

Excited to be here with you today. I've watched you, Mercy Church, from the beginning. So to be here today is a huge privilege for me. I believe that God has you...here...now...for His purposes and His kingdom. And today I want to help you understand what I think will be required of you if you want to make an impact on the people of Charlotte and the world.

I don't think I have to prove to you that the world we live in is desperately broken. And it really shouldn't surprise us that evil and hate and greed and sexual perversion are running wild in this world. How else would people without truth, without light, without Christ act? But what difference can you and I make? Is there any hope left?

If you have your Bible I want to invite you to turn to 2 Chronicles 7. We're going to focus on a verse that may be familiar to some of you. It is a powerful promise. But to rightly understand this verse and apply it today, we need to consider the context.

Let me set the stage for you. Solomon completes the building of the temple in Jerusalem...the children of Israel gather to worship. You see, this moment has been a long time in the making. Solomon's father, King David first had the dream to build a temple for the Lord Almighty. But God spoke and declared that he had chosen Solomon for the task. By God's grace, King Solomon built a magnificent temple. This was a great day for the children of God. It is a celebration like no other in Israel's history. There was singing and offerings presented to God. The experience is epic. God showed up. And his presence was so overwhelming that they could go on with their regular schedule. Can I read it to you?

2 Chronicles 5

1 When all the work Solomon had done for the temple of the Lord was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated—the silver and gold and all the furnishings—and he placed them in the treasuries of God's temple.

6 and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted.

13 The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, the singers raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang:

“He is good;

his love endures forever.”

Then the temple of the Lord was filled with the cloud, **14** and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God.

WOW! This was a high water mark for Israel. I often think, that just once before I die, I'd like to see the glory of God fill wherever I am in worship – so much so that everybody stops dead in their tracks.

While you and I may not have had this experience, this is not the first time God has shown up in this way. Do you remember the exodus from Egypt? God descends in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to lead them. When Moses goes up on the mountain to meet with God (Ex 24:15-18) and receive the 10 commandments, the glory of the Lord engulfs the mountain. And in Exodus 40 when the tabernacle is set up, Moses cannot even enter because the cloud, the glory of the Lord fills the temple.

This experience now at the dedication of the Temple by king Solomon would have served as a reminder to the children of Israel that the God who had rescued and redeemed them out of Egypt, the God who had guided them to the promised land, the God who had made a covenant of love with them, this God was once again confirming his desire to dwell among his people, so that they might know him and serve him and love him.

But as surely as they had a trail behind them that pointed to the faithfulness of God, there was another testimony, it was the testimony of their own rebellion and unfaithfulness. The people who were led by the presence of God out of Egypt, rebelled against God before the Red Sea was even out of sight. The same people who saw the glory of God cover the mountain, made and worshipped a golden calf – EVEN WHILE the glory of God still covered the mountain.

So Solomon prays (2 Chronicles 6) and much of his prayer is a plea for mercy when the people stray and sin against God. Solomon acknowledges that blessing and success, even the miraculous manifestation of the presence of God will not be enough to prevent the people from rebellion and idolatry and sin.

²⁶ “When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you...

³⁶ “When they sin against you— ³⁷ and if they have a change of heart ... and repent and plead with you... ..³⁹ then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you.

It is against this backdrop that God appears to Solomon and makes the promise found in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14

¹³ “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, 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 I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Maybe Thanksgiving was a good time for you to recall the goodness of God in your life. You may have experienced a lot of success lately. Or you've seen God answer some significant prayers. Your times with God are rich and you know he is speaking to you through His Word. Or maybe you just sense the favor of God on you...on your family...on this new church plant. But can we be honest this morning? Even in moments when we are deeply aware of God's goodness, there is great danger for all of us. It is not a danger from without, but rather a danger within. A lurking temptation to turn away, to rely on yourself, to forget what God has done, to question His faithfulness, His willingness to work. A temptation to give up, to turn inward and serve yourself...A temptation to hunker down, protect your assets, close the borders, shut out the refugees, protect your American dream. But just as it was hope for the children of Israel, the promise of 2 Chronicles 7:14 is hope for us.

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 I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

That's the context, now let's look at the CONDITION of the promise:

If my people will humble themselves....

This instruction, this admonition is repeated over and over in Scripture – and there's an overabundance of evidence that God responds when his people humble themselves.

1 Peter 5:5-6

**"God opposes the proud
but shows favor to the humble."**

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

If God commands us to humble ourselves, AND he has
If He disciplines us when we refuse to humble ourselves, AND He does
And if prayer are answered and forgiveness is lavished and healing is dispensed
WHEN we humble ourselves – AND that is the promise of 2 Chronicles 7:14
The big question is this: HOW do I humble myself?

I think 2 Chronicles 7:14 answers that question.

Look at it

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,

In this verse there are 3 key ways that you and I can actively humble ourselves. We humble ourselves when we pray, when seek his face and when we turn from wicked ways.

WRITE THIS DOWN:

1. I humble myself when I sense the power of God and I pray.

When you pray you are essentially saying “I can’t but God YOU can”
Prayer rises from an awareness that there is a need and deep conviction that God has the power to meet that need. Knowing the need is not enough.

Let’s stop for a moment and survey what we know of the power of God. The scriptures tell us that he created everything by “breath of his mouth” (Psalm 33:6) He spoke and it came to be. Hebrews 1 tells he sustains everything by his powerful word. The gospels tell us that he spoke and the lame walked. He commanded and the dead came back to life. But his power extends far beyond the physical realm. He controls even the hearts of kings, Proverbs 21:1. He thwarts the purposes and plans of the nations but steadily advances his own plans. Psalm 33:10-11 He has the power to take pain and hardship and difficulty and disappointment and turn into something good Romans 8:28 He is the one who has reconciled me and made peace for me by his own blood shed on the cross Colossians 1:20. AND He is the only one who is able to finish what he started in me Philippians 1:6 and keep me from stumbling and to **present** me **before** his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— Jude 1:24

THAT, my friends, is just a glimpse of the power of God. I can’t even come close to any of that. I am painfully aware that the things “I can do” are at best temporary...some are just illusions (or should I say delusions) Only God can do what is eternal, what really matters. So, why don’t we pray?

Most of you know you should pray. The scriptures command us to pray, God promises to respond when we pray. Over and over again the word of God to us is this: PRAY

Psalm 50:15 call on me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

Jeremiah 33:3 ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’

Matthew 7:7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

This is going to be a hard pill for many of you to swallow today, but it truth: Prayerlessness is a sure sign of pride – you are in essence saying “I’ve decided it’s not that important. I can do this on my own” And all your excuses for not praying are smoke and mirrors.

You say: I don’t know how What you’re saying: Praying is just not important enough me to learn to pray

You say: I don’t have time What you’re really saying: Everything else is more important than praying

Every excuse you have for not praying has as its root pride. So stop! Take a long hard look at what God can do against what you can do. Read his Word and Stare at his awesome power, consider your impotence and cry out to God in faith and trust. Humble yourself – pray.

2. I humble myself when I see the beauty of God and I prioritize relationship with Him.

¹⁴ if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face

To seek his face is to prioritize relationship. This is absolutely key to the process of humbling ourselves before God. You see, it's possible for us to pray and only desire the hand of God. But we must see God as more than just useful to us. We must take our eyes off of ourselves and look to him.

I must surrender my fascination with myself to a more worthy preoccupation with the character and purposes of God. I am not the point. He is. I exist for him. He does not exist for me. Larry Crabb, Finding God, pp.40,41

He is the point of it all. And seeing him, knowing him, being in his presence are far more valuable than any other pursuit.

King David understood that. That's why he said:

Psalm 27:4

One thing I ask of the Lord this is what I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon his beauty and seek him in his temple

Psalm 73:25

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

No comfort, no healing, no dream, no possession, no relationship, NOTHING is more desirable than God. He is more beautiful, more precious than anyone and anything else. He alone will endure. Everything else is temporary and fleeting. It will all pass away.

That's why the hymn writer said

I'd Rather Have Jesus – The Lyrics

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold; I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands, I'd rather be led by His nail pierced hand.

Than to be a king of a vast domain Or be held in sin's dread sway, I'd rather have Jesus than anything This world affords today.

I humble myself when I can begin to understand that He is the point, not me. He is the great treasure, not my comfort and pleasure. So make knowing Him your greatest pursuit – pull away from all the things that seem so important and spend time in His Word. Ask God to reveal Himself to you. Humble yourself – pursue knowing Him.

3. I humble myself when I encounter the holiness of God and I repent

Let's look at it again

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,

TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS – This is repentance. It is so much more than regret or feelings of sorrow. We cannot stop at confession. There must be a whole scale turning from sin and returning to God. It's our sin – our rebellion – that separates us from God.

Romans 3:23 all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

But there must be more than just an awareness of my failure. I have to see my sin in light of the holiness of God.

Habakkuk 1:13

Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.

God hates sin because he fully understands the destruction and devastation it brings. He cannot look at sin and NOT respond.

Planned Parenthood videos – how do you watch those and not respond?
The news reports from Beirut and Kenya and Paris.

Listen to me: Our sin is far more repulsive to God than anything that disgusts us. God sees your sin. He knows it. And He has already responded in wrath against your sin. Isaiah 53 he was wounded...

How incredible is that? How humbling?

C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity says this:

"Repentance means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into... It means killing part of yourself, under-going a kind of death."

All of the Christian life is repentance. Turning from sin and trusting in the good news that Jesus saves sinners aren't merely a one-time inaugural experience but the daily substance of Christianity. The gospel is for every day and every moment. Repentance is to be the Christian's continual posture.

There is little humility in regret or feeling sorry. Those feelings are most often quite self centered. But there is a true humbling that comes in turning around, in retracing our steps, in returning, over and over again.

Humble yourself – repent...and repent again

Now, hear the promise

then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

This is no small promise, but I am afraid we can dismiss it easily and not be caught by the enormity of what God has offered to us.

He promises to HEAR us. The God of creation – who spoke the worlds into existence, who formed you in your mother's womb. The great God, King of kings and Lord of Lords, Sovereign God – ruling and reigning on high – the one who sustains everything by his powerful word. The God is full of compassion and unfailing love – the one whose mercies are new every morning. THIS GOD has offered you his ear. He is mindful of you, attentive to you, waiting to listen to you...longing for you to talk to Him. HE HAS PROMISES TO HEAR FROM HEAVEN.

He has promised to FORGIVE. Holy God, perfect God – the one who cannot even bear to look at sin. The one who is repulsed, angered, by our idolatry. The one whose heart is broken and crushed by our adultery. Holy God who cannot simply sweep our rebellion under the rug and act as if it never happened. THIS GOD has offered forgiveness, cleansing.

He has promised to heal our land. This brokenness, this pain, this sadness - none of this was God's design for us. God will make all the sad things come untrue. It may not all happen this side of heaven, but you and I can experience some portion of it now.

There is so much blessing and hope for us if we would only humble ourselves. Do you want...need to know that God is hearing your cries for help? Humble yourself. Do you need...long for forgiveness. Humble yourself. And what about your land? Our land? Your family, your circle of influence, your community, this city, our nation??? Is there brokenness? Is there lack and famine? Is there destruction and devastation? Hear the Word of the Lord...

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 I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.