

40 Days of Prayer and Repentance: How the Church Can Return to God's Presence

The week we are in the midst of praying through the 40 day Jewish season of repentance, Teshuvah.

The word Teshuvah literally means to return to the presence of God. It is a season of introspection and repentance for Christians to come into unity with God, as Jesus prayed in John 17:21. However, as Jesus prayed, unity with God requires unity with each other in Christ. (John 17:20-23).

Yet, almost since the beginning of Christianity, believers have quarreled about Christian doctrine and church government. The first Jerusalem Council served as an example of a favorably resolved dispute (Acts 15). However, other disputes resulted in division and treatment of opponents as non-Christians. As Ralph Martin famously said, "The body of Christ is broken"

Today there are many denominations and doctrines which create a great diversity within the body of Christ. Yet, we can still be United in Christ. Lutheran theologian Oscar Cullmann said, "Unity in the church... is unity in diversity ... recognizing others in all their variety as true Christians." Pope Francis has said, "Unity brought by the Spirit can harmonize every diversity." Unity in diversity recognizes the contributions of other streams of Christianity and blends them together in a symphony of harmony. It is a unity of the Spirit, not in doctrine or church government.

During the second 10 days of Teshuvah, from Aug. 21 to Aug. 30, we will be praying for God's people and the healing of the broken body of Christ as God's people come together united in Christ.

- Aug. 21: The blessings of unity (Ps. 133)
- Aug. 22: Unity in Christ (John 17:20–22)
- Aug. 23: Accepting our brothers (Rom. 15:5–7)
- Aug. 24: Do not judge (Rom. 14:13; Luke 6:37–38)
- Aug. 25: Divisions (1 Cor. 3:1–9)
- Aug. 26: Evangelism through unity (John 17:23)
- Aug. 27: Watchmen warnings (Ezek. 33)
- Aug. 28: Appealing to all (1 Cor. 9:27)
- Aug. 29: Salvation for Israel (Rom. 11:11–32)
- Aug. 30: Messianic Jews and the Toward

Jerusalem Council II Movement (Acts 15)

The unity revival has already begun. The pope's historic outreach to Kenneth Copeland in 2014 produced a flood of Christian leaders who traveled to Rome for international reconciliation meetings. There have also been national-level events like Kairos 2017 where 40 national Christian leaders ranging from Cardinal Di Nardo, president of U.S. bishops, to Kenneth Copeland met to dialogue, pray, and worship in unity. Much has happened, but much more needs to happen to heal the broken body of Christ.

The urgent need to heal the body of Christ must be communicated from the national leadership of movements and denominations to the local churches. The city fathers must become champions of unity, bringing the body of Christ together to impact their communities. The prayer of Jesus in John 17 is not only about unity. It is for unity with a purpose, "so that the world may believe" (John 17:21).

Like the watchmen on the wall in the Teshuvah scripture of Ezekiel 33, the church must warn the unbelievers of the judgment to come and bring as many as possible to salvation.

The body of Christ must be healed to do its work for Christ.
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Ron Allen is a Christian businessman, CPA and author who

serves in local, national and international ministries, spreading a message of reconciliation to God, to men and between believers. He is founder of the International Star Bible Society, telling how the heavens declare the glory of God; the Emancipation Network, which helps people escape from financial bondage; and co-founder with his wife, Pat, of Corporate Prayer Resources, dedicated to helping intercessors.