

What's It Going to Take to Get Americans to Repent?

America is in trouble. From sea to shining sea we are witnessing the devolution of a nation. The United States is quickly becoming the divided states. Disunity and conflict abound. Family breakdown, the immigration crisis, the threat of terrorism, an abiding racial divide, and political dysfunction all point to a deeper problem.

Regardless of which side of the political aisle you sit on, it is clear: Things are unraveling at warp speed. Like never before, we must pray for our nation and her leaders.

On Our Knees

As Christians, we must ask: Are we going to sit by and watch our culture fall apart and our families disintegrate? Or are we going to do something to help turn America to God?

The future of our culture is in the hands of Christians because the cause of our cultural demise is innately spiritual. And if a problem is spiritual, its cure must be spiritual as well. If we Christians are going to help turn our nation to God, we must fall on our knees and our faces before God and pray. We must not only talk about prayer, but pray. Not only agree on the importance of prayer, but pray. Not only preach on the power of prayer, but pray. As Billy Graham once said, "To get our nation on its feet, we must get on our knees."

Second Chronicles 7:14 contains an awesome promise: "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 I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." In this hallmark passage, God calls a nation to pray.

Prayer is an earthly request for heavenly intervention. It is the tool and strategy we have been given in order to pull something down out of the invisible and into the visible. Prayer enacts God's hand in history like nothing else because prayer is relational communication with God.

But we can't enjoy this kind of divine intervention of healing in our land with just a little prayer tossed toward heaven occasionally. The kind of prayer that will reclaim lives, families and a nation for God must take high priority in our schedules. In fact, if you look back at Nehemiah 1:4, you see that Nehemiah prayed and fasted for days when he heard about the conditions in Jerusalem.

In the face of his nation's ongoing cultural demise, Nehemiah didn't sit down and write out a "Great Society" program for Jerusalem. He didn't propose a Jerusalem "New Deal." He fasted and prayed and sought God. As he did so, God revealed His strategy—and reversed years of deterioration in just 52 days. This is because prayer saves time.

We know that God moved in response to Nehemiah's prayer, allowing him to use his position of influence with the king to get Artaxerxes to support the rebuilding of Jerusalem. But Nehemiah didn't start with his position. He started with prayer—providing the link between God, Nehemiah's problem and his position.

If you see something in our nation or political leaders that is broken, is prayer the first thing you do or the last thing you do? If it's the last thing you do, more than likely you will have wasted your time on other things. If prayer comes last, then so will the solution to the problem.

God does not like being last.

If we are going to turn our communities and nation around, congregations are going to have to join in a unified, national solemn assembly (Joel 1:14) to repent and to throw themselves

before the face of Almighty God.

We could save a lot of time and worry if we spent time praying first. In Nehemiah's case, the crumbled walls of Jerusalem were a pressing problem, something that cried out for immediate and decisive action.

But Nehemiah fasted and prayed first. So my question to you is, "What wall is crumbling?" The answer: America. The spiritual foundations of this nation are crumbling fast; our beloved nation is imploding. But political action won't stop the erosion. More money and finger pointing and judgment won't stop it. Instead, political leaders need our fasting and our prayers.

In Isaiah 58, the prophet gives us the benefits of fasting God's way. As you read it, notice the conditional statements in it—the "if/then" logic that clearly lays out what we are to do "if" we want to experience the "then." When we fast with intentional love:

"Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, and if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday. And the Lord will continually guide you and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; and you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell" (Is. 58:8-12, NASB).

Do we want the light of the body of Christ to break out like the dawn across our nation? Do we want our country to experience a speedy recovery from what ails it? Do we want the Lord to answer us when we call on Him on behalf of our communities? Do we want God's guidance?

If the answer is "Yes," then we have to do the "if" that comes before the "then." It's dependent on that. Because the praying and fasting that will get God's attention also involves loving others in both word and action. It means winning people to Jesus Christ with compassion and kindness.

God's fast isn't merely skipping a meal or saying a prayer—although those things are crucial. To impact our country for good and turn our nation to God, we—His people—must fast and pray with His heart. For only when we have His heart, will we invoke His hand. And we must do this together.

Think of the impact we could have as the body of Christ if we would seek God's face in prayer and fasting on behalf of our nation and political leaders in a unified way. Biblical unity is oneness of purpose. It is not uniformity. Unity means moving together toward the same goal.

The clearest antithesis of this was given to me by Billy Graham when I was spending some time with him at his home one afternoon. In his typical, dignified manner, Mr. Graham leaned toward me in his chair and voiced his frustrations on how churches would come together for the sake of evangelism, but then go back to their own disconnected corners after the event had ended.

As a result, their collective impact was truncated. Unfortunately, we've allowed the separations in politics, power, culture and preferences to create a separation among churches as well. Because of that, we are making little visible difference in our nation.

As I pen this article, there are more churches and nonprofit parachurch organizations in our country than ever before. What if we joined together, on our knees, toward a shared purpose or vision to make a collective spiritual impact on our nation's problems?

It is time, now, to set our personal agendas, brands and voices aside and join our hearts and hands in a national solemn assembly to seek God's heart and His hand on behalf of our land.

If not now, when? Tomorrow may be too late.

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