

How to Humble Ourselves



Ruling by Prayer (Part 5)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, as we draw near to the close of another week. Our theme through this week has been, "Ruling by Prayer." In my talk yesterday I dealt with a very important and practical question: Suppose we acknowledge that we Christians have failed, through prayerlessness and in other ways, to exercise our potential influence for good in our nation. Is there anything we can do to remedy this situation? My reply was, "Yes, the Bible has a clear and practical answer to this question and it's found in 1 Chronicles 7:14."

> "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 sins and will heal their land." (NIV)

I pointed out that there are seven things involved in that verse: three things that God says He will do for us, and four things that God requires us to do for Him. The three things that God says He will do come last. He says He will hear from heaven, forgive our sins and heal our land. It's the last thing, of course, that we are working toward; the healing of our land. And God says that if we will meet His conditions, He will do three things, the last and the climax of which is to heal our land. So God offers us the possibility that our land can be healed, but He requires four things of us. What are those things? First of all, that we humble ourselves. Second, that we pray. Third, that we seek His face, and fourth that we turn from our wicked ways. Let me state them once more. First, that we humble ourselves; second, that we pray; third, that we seek God's face; and fourth that we turn from our wicked ways.

The first thing that God requires us to do is that we humble ourselves. And all through scripture where God talks about humility, He places the responsibility on us. God does not make us humble. We have to humble ourselves. Humility is not an emotion, it's not a religious facade; it's a decision of the will that has to be carried out in action. God says, "You humble yourself!" Furthermore, the Bible gives us a very specific and practical way in which God expects us to humble ourselves. To me, this is good news. There was a time in my Christian experience when I wanted to humble myself, but I

really didn't know how to do it. Then I stumbled on a secret, a secret that has been lost for many Christians, but I believe God is restoring to us today. The secret is that the appointed scriptural way for us to humble ourselves is by fasting. That's an unfamiliar word to many Christians today, yet it's one that occurs many, many times in the Bible. In fact, there are few of the great men of whom we do not know for sure that they practiced fasting.

Let me begin by briefly defining fasting. As I understand it, fasting is deliberately abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. Sometimes it's from food and water, but normally it's only from food. And I want to give you three examples from the Old Testament of how fasting is an appointed scriptural way for us to humble ourselves. The first example is the testimony of David. In Psalm 35:13, he says:

> "...I humbled my soul with fasting; And my prayer kept returning to my bosom." (NAS)

We see there that David combined fasting with prayer, and that through fasting he humbled his soul and this made his prayer more intense and more effective. I believe that that's how it should be, that fasting intensifies prayer. Why should we need to humble our soul? As I understand scripture, the soul is the ego, it's the self-assertive, demanding part; the part that always says, "I want... This is what I need... Bless me... Pray for me... Help me." It's the thing is us that makes us self-centered. And I believe that it's a tremendous barrier between us and the answer to our prayers, between us and the right relationship to God. We need to humble that soul, we need to bring it into subjection. Fasting is a way to do it.

Then listen to the ordinance that God gave Israel under the Old Covenant for the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, the great sacred day of the Jewish people up to this time. Leviticus 16:29-31:

> "And this shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls, and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you; for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you shall be clean from all your sins before the Lord. 'It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute.'" (NAS)

God there says that He requires Israel to humble their souls. Interestingly enough, in one of the new versions, the New International Version, in the footnote they translate that "to fast." And the fact is that historically, from that day unto this, almost 4,000 years, the Jewish people all over the world have always recognized that the Day of Atonement is to be kept by strict fasting. In other words, the Jewish people have always known that fasting is God's appointed way to humble our souls.

Then we look at the third example, Ezra, and the returning exiles from the Babylonian captivity. Ezra 8:21 and 23:

> "Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty." (NAS)

Ezra and the exiles were about to undertake a very dangerous, long journey through country infested by enemies and brigands, with all their wives and children and the sacred vessels of the temple that were being taken back to Jerusalem. And in order to obtain safe passage, they humbled themselves with fasting and besought God. And God heard them and granted them a safe journey.

So we see that all through the Old Testament, fasting is recognized as a scriptural way for us to humble ourselves. Fasting then is God's appointed way for us to humble ourselves. What are the steps that follow from that in this promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14? The next step is that we pray, but we pray out of humility. out of a brokenness, out of a humble dependence upon God, out of an acknowledgement that we need God desperately, and if He does not come to our help there is no other source of help that can meet our need. I believe that's why humbling ourselves comes first, because a prayer that's prayed out of arrogance and self-righteousness and self-sufficiency will not move the arm of Almighty God.

Then the next thing that we have to do is to seek God, seek His face. In Hosea 10:12, we read these words:

> "Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you." (NAS)

It's a different thing just to go to a prayer meeting and pray for an hour or so than it is to seek the Lord until He comes, until there is a definite, specific response from God. I believe in 2 Chronicles 7:14 God is speaking about our seeking Him in prayer, until He comes, until we see His arms stretched forth

and we see definite evidence that God is moving to answer our prayer. Hosea says, "Break up your fallow ground…" One of the ways that we can do that is by fasting. There are areas of our lives that have not been cultivated, that are not bringing forth fruit for God; they're just areas that there's no real results, there's no real work of the Holy Spirit. So God says, "Break up your fallow ground and seek the Lord until He comes and rains righteousness on you." Frankly, I believe that's the only hope for this nation of ours, that God will come and rain righteousness upon this land. But, He requires us to seek His face.

And then the last thing that He requires of us is that we turn from our wicked ways. Perhaps you may say, "Well, what wicked ways do I have? I go to church, I say my prayers, I read my Bible, I pay my taxes, I do nobody any harm." Well, just wait a minute. Who's right? You or God? Paul said, "Nay, but O man who art thou that repliest against God." Are you arguing with God? Are you saying to God that you or I, that we don't have any wicked ways? God says it's our wicked ways that brought the problem on our nation.

Well, let me show to you just two possible forms of wickedness out of many. The first is sins of omission. Remember, it's a sin not to do the right thing when you can. James 4:17 says:

> "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is a sin." (NAS)

So it may not be just the things that you are doing, but the things that you are not doing that God is concerned about. For instance, if fasting is God's appointed way to humble yourself and you know it and you're not doing it, remember the "if" at the beginning, then that is sin in your life. God requires you to change that.

The other kind of wickedness that is so common amongst Christians and church-goers is unforgiveness.

Do you remember the story of the servant who owed his master 10,000 talents and couldn't pay, and was freely forgiven the whole debt? He went out and found a fellow servant who owed just 100 pence, a tiny fraction of what he's owed his master, but he refused to forgive his fellow servant. And so the other servants complained to the master, and the master summoned the unforgiving servant and said this:

> "…You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow-slave, even as I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. [Then Jesus concludes:] So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from His heart." (NAS)

Let me quickly make four points. First of all, unforgiveness is wickedness. Secondly, it makes the Lord angry. Third, the punishment is to be handed over to the torturers. And fourthly, Jesus warns us specifically that if we do not forgive our fellow-believers, this is how God will deal with us. He will become angry, he will hand us over to the torturers, and we will not come out of that situation until we have paid all that we owe God.

All right, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again next week at the same time, Monday through Friday. Next week I'll be dealing with one of the highest forms of prayer, indeed of all Christian service, the ministry of intercession.

Stay tuned now for some important announcements. In particular, how you may obtain a copy of my book, Shaping History Through Prayer and Fasting. This book explains how, as Christians, we have both the privilege and responsibility to cooperate with God in working out His highest purposes for our nation. It shows, from original historical documents, how prayer has repeatedly and decisively influenced American history. The announcement that follows will tell you how you may obtain this book.

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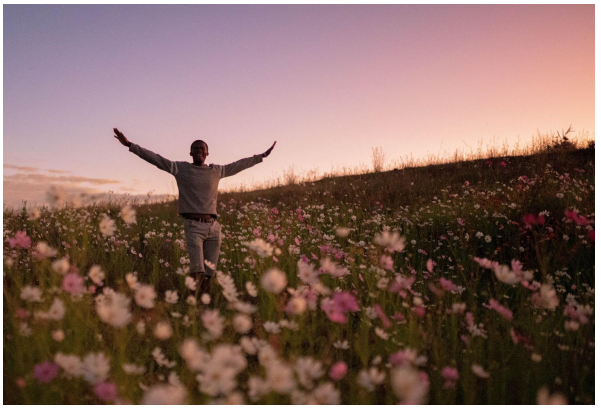
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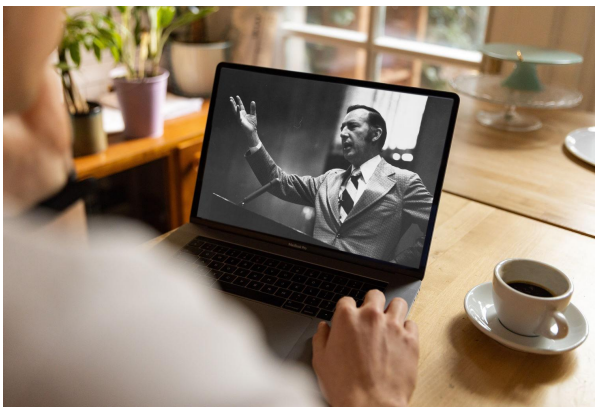
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