

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: The story of the Asbury College Revival – 1970
- B. Behind every revived heart or people stands the promise that God gave Solomon in 2 Chron. 7:11-14... That describes the Asbury Revival. In about 475 BC, when the Chronicler reminded the Jews of this promise, he then gave them five examples from the history of their kings. The Chronicler retold certain centuries-old stories of Jewish kings and emphasized these were actually the stories of these revival words—*humble, pray, seek, turn*—so that the remnant of Jews whom God *had* restored to their land would not forget who they were and how crucial it is to keep their fellowship with God fresh and pure.
- C. I don't know if God wants to bring one of those stunning, time-stopping revivals to us like he has done at other times. Most revivals are quiet, more like a plant growing from a seed than a phoenix rising from ashes. Most revivals happen one person at a time. But either way I know that we as God's people need to always protect our precious relationship with the Lord. Without it, we are nobodies.

Look at v.13... God is not saying, *If bad things happen to you, it's proof you've sinned and need to repent.* This isn't about hurricanes or measles. God had specifically promised that if Israel was faithful to him none of those particular things would happen to them. Ever. So if they *did* happen, it wasn't just nature taking its course—some *natural* disaster. They happened because God purposely withdrew his blessing because Israel broke their covenant with him. If a teenager finds out her parents have taken away the car keys *and* grounded her for a week she knows she did something wrong. When God blocks the blessings he's promised us it is time to repent. our spiritual birthright: *"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."* **When the blessings God promises begin to disappear it means God is determined to bring us to our knees in repentance.**

I. WHEN WE'VE SQUANDERED OUR GOD-BLESSED LIFE THE LORD OFFERS US A REMEDY (7:13-14)

You can see that this is an *if/then* statement. It is conditional.

- A. **If we want to be back in God's good graces we need to be reconciled to him.** Jesus Christ is our guarantor that God will have us. God's Holy Spirit is within us stirring all that inward dissonance—that dis-integration in our hearts when we rebel against our Father. Notice that three of the four necessities here are *relational*. To put things right with the Lord we don't just turn over a new leaf or try to do better. **We are restoring a relationship not just reforming our behavior.**

Are you listening? Could this be you? Has the God-blessed life gone to gray? **Make today the turning point.**

These four necessities apply to us personally or as a church if we have squandered our God-blessed life. Don't lump them together. They each need to be done.

1. ***Humble yourselves.*** Sin is always the poison weed of pride. One reason it is so hard to humble ourselves is that we can hardly find it within to be so honest about our pride. It means saying to God, "*I'm so ashamed of myself. I have no excuses. I'm sorry.*" And to our amazement we're met by Jesus' words, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"
2. ***Pray.*** Prodigal people don't talk to God just as runaways don't call home. If we want to be restored to fellowship with God we have to talk to him about the elephant in the room—our sin. What we've done. What it's been like. What we've realized. We can take our cues from the Bible's sinners, like David in **Ps. 51....**
3. ***Seek my face.*** Ever since Adam and Eve, sinners always try to hide from God. Can you hear a mom saying to her little rebel: "*Look at me! Look at me!*" To be restored we have to look at God—look him in the face, as it were. We must "*be still and know that he is God.*" He is there waiting, having seen us coming a long way off, but sometimes he lets the silence grow heavy as we realize how much we've missed him.

4. **Turn from their wicked ways.** The sin has to stop. We don't just stop doing it; we turn our backs on it as we would a stench, or a plague, or a heartless companion. Walk away from the pigsty without a backward look.
- B. *"Then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."* Then God will run to us as a father to a son thought dead. He will throw his arms around us and restore every privilege of the God-blessed life in Christ, like a robe over our shoulders, a signet ring on our hand, and a feast for our famished souls. Though we had ignored him, he will **hear** us. Though no remorse can erase what we've done, he will **forgive** us. Though we disdained all the blessings we had once enjoyed, he will **"heal our land,"** which for us means that he will restore all the blessings Christ has secured for us. How God can be so gracious, so merciful, so glad to have us home, is the stuff of the Gospel.
- C. Illus.: My third sermon in my previous church, some 30 years ago now, was from Josh. 1 and was titled, *"The Cost of Fellowship."* I don't remember what I said but I remember what happened. I'd barely finished the service when two women almost ran to each other, and embraced, both of them crying. It seemed obvious a broken relationship was being restored, while the rest of us watched that holy thing. You could almost *see* the healing.

As wonderful as that is, there is even a better position than that: to have never left the Lord at all. Do you see how **v.15** begins, *"Now..."* He means, *Here and now, Solomon, since you and your people have not squandered your birthright, since you are humble before God, here is where things stand. Vv.15-16....*

II. NOW, WHEN ALL IS WELL, THE LORD WELCOMES OUR PRAYERS WITH ALL HIS ATTENTION AND LOVE (7:15-16)

These are three wonderful promises that are ours right now, all the more wonderful because we see them through Christ.

- A. **V.15**, *"Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place."* For us, it isn't in this place—this building—but in *us*. **We are God's temple.**

This is a picture of God's rapt attention: eyes open, ears attentive. That's what counselors must learn. Listening to the unspoken. **Paul Tournier** said, "*It is impossible to overestimate the immense human need people have to be listened to, to be taken seriously and to be fully understood.*" [To Understand Each Other]

Bonhoeffer called God "the great listener. He said, "*It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear.*" [Life Together, p.97] God listens to our prayers with his eyes as well as his ears. It's as if he says, "*I see what you're saying.*"

So what should we do? Pray! "*To the prayers offered.*" Pray, not because that's what seriously disciplined Christians do but because **God wants to give us his full attention**. God doesn't listen to us like someone taking our order nor as someone seeing if we've done our homework. He listens like a Father who loves to be with his children. "*I can see how sad this makes you.*" "*I hear that you want to trust me but I see that you are frightened too.*"

God not only listens, of course; he responds. He acts. For one thing, he forgives sin. He gives the blessings he's promised. He helps us, counsels us, encourages and teaches us. God simply loves to be with us, as a father with his child. Jesus said in **Luke 11:9-13...**

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

- B. **V.16a**, "*I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever.*" Again, remember that now we are God's temple—each believer's heart and each believing church. The very best part of being Christians is

that God has moved heaven and earth to be among us. God chose us for no reason but love. He consecrated us—made us holy for his presence by Christ’s forgiveness and the Holy Spirit’s presence. **We pray as dear friends in the same room talk.** We don’t always have to accomplish something. I told my son the other day how much I’d just enjoy sitting with him over a cup of coffee. We can do that with the Lord, because he is with us. What’s more, the single most wonderful thing about heaven is not reunions or being trouble-free or living forever. It is that “*God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*”

The best part of being God’s people is that God is with us, now and forever. The greatest cathedral is not more inviting to God than your heart or our fellowship.

- C. **V.16b:** “*My eyes and my heart will always be there.*” What tender words! Like a love letter. God always focuses all his attention and love on us! God’s dwelling, of course, is heaven—a throne room alive with jeweled colors, encircled with mighty beings, echoing with the anthem, “*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God Almighty.*” But I get an almost wistful feeling in this word from the God that **while his dwelling is there, his heart is with his people.** I know that God doesn’t actually face a dilemma about that, but the language is like that of a love letter from far away. “*My eyes and my heart will always be there.*”

I’ve shared with you before that perhaps my greatest spiritual challenge is simply enjoying the Lord. I trust him with my life and yours. But I seem to think that he is all business. That he is somehow a different kind of father than I am. This passage moves me because I hear the Father’s longing to be with us, to talk with us, to love on us. And I know that feeling as a father myself. There is no reluctance in God to be found; no reluctance to listen, nor to forgive, nor to bless. **Martin Luther** said, “*Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance. It is laying hold of His willingness.*”

Conclusion

Illus.: There a Christian brother not far from here who is dying. He has a terrible infection and he is HIV, so his body can't fight it. He came to Christ only a couple years ago and so much has changed. For one thing, he loves his church and he is the best greeter they have. Everyone gets a hug. But now he may not live. My friend, his pastor, visited him a few days ago in the hospital and bent down to hear him. He whispered, "*I just love Jesus so much!*"

That's what revival sounds like.

The Asbury College Revival of 1970

Compiled and told by Stephanie Christensen

On February 3, 1970, the Spirit of God started a revival at Asbury College in Wilmore, KY. A chapel service began at 11:00 in the morning and did not end until one week later. Students gave witness to the power of God in their lives in such incredible ways that it not only spread to the neighboring communities but all over the country; from East to West, colleges paid for students to come and share the work of God at this school and watched the power of the Spirit work in their midst before their very eyes.

You see it all began in October of 1969, just four months before this began. 6 students decided to meet and pray together for 30 minutes, everyday for 30 days, calling it “the experiment”. They woke up early before class to pray, and each time they prayed, they would write down one truth from God’s Word, and one-way God was asking them to obey Him for that day. Once per week these 6 students would meet for accountability to make sure they each followed through with the tasks God had given them.

After the 30 days ended, the winter session began and each student grabbed 5 students to continue with this experiment, so now there were 6 groups of 6 praying daily for not only the purification of their own hearts before God, but for the renewal of the hearts and minds of the students on campus. It was with great excitement that they would meet together and say, “Do you think God is going to come today?” With great faith they knew that God was going to come them on campus, it was just a matter of when.

On Saturday, Jan. 31st, the 6 students who began this time of prayer explained their experiment at chapel and encouraged others to write down one thing they were committed to do for the next 30 days. There became a greater fervency for prayer after chapel where one night these students were praying and crying out for God to come and renew their hearts. It was 2:30 in the morning when prayers suddenly stopped. They knew God was coming tomorrow, so they went home and went to bed.

The next morning, Feb. 3rd at 11:00 the dean of students shared his testimony and invited students to share what God was doing in their lives, and the time of sharing continued and lasted for one week. A student would talk about God's forgiveness, confessing sins in their lives and how God had restored them through His great grace. Another student would think, "This is like me" and would come up to share her testimony. Then there would be prayer, worship and another testimony.

One girl spoke with the president of the college, Dennis Kinlaw, and confessed that she was a liar, and had been lying her whole. Dr. Kinlaw suggested she go back and tell every person she had lied to the truth. 3 days later, after talking with her 34th person, she said, "I am free!!" She called her parents and said, "I found Jesus."

The theme the Holy Spirit made clear throughout this revival was transparency. No one had any clue what each student would share as they went up to give their witness, but there was restraint by the Holy Spirit that put emphasis not on gifts but sin and the need for **repentance, restitution, reconciliation** in relationships and the need to put Christ first. Church tradition became a reality. Human vocabulary became human experience and what was once transmitted from head to head became a transformation of the heart. The less impressive a student appeared, the more impressive their witness.

On February 3, 1970, the Spirit of God began a revival at Asbury College in Wilmore, KY. A chapel service began at 11:00 in the morning and did not end until one week later. Lives were forever changed for the glory of Christ. Because a group of 6 students said, "First, prayer."