himself in the pig slop, but the Bible says he came to his senses and returned to his father.

So with the people of God, if we will humble ourselves, if we will pray, seek the face of God and turn from our wicked ways, what does God say he'll do? First thing he says here is he will hear from heaven. It says, "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, pray, seek my face, turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven." Now let that just kind of settle in for just a moment. It's not that he doesn't hear every prayer we offer, it's not that he doesn't know every aspect of every person's life, but what you get the idea is you get that he has no intention of coming to or answering of our prayers if we do not meet these conditions. If we come with a proud and haughty spirit, and all we're trying to do is to change him instead of us, in fact, at the end of the day, as soon we get the answer, we're going to run right back to world.

He says, "I will hear you if you do these things." Then what does he say? "I will forgive them." You see, that's where it goes back to admitting that we have sinned, our communities have sinned, our culture has sinned. If there was no cry for forgiveness, then there would be no need to confess and so even God himself says this incredibly powerful but dangerous prayer hinges on the fact of admitting and confessing we've sinned, because forgiveness of sin always precipitates or goes before the healing of the land. I might need to repeat that again: forgiveness of sin always goes before the healing of the land. You see, one of the problems is we want the land healed, we want the virus healed, we want the circumstances changed, we want the environment back to what we're used to but are we willing to confess sin and have God forgive it?

He will hear, he will forgive, and then what does he say? "I will heal their land." Now in a very strict context, remember the Israelites of the Old Testament had a land covenant with God. There was a certain piece of land that was theirs, that when they were in a right relationship with him, they were there and established, when not, they were not. So how does this apply to you and I? How does this apply to our lives? I know we are walking through a global pandemic, I understand that these are different days than any of us have ever seen or navigated before, but understand that what we know as the United States of America is not a synonym with Israel. What we know as any other sovereign state is not a synonym with Israel. And so we've got to kind of remove ourselves from that strict doctrinal approach and just kind of look at this spiritually. What does it mean if those who are believers in Jesus Christ will humble themselves, pray, seek God's face and turn from their wicked ways? What does that mean? It means God will hear us, he will forgive us, 1 John 1:9 says if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us, then he will heal the land.

Now I want to talk about what is our land? Don't think sovereign state. Don't think which one of the 50 states of whatever country you live in what is our land as a believer in Jesus

Christ? You see, you and I are a part of what Matthew 6:33 calls the kingdom of God. We are a part of the body of Christ. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 12, it talks about that he gives gifts unto the body and we get the idea or the illustration that there are those that are hands and those that are legs, those that are mouths, those that are ears, that we comprise the totality of the body of Christ. Do you know what our land is as believers? It's not the state we reside in, it's not the county we pay taxes to, it's not even the country that we may pledge to, our land is the body of Christ. You understand that if the body of Christ is not healed of its sin problem, how can we expect the world at large to even be willing to address theirs?

I want to close tonight from 1 Peter 4:17. It says judgment must begin at the house of God. Let me repeat that: judgment must begin at the house of God. If we want God to address this global pandemic, which I hope you want him to because I do, then we at first have got to do what this prayer says and we've got to allow God to heal our land, heal the body of Christ, heal those of us who as believers have gone the world's way, as believers are seeking out wickedness, as believers not seeking his face, as believers are proud and not humble. I don't enjoy walking through these days of uncertainty, I don't enjoy these days of what many of us have called the new normal. Between you and I, we're hearing that this is going to go on for weeks and even months and I wish it would come to a conclusion yesterday, but it does serve for all of us as believers in Jesus Christ as a wake-up call. We, the church, we, the body of Jesus Christ in totality, I'm not speaking of a local congregation as much as I am the totality of the body of Christ, we have become proud. We have become a people wanting our circumstances to change and not our hearts. We've sought the world and we are willing to, shall we say, bathe in our wickedness. We have walked alongside the world and we've advocated and we have celebrated the world. Maybe just maybe as difficult and as undesirable as these days are, maybe it will cause you and cause I and cause all of us as believers to do 2 Chronicles in our own personal life. Maybe the body of Christ through the forgiveness of their rebellion will be healed and healing will begin to extend itself.

You know, if you do a study of the great revival and awakening movements not just on the North American continent but on other continents, one of the things you see is that when the people of God get right with God and people began to turn from their sins and get saved, then you see a residual effect in the community and in the culture. Many of you are aware of a great evangelist of days gone by the name of Billy Sunday. He was a professional baseball player who got saved out of his, shall we say, debaucherous living and became a fiery evangelist, the famous Sawdust Trail, that he'd have these open revival movements. Billy Sunday was so notorious for calling people of God to turn from their sins that those who ran the places of ill repute would shut them down before he even came to town because they knew once the people got right with God, that they'd have to shut them anyway. Now I know that some of you are gonna say that Jeff's gone from preaching to meddling but I want to encourage you, I want you to read the instructions that we've been given not only by our governor but other officials about places that we should and should not frequent now that we are under all these new restrictions, and I want you to ask yourself how many of those places, what types of lifestyles should a believer in Jesus Christ even be participating in to begin with. You see, one of the things

2 Chronicles 7 does, it's powerful but it's dangerous because it causes us as believers to examine our own heart.

Today we're walking through days that are unfortunate from an economic perspective, they are unfortunate from a health perspective, and I think we can say they're dangerous for a lot of different reasons, but maybe just maybe God is allowing you and I as the body of Christ to walk through these days so maybe we'll take our relationship with him seriously. Maybe tonight you're a believer who the Lord has opened your eyes. As we've shared with you in every one of our online services, please reach out to us, make contact with us here at First Baptist whether it's the phone numbers that are provided or an email or a text or social media. Our office hours, we're still open. We still have ministers, not all of them are on the campus but we still have ministers who are able to have communication with you and to talk with you. One of the things that I've spent an awful lot of my time doing lately is having conversations with people who a few weeks ago found themselves very comfortable in their relationship with the Lord, very confident in their worldly status, but their world's been rocked, your world has been rocked, my world has been rocked, and God has gotten their attention. Maybe we can have the privilege of praying with you or for you or just walking you through, or maybe you're that person tonight who's not a believer at all and maybe when you look at the statistics that are being published every day, maybe when you look at even the possibility of your own mortality, maybe God's gotten your attention and maybe you're that person who needs to do what we call the A, B, C's: accept the fact and admit that you've sinned, believe that Jesus Christ is the only answer, and confess him in your life. We would love the privilege of walking through that with you. We'd love the opportunity to pray with you and to pray for you. Just reach out to us.

You know, in the days ahead by way of social media, emails, texts, and even telephone conversations, I'm sure this 2 Chronicles 7 is going to be brought up. I'm sure there's going to be somebody with a willing heart that says if we all prayed at the same time, if we all did this at the same time, then maybe all that's happening would be lifted from us. I want to encourage you to invoke 2 Chronicles 7:14 in your life but I want you to do it as was written. Will you be willing to call out the sins of your life? Will you be willing to call out the sins of our culture? Will you be willing to call out the sins of even your forefathers? Will you humble yourself before God? Will you pray not for your circumstances to be changed but for God to change you in the midst of your circumstances? Will you seek his face, not the world, and will you turn from your wicked ways? If you and I and we collectively do that, then guess what? God will hear, God will forgive, and God will heal and maybe just maybe the body of Christ that was so fractured and so with issue some weeks ago, maybe on the backside of this pandemic we will find ourselves strengthened in a proper and a right relationship with God.

So tonight if you are a child of God, let me encourage you to do as 2 Chronicles 7 says. If not, make contact with us. We'd love to talk to you about becoming a believer in Jesus Christ. But tonight as we draw to a close, thank you. I recognize that there is a lot that is on your mind, there is a lot of information sources that you could be listening to, watching, or hearing tonight, but you were willing to spend a significant amount of your

time in studying the word of God. It is the word of God that gives us comfort, it is the word of God that gives us conviction, and I am convinced it is the word of God for the people of God that will get us through this situation with the help of God. With that being said, again thank you for being a part of our online Bible study. We wish you God speed and we pray that if you need help, you will call us. We are here for you. The church may not be gathered in the building but the church has never been a part or been a building to begin with. Please make contact with us. We'd love to pray with you and for you. Thank you. God bless and good night.