

HOW TO PRAY FOR HEALING AND RESTORATION

40 Days of Prayer

Pastor Warren's sermon transcript

Week 6

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Welcome to 40 Days of Prayer, and if you'll take out your message notes. You know, guys, we're living in very unusual days. The economy's going really good, but nothing else is. I mean, the stock market's at record levels, more people are at work right now than in decades. The economy's humming along, but I think we are experiencing material prosperity and moral poverty, because every week there's another shooting or another scandal, or conflict or bigotry or opioid addiction epidemic.

The news isn't very good. I was reading an article the other day, and one of the columnists said, "America needs a national healing." I agree with that. Of course, Saddleback is a multinational church, and we have members in Argentina and Germany. We have them in the Philippines and in China. So we care about all of those nations too because we have family there.

We do need healing in our nation, and we need healing in the world, but we need more than that. We need healing in our schools, we need healing in our businesses, we need healing in our government, we need healing in our neighborhoods and in our communities. We need healing in our families. We need healing in our lives, in our minds, in our hearts, in our bodies.

I just thought and felt led by the Lord to this week, for us, in the 40 Days of Prayer, we're looking at how do you pray for healing and restoration? I'm talking about physical healing, but I'm talking about more than that too. Healings of minds, healings of relationships, healings of finances, and so many different areas where there needs to be a restoration, there needs to be a healing. What I want to do is I want to quickly explain how to pray for healing. It's something you need to know. And then we're gonna pray for each other.

About 3,000 years ago God made a promise to King Solomon, and that promise still stands today because it's a promise made to all his people. If you'll look at your message notes, at the top of your outline, 2 Chronicles 7:14, one of the very most important and well-known promises in the entire Bible.

"If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, I will forgive their sins, and I will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

I want you to circle that word "heal." *"I will hear from heaven, I will forgive their sins, I will heal their land."*

Now, I want to point out a couple of things before we actually tear this verse apart in our study together. The first thing I want to point out is this is not a promise to everybody. God didn't make this promise to everybody, but he says this: *"If my people. If my people."* This is a promise for the people of God. Who are the people of God? Well, look up here in the screen.

One day somebody asked Jesus that, and the Bible said in Matthew 12:46-50, *"While Jesus was teaching the crowd, his mother and his brothers waited nearby to speak to him."* By the way, some people don't realize Jesus had brothers and sisters. He was just the oldest. They were all half-brothers and sisters because Joseph was the dad, and God was the dad of Jesus, but it's very clear. We even have the names of Jesus' brothers and sisters. So Mary had children. It's real clear. They're in the Bible. In fact, one of Jesus' half-brothers, named James, became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and wrote a book in the Bible, and it's called James. Hmm. His half-brother. So Mary certainly had kids. It's in Scripture.

Let's go back to that. *"While Jesus was teaching the crowd, his mother and brothers waited nearby to speak to him."* So they're standing at the edge of the crowd. *"Someone told Jesus, 'Your family wants to talk to you.' Jesus asked, 'Who's my family?'"* He always turns everything into a teaching incident. *"Then pointing to his followers, he said, 'These people are my family! Anybody who obeys my Father in heaven and does his will,'"* does the Father's will, *"is my brother and my sister and my mother!"*

So, question. Have you done what the Father said? The Father said to receive his Son. If you've accepted Christ into your life, if you have followed him, if you've become his follower, his disciple, guess what? You're in the family. You're in the family. So this verse is a promise to you. "If my people"; you're his people. If you know the Lord, you're his people. It's not a promise for everybody, but it is for God's people.

The second thing I want you to notice is *"If my people, who are called by my name."* I wonder if you're ever embarrassed to identify yourself as a disciple? I wonder if you're ever embarrassed to say, "I'm a Christian. I'm a follower of Jesus. I'm a disciple of Christ"? *"If my people, who are called by my name."* Everybody else is bold about their beliefs today, but a lot of Christians, they don't say a word at the office. Nobody knows.

Years ago there was a ...anybody remember Lady Clairol? I don't even know if they still have that anymore, but it was one of the original dyes for your hair, and it was the "Lady Clairol. Only her hairdresser knows for sure." You remember that? If you do, you're incredibly old. Go home. There are no Lady Clairol Christians. Only God knows for sure. There are no secret agent Christians. The Bible said, *"Let everyone who nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity"* (2 Timothy 2:19). The Bible says if you're a believer, you need to be called by his name. You need to stand up and say, "I'm a Christian. I'm a believer. I'm a follower of Christ."

He says, *"If my people, who are called by my name..."* Look back up here on the screen. The Bible says this in Mark 8:38, *"If anyone,"* Jesus is talking, *"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and immoral generation, I'll be ashamed of him when I return in glory with all my angels."* I don't want that for you. I don't want that for anybody in our church, that you are ashamed of Christ, to be called by his name, in this day and age, well, Jesus said, "I'll be ashamed of you if you're ashamed of me."

The third thing I want you to notice as we're just getting started, it says, *"If my people, who are called by my name,"* and then he gives four conditions. He says, "If you humble yourself and you

pray and you seek my face and turn from your wicked ways, then I'll hear from heaven, then I'll forgive your sins, and then I'll heal you. I'll heal your land."

The point here is that with every promise, there's a premise. There are conditions. And there are conditions here. He says, "I'll do this, but here are the conditions. Here are the premises before the promise, and therefore there are conditions of healing and restoration."

I don't know what you need restored in your life. Maybe you need your marriage restored, or maybe you need your dream restored. Maybe you need your body restored. Maybe you need your health restored, or your finances restored. I don't know what needs healing in your life, but the principles in this passage apply to every area of healing and restoration. So if you'll do what he says to do here and you fully understand it, you can expect. God says, "If you do this, I will do that." So let's get right into it, okay?

Number one. Here's the first condition for healing and restoration in any area of your life. Number one.

1. I admit I'm not in control.

I admit that I'm not in control. And what is that called? That's called humility. Saying, "God is God and I'm not. God is God, and I am not." The first condition for healing and restoration in your life, *"If my people will humble themselves."* Humility is the first step to healing.

What's he saying here? So you know, I don't approach God arrogantly. I don't come to God proudly. I don't come to God flippantly. I don't come to God disrespectfully. "Hey, man, how's it going? Big man upstairs? Big daddy?" I don't make demands in prayer. "God, you have to do this." God is not your genie. God is not my genie. We've talked about this many times. I don't come arguing, demanding, being arrogant. It says I come humbly. *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves."*

By the way, did you know that in the Scriptures, never are you ever commanded to pray for humility? So you don't ever have to pray for it. The Bible doesn't ever tell you, "God, please humble me." Really, you don't want to ask him to do that. It's humiliating. You are never to pray, "God, humble me." Why? Because humility is a choice. Humility is something you do to yourself. God doesn't do it to you; you do it to yourself. Humility is a choice.

So instead of saying, "Pray for humility," it just says "Humble yourself." It's something you do. And over and over in Scripture it says, instead of pray for humility, it says, "Humble yourself. Humble yourself. Humble yourself. Humble yourself." It says it over and over and over in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Humility is a choice.

You say, "Okay. If that's the first condition for something to be restored in my life, something to be healed in my life, I want to know three things. What is humility? What does it look like? How do I develop it? How do I show God my humility? How do I do that?"

I'm glad you asked, because I made a list. This is gonna surprise you. What is humility and how do you show it? Let me get ... I'm gonna just read ... you don't try to write all these down. Here's 12 ways to show humility, real humility, every single day.

Number one: Confess your sin to God the moment you realize it. So you're sitting there and you say something wrong, you're angry, prideful, jealous, or whatever, "God, that was wrong. I'm sorry." That's humble. That's humble. That's humility. When you keep short accounts of God, you don't wait until the end of the week to have a pile of garbage and say, "Lord, I gotta take out the garbage now." No, you take it out the moment you do it. "God, that wasn't right. I'm sorry." You just say it to God. You confess your sin the moment you realize it.

Number two: Humility is forgiving quickly. If you don't know how to forgive quickly, that's prideful. If you carry grudges, that's prideful. Humility is forgiving quickly. You never hold on to a grudge. Humble people are forgiving quickly.

Number three: When you're treated unfairly, be quiet and patient and don't retaliate. That's real humility. You are most like Christ, I am most like Christ when I refuse to defend myself against false accusation. When people attack you, when people say mean things about you, when people say stuff that's untrue about you, and you don't say a word. The Bible said that Jesus did this. He was perfect, and yet he was maligned; he was misled; he was accused of all kinds of stuff. They put him on the cross for stuff that wasn't true. The Bible says that when they stood him before the governor, Pilate, and others, it says, "*He spake not a word unto them.*" I am most like Christ when I absorb the attacks. You are most like Christ when you absorb attacks. That's humility.

Number four: When you look for ways to serve others, instead of expecting to be served, that's humility. When you accept criticism and correction graciously, that shows God your humility. When you don't fight to get the best seat or the best table or the best parking spot, that's humility. Intentionally being friends, befriending people who have no status or who can't help you, or who are overlooked by society, that's humility, where you intentionally build relationships and build friendships with people who don't, can't, won't serve you. Maybe they're the unpopular person in the office or at school. But you do that. That is a mark of humility.

Humility is being respectful to the authorities in your life, even the bad ones. This stuff's not easy, is it? I'm not giving you an easy list.

Humility is when you pick up the trash wherever you find it. Humility is when you leave a public restroom cleaner than when you found it. The little things, the stuff that nobody else will see, God sees that. That's humility.

When you admit your weaknesses and your sins to a few safe people. You don't have to tell everybody. But revealing your feelings is the beginning of healing; we've talked about that many times. When you're able to say, "I'm not good at this. I'm weak at this. This is my sin. This is where I'm struggling. This is my temptation." If there was more confession of temptation in small groups, there'd be less need of confession of sin. It would get stopped sooner. That's humility, when you can admit what you're struggling with in a small group or with a close friend.

When you always speak well of others, you never use put-downs, you never use put-downs, you never stoop to the level of people who put you down, that's humility. When, number 12, you pray for your enemies. Are you kidding me? Jesus said it. Those people you really don't like, the people you vote against, the people who you walk the other way when you see them. Pray for your enemies. Bless those who hate you. That's 12 marks of real humility.

Now, why would anybody live like that? It's hard. Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less. Humility is you're so busy focused on God and helping other people, you don't even think about yourself. If I go into a party and I walk in and I start thinking, "How do I look to everybody?" Who am I focused on? Me. That's pride. When I walk into a party and I go in here and go, "Who needs encouragement? Who could probably use a word of encouragement today?" That's humility. Humility is not thinking less of yourself - "I'm bad. I'm no good. I'm nothing. I'm zero. I'm zip." No, that's false humility. Humility is you're so busy focused on God and other people, you just don't even think about yourself. You're natural. You're normal, because you're focused on everybody else.

That's a hard way to live. Why would anybody do that? Because what God does when you do that. God says, "If you humble yourself," there are many, many, many promises in Scripture. God ... I'll just say it this way. Humility is a big deal to God. It's a lot bigger deal than you realize. Humility's not false. I'm nothing, I'm zero. You can be confident and humble at the same time. You're just not focused on you. But God loves humble people.

Let me give you four things God will do in your life if you work on this. Write these down.

- **If I'm humble, God will guide me.**

If I'm humble, God will guide me. You ever go, "I don't know what to do. I don't know what step I should take. I don't know whether I should get in or get out. I don't know whether I should hold on or let go." When you don't know which way to turn and you're confused, get humble. If I'm humble, God will guide me.

Psalm 25:9, *"God leads the humble in the right way, and he teaches them his will."*

You want to know God's will? God's will is not given to prideful people, arrogant people, self-sufficient people. The humbler you are, the more God will guide you, the fewer mistakes you'll make in life. That's a benefit.

Let me give you a second benefit. If I'm humble, God will not only guide me, he'll bless me.

- **If I'm humble, God will bless me.**

These promises are all through Scripture. I just gave you one verse right there.

Isaiah 66:2, *"I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts."*

God doesn't bless ego trippers. God doesn't bless prideful people. God doesn't bless people who secretly think they're better than everybody else. No, God says, *"I'll bless those who have humble and contrite hearts."*

Number three:

- **If I'm humble, God will give me the power to change.**

If I'm humble, God will give me the power to change. You know what the power to change is? One word: it's called grace. Grace is the power to change. You need grace to make changes in your life. There's stuff in your life you'd like to change but you can't; you've tried. You won't.

The only way you'll ever get changed is with the grace of God. How do you get the grace of God in your life, the power you need for change? Well, he says, James 4:6, *"God opposes the proud, but God gives grace to the humble."* The more humble you are, the more grace God gives you. The more prideful you are, the more on the opposite side you are, and you're gonna lose that battle because your arms are too short to box with God.

God opposes the proud. Every time I'm prideful, I'm on the opposite side of God. I don't want to be there. You don't want to be there. But every time I'm humble, God gives me the grace that I need. And what's that? It's the power to change. God says, "I'll guide you. I'll bless you. I'll give you grace."

Number four. If I'm humble, God says, "I will relieve your stress."

- **If I'm humble, God will reduce my stress.**

When I am humble, my stress goes down. When I'm prideful, my stress goes up. It's true. Jesus says in Matthew 11:29, *"Take the yoke that I give you... and learn from me. For I am gentle and I'm humble."* Jesus is humble. And he says, *"I will restore deep rest for your soul."* The deep rest for your soul.

Wouldn't you like that, the deep rest for your soul? How do you get deep rest for your soul, when you think, "I'm all dried up. I've got nothing to give. I've got nothing left in me, the faucet. I'm tapped out. It's gone. I'm at the end of my rope. I'm ready to throw in the towel." All those expressions. How do you get the deep rest you need? Humility. Look at that. Take my yoke, learn from me, cause I'm humble. And it says if you learn from me, he said, "Then it will restore deep rest in your soul."

So, humility begins with admitting, "I'm not in control. God, you're God, and I'm not."

In just a minute I want to sing that song again. You guys ... "Lord I Need You," cause that's exactly what humility is. But write this down, because this is what that song's about. Number two. Second key is:

2. Ask God for help!

If you need something in your life restored, if you need something in your life healed, first admit I'm not in control, humble myself, I can't do it on my own; and second, I ask God for help. How do you do that? *"If my people... will pray..."* (2 Chronicles 7:14). *"If my people... will pray..."* I ask God for help. And when I ask God for help, I realize I'm not waiting on God; he's been waiting on me. You know whatever you've wanted restored in your life, have you been praying about it? Have you been asking God for that kind of help? He says, "I'll give it to you." He says, "I'll give you the kind of help that you need."

Now, the truth is, for many people, healing, asking God for healing, "God, I need healing in my body. I need healing in my mind. I need healing in my marriage." Healing is a scary thing to a lot of people, so how do you do it? How do you pray for healing? Let me just give you a couple tips. Write these down. Let me give you four, five tips right here on how do I say, "Lord I need you"? How do I say that?

You're first gonna need some confidence to do this. Look at this. John 16, Jesus says this, verse 23-24: *"I tell you the truth, my Father will give you anything you ask... My Father will give you anything you ask for in my name. Until now,"* Jesus says, *"you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask..."* I want you to ask. Over 20 times in the New Testament, you are commanded by God to ask in prayer. He says it over, "Ask and it'll be given. Seek and you will find." Ask anything. Ask everything. *"Ask and you'll receive, so that your joy will be the fullest possible joy."*

That verse gives us the first two tips on how to pray for healing. I hope you're writing this down. Here's the first thing you do when you pray for healing. The first is:

- 1) Remember Jesus wants me to ask.

That'll give you confidence. Whatever you've got going on in your life, you go, "Well, I don't know if I should pray for this." Jesus says ask. And look what he says there. He says, "Ask anything. Ask anything in my name." He says, "Remember that I want you to ask." It's his idea.

Have you ever thought about this? We've been talking about prayer for over a month now. Why does God want you to ask for stuff in prayer? Why does he do that? The reason God wants you to ask for stuff in prayer is that's the only way you're gonna learn how to trust him. It's like with a parent and a child. How does a child learn to trust a parent? The child has a need and the child expresses the need, usually through crying. The parent hears the need. The parent meets the need. The child trusts the parent. And that's done thousands and thousands of time growing up; that's how a child learns to trust a parent. I have a need, I admit a need, I express the need, parent hears the need, parent meets the need, trust. Repeat again.

The same is true with your heavenly Father. If you're not asking God for anything, you're not learning how to trust him. If you're not asking God for anything ... if you're not saying, "Lord, I need you. I need this." You're not asking him, you're not trusting him.

So in this verse, he says first, Jesus wants me to ask. The second thing, here's the second tip:

2) Ask in Jesus' name.

It says, "Ask in my name." In other words, on the basis of what Jesus paid for on the cross. Jesus paid for everything you need on the cross. It's like if you were to walk into a fancy restaurant and you had no way of getting in there and you didn't know anybody, but you knew the owner and the owner said, "Just flash my name when you walk in. Say, 'I come in the name of Bob.'" "Oh, come right in." I come in the name of Bob. There are some places you could use my name, it'll get you in there. Some places you could use my name, you get kicked out.

But when you come in the name of Jesus to the Father, you get instant access. So I realize Jesus wants me to ask, and I realize ... I don't need to be reticent or hesitant to pray for healing of my body or anything else. He says, "I want you to ask. Ask anything in my name."

I know what some of you are saying. You've got an objection. "Excuse me, Rick. I don't get everything I pray for. What's wrong with this verse?" All right, let's just take it one step at a time. First, you say, "I don't get everything I pray for. What's up?" Look closely at that verse right now. Do you see the word "everything" in that verse? No, you see the word "anything." What that verse says is you can ask for anything. It doesn't say "I'll give you everything." Big difference between anything and everything. Does that make sense? Jesus says, "I don't want you worrying about, is this okay to pray for or not?" He says, "You can pray for anything; I'll figure out whether it's legit or not."

So, if you trust God and say, "God, you told me to pray for anything. I'm gonna pray for this." God will figure out whether that's best for you at this time, it's part of his plan for this time. He doesn't say, "I'll give you everything." He says, "You can ask anything. I'll figure out which of these are legit, which of these should be done right now or not, so go ahead and ask." He says he'll sort it out in his plan.

The next verse there in your outline gives us two more tips. James 5:13-15, he says:

"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise." We were doing that earlier. "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. And if he has sinned, he will be forgiven."

All right now, here's the third tip of how to pray for healing based on that verse. Write this down. I'm sorry I didn't give you a lot of room this week. Third tip in praying for healing:

3) Get other people to pray with you.

That's important. It doesn't have to be elders. Here it's using elders. But anybody in our church can pray for you. Any believer can pray for you, for your healing.

By the way, we covered this when we covered "He anoints my head with oil," but there's no healing power in oil, but it is a beautiful symbol of the Holy Spirit. So it's fine. If you want to anoint somebody with oil, then anoint him with oil. It's a symbol of God's presence and Spirit. There's nothing magical about it.

You don't have to have an elder; just get somebody to be with you and pray with you. I don't know where you need restoration. I don't know where you need healing. But this is the time to take advantage of somebody praying for you and anointing you with oil.

Do you have to have a pastor? No. Do I have to have, like, 10 people? No, you could do it with one. Look at this verse here up on the screen.

Jesus said, *"I tell you, if just two of you on earth agree together about anything..."* [there's that word again] *anything you ask for*, [it doesn't say everything. Anything you want to ask for, you agree on it,] *it will be done for you by my Father in heaven"* (Matthew 18:19). He says, "You only need two." You don't have to have 50 people praying for you. Fine, get 50 people praying for you. He says you could have two people, just one other person.

In that verse that we just read in James 5:15 where he says, *"The prayer in faith will make the sick person well,"* that's the fourth tip:

4) Believe and expect an answer.

If you want to pray for healing for somebody, this is how you do it. Remember Jesus wants me to ask, ask in Jesus' name, get other people to pray with you, and believe and expect an answer. He says, *"The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well."*

Then there's one other tip, and it's in this next verse, Ephesians 6:18. It says there,

"Pray in the Spirit at all times with all kinds of prayers, asking for all that you need. To do this you must always be ready and never give up! Always pray for all God's people."

Are you seeing all the "all's" in this verse? All the "all's"? You might circle them all. All the "all's" and all the "always". Pray all the time, all kinds of prayer, for all you need. Always be ready. Always pray for all God's people. Circle the "all's" and the "always." That's tenacity. That's the fifth key to praying for someone's healing.

5) Keep on praying till God tells you to stop.

You don't pray one time and say, "Well, forget that." You just keep praying and you keep praying and you keep praying because God's timing is perfect. You don't know when it is. Sometimes God does a restoration instantly; sometimes he does it in an hour or a day or a week. Sometimes it takes years.

God is responsible for the answer; we're responsible to ask. All right? So, if you need healing, in any area of your life, you need restoration, first I admit I'm not in control and I evidence my

humility in all those different ways we talked about. And then I ask God for help, and I'm not worried about it; I'm bold, because Jesus tells me to ask. I just say, "Lord, I need you," because that's what he wants to hear. He wants to hear you say, "God, I need you." He goes, "I know, but I want you to say it, because everything in the whole universe I've planned for you. And if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves." God, I'm not in control; you are. I'm not. You're God. I'm not. "Will humble themselves and pray." God, I need your help. I need you, oh, I need you.

Then we come to the third premise for the promise. *"If my people will humble themselves and pray,"* and number three, *"seek my face."* Write this down. Third key.

3. Seek God, not a miracle!

I seek God. I seek God's face, not a miracle. It's okay to want a miracle. That's fine. It's okay to want healing and restoration, but that's not what you seek. If my people will humble themselves, pray, seek my face, not seek a miracle, not seek a sign, not seek a healing, not seek prosperity, not seek a thousand other gifts of God. Stop seeking the gift and just go, "God, I want you. I want you. I want to know you." And when you seek God, you get everything else. But God is not a vending machine, and there are unfortunately millions of Christians today who spend all their time seeking what God has to give them, and nothing in seeking God himself.

"If my people ...will seek my face..." Seek him, not merely the blessing. If my people will seek my face. Lord ... what does that mean? It means, Lord, whether I get the answer I want or not, I want to know you. Whether I get the healing I want or not, whether I get the restoration I want or not, whether I get the answer I want or not, I am seeking you. And as I come to you, if I don't get what I think is best for me, I'm gonna be satisfied with what you think is best for me. And out of this whole ordeal, coming out of my pain in the divorce, coming out of my pain in the loss of a child, coming out of the miscarriage, coming out of being laid off or whatever, I'm seeking you. Not the blessing, not the gift, not the miracle. I'm seeking you. I want to know you, God.

Proverbs 8:17, God says, *"I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me."*

Hebrews 11:6, *"God rewards those who earnestly seek him."*

Circle the word "earnestly." This is not some casual pastime. This is not like, "I'm gonna seek you in my spare moments. After three TV shows, I'll seek you. After I do my social media, I'll seek you." Like you're the low priority. No, this is a serious pursuit. Who earnestly seek him. It's the primary focus of my life. God, I've got to know you, because you made me to know you. You don't become an Olympic athlete in your spare time. You've got to seek it. You've got to earnestly seek it.

Years ago, my brother played golf, so I played golf because he played it. I hate golf. It's the only game you can play your entire life and never get any better at it. Why would I do that game? People say, "You play golf?" Well, I played at it. Big difference. You say, "Why did you play it?" Because I wasn't willing to invest time. It's real simple. I just wasn't willing to invest the time. And to be a pro at anything requires intensity. You want to be a pro at prayer, you gotta

invest the time. You want to be a pro at knowing God, you gotta invest the time. You've got to earnestly seek him. What does God want from me more than anything else? What does God want from you? He just wants you to seek him. God, I really want to get to know you.

Look up here at the screen. Psalm 114:2, *"The Lord looks down from heaven on the entire human race, and he looks to see if there's even one with real understanding, [just] one who seeks for God."*

What's he saying about that verse? He's saying, "The fact is, most of my children really don't even seek me." It's really rare to find somebody who's earnest about seeking God. We want just enough of God to bless us, but not to change us.

Deuteronomy. The Bible says this in chapter 4. *"If you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart,"* that's the key, *"and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, you will return to the Lord your God and obey him. For he is a merciful God; and he will not abandon or destroy you..."* (Deuteronomy 4:29-31).

If you're stuck in a cycle and year after year after year, you feel like, "I'm not getting any better. I'm just kind of stuck. I'm in neutral. I wasn't any better last year. I'm not sure I'll be any better this next year. Same situation, relationships still stink, and my habits still are not where I want them to be." You're stuck in that cycle, it's because you're not seriously seeking God. You've got to seek him with all your heart.

You know what? If you'll do that, it's kind of like humility. God loves the humble, but God goes overboard for people who seek him. He will bless your socks off.

Look at the next verse, Matthew 6:33, *"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these other things will be given to you as well."*

There's almost nothing God won't do for the woman or the man that are genuinely seeking God first. Almost nothing. Everything else ... he's all, "I'm gonna take care of it. It's so rare to find somebody who's truly seeking me. Other people are seeking blessings from me, miracles from me, signs from me, but these people actually just want to know me."

You say, "How do I do that?" Well, go back and listen to the message last week where I talked about how to pray throughout your day using the seven phrases of the Lord's Prayer. That's a way to seek God. You can listen to it online again, review those notes. It shows you how, throughout the day, how to seek God throughout the day.

"If my people... will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face," then he gives us the fourth premise for the promise. *"And turn from their wicked ways..."* What in the world does that mean? "I'll heal you, but you gotta," number four, turn from my wicked ways. Write this down:

4. Turn my attention from the world to the Word.

I turn my attention from the world to the Word. Now, I need to define two terms here: the word "turn" and the word "wicked," because I think we've got a lot of misunderstandings about this.

He says the fourth premise for the promise is turn from their wicked ways. Okay, first I'll start with wicked ways. Wickedness. What do you think of when I say the word "wicked"? You might think of the Broadway play. "I wanna be popular." Wicked. What are you thinking? What most people think of when we say the word "wicked," they think of evil, really bad and evil stuff that other people do. Assassinations, that's evil. That's wicked. Sexual rape and abuse, that's wicked. Genocide, that's wicked. Extortion, that's wicked. Murder. Torture. That's wicked. Our idea of wicked is Hitler and the extreme of evil.

Let me give you a little bit different definition of wicked. What does the Bible say? Write this down. Definition.

Wickedness is forgetting God.

Wickedness is just forgetting God. Any time I forget God, that's wicked, because you were made to be in fellowship with God. He loves you, he wants you to love him back. He knows you, he wants you to know him. Wickedness is not all those other things; it's forgetting God, and when we forget God, we do all kinds of other stuff. And when society forgets God, society does all kinds of wicked stuff, but it's really about forgetting God.

Look up here on the screen. Isaiah 17:10. *"You have forgotten... You have forgotten the God who saves you, and you have not remembered that God is your place of safety."*

Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. What's your place of safety? What has been your place of safety? God says, "I'm your place of safety." You've just forgotten that. Some of you, you think your place of safety is your bank account, and some of you think it's your boyfriend, and some of you think it's something else, whatever. But God says, "I'm your place of safety. I'm gonna protect you. You're my child. You're my son. You're my daughter." And what you've done is you've forgotten.

I've got a message I've been holding on. I was gonna do it a couple weeks ago on prayer and memory. I studied all through the Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, every verse on forgetting and remembering. There are a lot of things God says I want you to forget, but there are a lot of things God says I want you to remember. One of the things God says, "When you've forgotten me, that's wicked."

Now, what about "turn"? Turn from my forgetting God. Well, the "turn," that word there in Hebrew, the Old Testament, literally means "return." It means "bring back." It means "repent." It's the word for "repent." You don't just turn away from the bad stuff; you turn to the good stuff. In the Bible, in the New Testament, it's the Greek word "metanoia." "Meta" means "to turn," and "noia" is the Greek word for "noos," which means your mind. It means to flip your mind, to change your mind. "Repentance" - that's the word for "metanoia" in the Bible - "repentance" simply means change your mind.

I used to think about God this way, now I think about God that way. That's repentance. I used to think about... I thought that was good. Now I think this is good. I used to value that, now I value this. That's repentance. I used to think God was this; now I think God is this. I change my mind about life; I changed my mind about success; I changed my mind about what matters; I changed my mind about the past, my past; I changed my mind about the future; I changed my mind about love; I changed my mind about what matters most. That is repentance. I am turning my attention.

Now, most people, they think of the word "repentance," they think of a negative word. When you think of repentance, you think of a guy on the sidewalk with a street sign and he's got long scraggly hair and a beard and it says, "Turn or burn. You're gonna die and fry while we go to the sky." No, no. That's not repentance. Repentance is not a negative term.

Repentance is the most positive term in history. When I repented, I turned from guilt to forgiveness. That was a good deal. When I repented, I turned from darkness to light. I turned from no purpose to purpose. I turned from hopeless despair to hope for eternity. I turned from bitterness to love. It was the most positive change in my life. If I had known how positive it is to repent, I would have done it years earlier. It's not like somebody's trying to give me cancer.

I wish I had known it and understood it sooner to turn from darkness to light, from meaninglessness to meaningfulness, from a life that is shallow to a life that is significant. That's repentance. It's the most positive change you can make, to turn away from hell to heaven, from Satan to God, from no love to the love of the Father that will never, ever end.

So when he says, "Turn from your wicked ways," he says, "I want you to turn away from that to turn over here." Change your attention. Change your attention. Metanoia.

I'm gonna wrap it up. Look up here at the screen. Acts 3:19. The Bible says, *"Repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out..."* Anybody like that? I like that part. And, *"so that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."*

I bet you probably need some times of refreshing in your life. You may need some times of refreshing in your career. Our nation needs a time of refreshing. How do we get it? *"Repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out. Times of refreshing come from the Lord."*

Last two verses, Proverbs 28:13, *"If you hide your sins, you will not succeed. But if you confess and reject them, you will receive mercy."*

What are you pretending isn't a problem in your life? What are you pretending isn't a sin? Anything we've learned from politicians, and we haven't learned much, but what we have learned, the cover-up is worse than the sin. It makes it worse. It just makes it worse. *"If you hide your sins, you will not succeed. But if you confess and reject them, you're gonna receive mercy."*

James 5:16, *"Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be ..."* What? Circle that word, *"healed."*

It all starts with confession. You might write down there, "I need others to help me change." That's why we have support groups, that's why we have recovery groups, that's why we have small groups, that's why we have every kind of possible group you can imagine, because you need other people to help you change. *"Confess your sins to each other, pray for each other, and you will be healed."*

"If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn," repentance, *"from their [evil ways,] their wicked ways..."* I stop forgetting God, then three things: ***"I will hear from heaven, I will forgive their sins, and I will heal their land"*** (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Let's bow our heads.

Folks, this isn't rocket science. It's pretty easy to understand. God just lays it all out. It's just the real issue is will we get it? Will you take these steps right now in your mind, in your heart?

Would you start, "If my people will humble themselves," will you say, God, I want to admit I'm not in control. I've acted like it, but I'm not. I've tried to run the shots and call the shots, and it just isn't working very well, and the harder I try to control things, the more out of control everything gets. So today I humble myself, and I'm asking you to guide me and bless me and give me the power to change and relieve my stress and all of those things that come if I walk humbly before you.

That list of humble actions doesn't look very easy to do, so God, I'm asking you to help me to be quiet in the face of criticism, to pray for my enemies, to immediately confess my sin to you, and all those other things.

And you said, Lord, "If my people will pray." I'm asking for help. Thank you for thinking of the idea of prayer. Thank you that I don't even have to worry about is this a good prayer or not? You just said, "Ask anything," and you'll sort it out. I thank you that you don't put me down for saying stupid prayers. You just want me to talk to you. Teach me to pray all the time, all kinds of prayer, asking all that I need, to always be ready, to always pray for all God's people. To be tenacious.

And Lord, I want to seek you. "If my people will seek my face..." Forgive me for the times I have not sought your face, I've just sought your blessing. You've said that those who seek you will find you. I want to find you, and in this next year, I want to be closer to you than ever before. Help me to turn my attention away from the world to the Word.

And as I do these things, I ask you to hear my prayer from heaven. I ask you to forgive my sins. And I ask you to heal me, my heart, my body, my mind, my relationships, my fears, my bad habits, my bad attitudes, my bitterness. Heal my anger. Heal my impatience. I want to be like you, Lord. You're humble, and I humbly ask this because Jesus already paid for it, and I pray it in his name, amen.