

# A Revival of the Word

by Douglas Small

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**Scripture:** Genesis 28:16, 2 Chronicles 7:14, James 4:8, Psalm 51:17, Joel 2:12, Malachi 4:6, Ephesians 6:4, Deuteronomy 6:6

**Topics:** "Personal Transformation", "Revival through Repentance"

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## Description

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## Transcript

A couple days here of considering what God might be saying to us and might be calling us to do. Yesterday, I spent my time in the book of Amos. Today, I want to spend most of my time in the book of Ezra.

And of course, Doug Stringer was just in the book of Nehemiah talking about Nehemiah. Let me give you a little bit of perspective that you may not have been aware of. In 605, and I know all of us, we start, our eyes start glossing over when somebody starts giving us a history lesson.

But it's worth the perspective that in 605 BC, Babylon made its first incursion into Judah and into Jerusalem. It took Daniel and the three Hebrew children, the brightest of the bright, deposed the king, put a vassal king. And then in 597 or thereabouts, it made a second incursion.

This is when Ezekiel and others are taken into what is modern day Iraq, ancient Babylon. And then in 586, they came back and completely destroyed the city and the temple. From 605 to 539, when Babylon moves

off the international stage and Persia moves onto that stage, you have Cyrus.

And there's been a lot of talk about Cyrus, about Donald Trump being a modern day Cyrus. Somebody said he is more of a firewall than he is a president. That is, God has raised him up as a firewall to stop what was happening in the nation, to stop a slide, to stop a definitive direction.

It is not what Donald Trump will do. It's not what Mike Pence will do. It's not what Washington will do.

It's what the church must do. We've been given a window of time and frankly, we've wasted it. We've not cried out to God.

We've not had a mighty revival. There hasn't been unity. There hasn't been prayer.

And it's as if God says, all right, just before this term, this window closes, I'm going to give you one more chance in the coronavirus. So the first exiles leave in 605, 50,000 come back in 535. Cyrus allows them to come back.

That's 70 years. That's the 70 years of captivity. And by the way, by the way, Israel never celebrated a Sabbath.

Remember every seventh year the land was to rest and they were to give themselves to the kind of recalibration of social values so that the rich didn't get rich and the poor didn't get poor. And people got a second chance to begin every seven years. It's kind of what our seven years of bankruptcy stays on your record kind of thing.

It's a biblical idea. Every seven Sabbaths, every 50 years, they were to have a year of jubilee. Never had one.

And so God counted and he said, my goodness, you've been in the land 490 years. You should have given me 70 Sabbaths. You haven't given me any.

I'm going to give the land a Sabbath. I'm going to impose a Sabbath on the land. So you get a Sabbath from 605 to 535.

Ah, when the people come back, they have appropriations to rebuild the temple, but they confiscate much of the lumber. And this is what Haggai would say. You dwell in paneled houses.

They've taken the lumber that would have been used for the temple and they've used it to build their own houses. And so they sit going to the temple site, but there's only a pile of rubble where Solomon's temple, it's the remains of Solomon's temple. And for almost 20 years, from 535 to 515 or 516, there is no temple.

And then Haggai prophesies, isn't it enough that you have money and you put it into a bag with holes? You don't have enough food to eat. It's because God is blowing away your profits. It's because of his house that lies waste.

And finally, they're motivated to rebuild the temple. So you get the destruction of the temple 586 and you get the rebuilding of the temple 516, another 70 years. 70 years of the people being out of the land, 70 years of no temple, no place, no footstool for God's glory.

Now here's the sad thing. They've got a temple in 516, but they're still scattered. Most of them are scattered now in modern day Iran and ancient Persia.

And they are about to execute all Jewish people in Persian. And God raises up Esther. Mordecai says, God has brought you to the kingdom for such a time as this.

And the date of that is about 474 BC. So you're counting down 605, 586, 516. And now you go into the next century and you're at 574.

About what? 40 years or so. And you get the possible annihilation of Jewish people. Esther represents the intercessory element.

She is the one who goes before the king. And so the first thing Matthew Henry said was that when you want to see what God is doing is you look at the level of prayer. He raises up intercessors.

We saw in the 70s, Intercessors for America raised up probably the largest, most formidable group we saw in the same period. The National Day of Prayer take on new notoriety and the National Prayer Committee formed out of that. We've seen a rising tide of prayer.

It was in 1989 that Peter Wagner and others said, have you noticed what's happening around the world with these prayer gatherings, these extraordinary prayer gatherings? It was in 1992 that you had the first pray through the window. You looked at 62 nations in the 1040 window, as it was called, 10 degrees latitude to 40 degrees latitude north from Western Africa and South Western Europe, all the way around through the Middle East, through India, through Southern China, and then the 470, the 470 window. This is where 60% of the population lived, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist.

And the idea was you can't get in there. If we're going to finish the Great Commission, you can't even get in there to evangelize. And somebody said, well, couldn't we pray? Couldn't we pray? Well, what good is, and here's our pragmatic problem in America.

What good is prayer going to do? What good is prayer going to do if we can't, if we can't actually do something? We are so pragmatic in America. We don't understand the real movement happens not when we work, but when God works. And we don't understand, and you'll never understand the mystery between our prayer and God's works.

It's not that our prayer moves God. It's that our prayer is a signal that we discern His moving, and we are prepared in that process to move with Him. And this dialectic of bridegroom and bride, this dialectic of heaven and earth, thy will be done in earth as in heaven.

This conversation back and forth where God moves and we move, and He moves us, and we begin to move it with Him. This is what, this is what God has been trying to get us to do to move into all these years. You will have another, you'll have another 15 years before you come to Ezra.

And Ezra will be about 558, 557 BC. So you are now way into the next, to the next century. And you've had, you've had now 60 years in which the temple has been rebuilt, but the city is in ruins.

The gates are down, burned with fire. The walls of the city are not definitive. There's no in and out, no right and wrong, no clear them and us.

All of that's gone. All of that is erased. And so you get an intercessor movement, and then you get a priestly movement.

In 1989, the first pastor's prayer summit took place. And over the next decade and a half, almost 50,000 pastors in America got on a bus, went out of town for three days, sometimes four, to do nothing but sit in a circle around the communion table with Bibles on their laps and pray. Pray for their city, pray for their own lives, pray for their own spiritual renewal in their own lives, in their own hearts.

50,000 people. And God started to work with pastors. And if you go then another 13 years to 445, you come to Nehemiah.

Nehemiah is not a priest. He has the authority of the governor. He comes in the place of the king, of Persia himself.

He's got the documentation, the authority, everything that is needed, as did Ezra when he came. And in every one of these cases, there is the moment in which Esther goes before the king. There's the moment in which as Ezra gets permission of the king and letters to go back and begin the process of renewal.

And Nehemiah gets letters, authority to do what he's doing in the city. We're not a group of rebels trying to do what is defiant. But watch this again, a movement of intercessors symbolized by Esther, a pastoral movement of prayer and spiritual renewal, pastors symbolized by Ezra, and then the marketplace movement.

Nehemiah will do in the city what Ezra did not have authority to do. And I think what's happening today is a Nehemiah movement. It's a movement in the city, but the movement in the church, the spiritual renewal in the church has not yet, it's not yet come to fruition.

I just want to give you a perspective. All of this happens over almost a 30-year period. Well, if you look at it, it's a century and a half.

It's a century and a half in building, but from the time of Esther, Esther and the decree, 474 to the time of Nehemiah, 445, you get that feeling, almost 30 years here. This doesn't take place quickly. It doesn't take place automatically until God begins to move in a definitive way.

There is a season of suddenlies in which we enter in, you know, shall God not avenge his lack, though they cry out day and night and night and day and day and night, I tell you, he will avenge them speedily. Wait a minute. Do we cry day and night and night and day and night and day and day and night, or does he do it speedily? Both.

Both. There is a persistence in prayer. There is a dogged determination in prayer.

There is a relentlessness in prayer, and then we enter into a season of suddenlies. I think we're about to enter into a season of suddenlies. If Doug String had been able to come back on, I was going to ask him, because everybody's been seeing the news, I'm sure, that the leader of North Korea, not only a coma after the stint, failure of the stint, but now almost definitively reports are coming out that he's dead.

There's rumbles already in China about appropriating North Korea as their own, but there is a prophecy by Ken Clement who also prophesied the election of Donald Trump. He's dead now, but he prophesied the reunification of Korea and that that would be the place from which the global revival emerged. We're

seeing a season of suddenlies.

We're seeing this perseverance that's been taking place from the intercession and from the time of Reagan and the new emphasis upon a national day of prayer for the nation. A law, actually, a call to prayer in the nation. Washington doesn't pay much attention to it.

I've been there many times on the national day of prayer, and I thought, boy, this will be a wonderful time to go when Washington is praying. You never know. You never know except for what did take place in the days before the Obama administration.

There was a White House ceremony, and then there was always a ceremony in Congress and a ceremony somewhere else in Washington of prayer. Then the Tent of David has been there for a good while until it moved out to 50 states. That was the plan this year is that it would move out and go to 70 cities across the nation.

I pray that that still happens in some way. We're seeing a season of suddenlies, and we're likely to see more jolts, more seismic shifts. What's the foundation for a marketplace revival? Well, first, you've got to get something else settled that we've not gotten settled.

I hinted at it yesterday, but I want to come back to it today. If you'll open your Bible to the book of Ezra, I just want to go through this and just do a basic, plain, vanilla, no fancy stuff look at this, and we'll stop and pray. We'll stop and pray.

The first thing you see in chapter 7 verse 10 is this, Ezra. Let me just point out his granddaddy, or perhaps his great granddaddy, was the last high priest who was killed in 587-586, somewhere in that era, the year of or the year before the temple was destroyed. And so when the people were carried away into captivity, the sons and the family of that high priest was carried away, and from that lineage came Ezra.

So he would be third or fourth from that last living high priest of Solomon's temple. So he has charge of these sacred scrolls, and he's pouring over these scrolls. He's a scribe who writes and copies and studies.

He's a priest. He's in the lineage of the high priest, and the Bible says that he prepared his heart, that's prayer, to seek the law of the Lord. And so let me just say to you that the revival that we have to have in America is a revival of the Word.

It cannot be an emotional revival. It cannot be a signs and wonders revival. It cannot be a, it doesn't mean that it won't be without emotion or passion.

It doesn't mean that it won't be decorated by the supernatural evidence of God around it, but it has to be a fundamental return to the Word of God. Because we've gotten to the place that we don't even know the Bible, and we pick and choose our favorite portions, and our understanding and commitment to Scripture lacks integrity. So there is prayer.

There is prayer over the scrolls, over an open Bible. This is the best kind of praying you can do. It's the only real praying that you can do.

You see, prayer request or asking is the privilege of prayer. It's not the heart of prayer. Intercession, prayer for others, is the duty of prayer.

It's the noblest use of prayer, but it's not the heart of prayer. No, no, no. Thanksgiving is the envelope in which in which prayer takes place, because it celebrates and points out the goodness of God, and praise points out the greatness of God, and worship points out the wonder, the speechless reverence that we need before God.

But the heart of prayer is not Thanksgiving. It isn't petition or prayer request. It isn't intercession.

It's prosuche. It is standing before God in the seeking of His face. It's the desire for a relationship with God.

It's the depth of communion with God. At times, it is wordless communion with God. It's not a dance with His power and ability.

It's not even a celebration of His love. It is an acquaintance with His holiness, and that's where transformation takes place. The holiness of God always has three aspects about it.

Number one, whatever is holy belongs to God. So it is the signature of God. God declares something holy in order that He might make it holy, and this is what justification is in my life, in your life.

God declares me holy in order that He might make me holy, and that's the second part of holiness. It's the imputation of righteousness followed by the impartation of righteousness. He imputes righteousness.

He calls me righteous. He gives me the record of Christ, and Christ takes my record. He dies for me that I might live for Him.

This is the exchange life. This is the principle of consecration. I consecrate.

God only makes holy what I consecrate. He claims me, and I enter into a relationship with Him where I learn to yield and yield more and yield more and die and die more and die more until Christ comes to live in me and through me. What's the third aspect of holiness? It's wholeness.

It's help. Our churches are not healthy. Our churches are divided.

Our churches are carnal. Our churches are preoccupied by worldliness. Our prayers are worldly because they're about the problems of this world.

Intercessors' prayers are all about the evil one. We're more preoccupied by the darkness than we are with the light. The first movement of prayer is to crucify the flesh in order that Christ might rise up in me and touch through my touching and love through my loving and care through my caring and speak through my speaking until He, the invisible God, is made visible in me and people see my good works and say, you could not have done that, and they recognize the presence and the glory of God upon my life.

See, the glory of God always is associated with the holiness of God. The beauty of holiness and the glory of God dance together. God claims you.

He marks you with His blood. It's His signature. You belong to me.

And then He begins the process of both imputing to your righteousness, that is putting it on your record, but imparting that to you. It begins a process of sanctification. I consecrate and He sanctifies.

The more I consecrate, the more He sanctifies. The more I yield, the more He takes possession of my life until I began to come to a place of wholeness, of beauty, of holiness. Oh, oh, oh, oh.

This is where He wants us. This is where He wants to bring the church. This only happens when you begin to pray over the Bible, and you pray the principles of the Bible, and you seal them in your heart until you begin to experience personal transformation.

You cannot have a praying church unless you have a praying people. And you will never have a prayerless church if you, if you, if you have, if you have a praying, a praying people. Does God use our prayer in an intercessory way? Well, absolutely.

He moves us from the center of communion where we're anchored to the edge to reach over the cliff and make a difference. I didn't finish what I started to say a moment ago. In 1992, there came this desire for an experiment to pray for the 62 nations of the world where the great amount of darkness was concentrated.

And after that, there was a quantification done by, I can't remember the group, it may have been Ralph Winter's group, Mission. And they said, it appears that 95,000 people are coming to Christ every day. It was just an unbelievable thing.

In 1995, there was another pray through the window, this time not for the nations, but for a hundred gateway cities. And people made trips. I think it was something like 35 million people signed up to pray.

And people made trips spontaneously to those cities where there were no churches, no Christian witness at all. They walked the streets and sat on benches and they couldn't take tracks. They couldn't witness openly.

They simply prayed. So here's the incense of God rising from a hundred cities where there's no witness, virtually no, no Christian witness at all. And the quantification was done again.

And it said, it looks like, it looks like 145, 146, 147,000 people are coming to Christ every day. In 1997 or 1998, they did the pray through the window again. This time they focused on unreached people groups within that 62 nation.

Where are the people group, the ethno-linguistic groups that do not have a church planting movement, a sustaining gospel engagement movement, let's pray for them. This time they stopped counting when 50 million people signed up to pray. How many people took treks and walked the streets and just prayed? See, we think we've got to do something.

We think it's up to us. No, no, no, no. It's God working.

God from the Genesis on is the laborer who has dirt under his fingernails. He is the great evangelist. Through the Holy Spirit, through the work of Christ, we get the privilege of coming along with him, sowing the seed and picking up the sheaves and reaping the harvest.

You know, as Blackaby used to say, you find out what God is doing and you join him on mission. In a pragmatic culture, we design our own plans and then ask God to bless them, sprinkling them with prayer. We pray and then we go and do it ourselves and ask God to join us.

The real deal is praying, finding what God is doing, mission, and releasing that through the power of our collaborative effort, and that's called church. I got to stay on my track here. Let me just show you this

again.

This is so important. This is foundational. Here's Ezra praying.

He's praying over the scrolls, praying over an open Bible, and then I want just two little words to do it. It begins to change the practices of his own life. It begins to change what he's doing.

His ideas, his thinking has changed, and then his behavior has changed. You really haven't begun to experience transformation until it begins to change not only your beliefs, but your behaviors. Values are not what you believe.

They are what you do. They're what drives your life. Values are the essence of worship.

It's the essence of worship. Worship is not going to church and lifting our hands and swaying back and forth. Worship is recalibrating our values and reorganizing our life around biblical ideas and biblical principles.

If there's anything that's happening to us in this coronavirus episode, it's that God is calling us to recalibrate our values. Here's prayer. Here's prayer and Bible engagement.

Here is prayer that's transformed into behavior and action. Then the Bible says he begins to teach it. As he talks about what's happening out of his own encounters with God over these scrolls, he engages a whole group of people in Babylon.

Evidently, at some point, they say to him, we can't stay here any longer. We can't be happy here any longer. We've got to sell everything we have and we've got to move back to Jerusalem.

It's where their fathers came from, but they've never been there. No, no, no. They've never been there.

What happens with one man spreads and infects a small group until that group decides to re-center their lives, to move back to what they believe to be the center of God's will, where God wants them to be, where God wants them to live. They're going to return to mission and to purpose. This is extraordinary.

The Bible says, it tells us about the heads of the families right here in Ezra that decide to go up. These are the heads, chapter eight, verse one of the father's houses that went with me from Babylon. In verse 21, they stop and they pray and they fast together at the river Ahava.

They humble themselves. They will not do this out of their own energy. They will not do this out of enthusiasm, nor can we.

They pray every step of the way. They're praying and asking God that may your hand be upon us. The hand of God is upon all those for good who seek him and his power and wrath are against those who forsake him.

So we fasted and we entreated God. They began in the first month and in the fifth month, it takes them four months to make the journey and they get to Jerusalem. They take three days and then they go to the temple, chapter eight, verse 33.

They take their gold. They take their silver and they offer burnt offerings and they offer a sin offerings before God. They offer a hundred bulls.

They are, I'm sorry, 12 bulls and 96 rams and 77 lambs and 12 male goats. Not since the rededication or the dedication of this rebuilt temple have they had such a moment. Not since then have they had such a service as this.

I mean, this is one of those, everybody goes home and says, mama, you should have been at church this morning. We had this visiting group that came from Babylon and I mean, the offering plate was overflowing. You should have seen the altar.

I mean, mama, you should have been at church this morning. And so what happens with one man? Moves to a small group and that small group, let's modify the understanding here. Let's make it contemporary.

It overflows into the church. It overflows into the Sunday morning. I know this is a Sabbath experience here.

It overflows into the temple. This is the metric, the growing metric of revival. One person on their knees over an open Bible, weeping, asking God, give me understanding, change me, transform me until something happens in their life and they're so moved.

They're so moved that other people notice it and they infect a small group. And that small group consecrates, rededicates, moves, re-centers their life, sacrifice to get where they need to be, where they think they need to be with God. And then one Sabbath, one Sunday morning, I know there's a difference between Saturday and Sunday, but you get the point.

It overflows into the Sunday morning crowd. You know, pastor, you don't need the church to vote on revival. You don't need the whole crowd.

You don't even need 50% of your congregation. All you need is 17%. That's actually 17, 18%, rounded off to 20.

That's the tipping point. Sociologically, if you get 20% of your congregation that has a fervent heart for God, an on-fire heart that wants to see revival and renewal, it will change your whole church. You see, a tepid majority is always less influential than a fervent minority.

It's this remnant that you need to be working with. Most pastors, they're working with the Sunday morning crowd when they ought to be working with a remnant. Jesus, his great concern was not the 5,000 that he fed, the 4,000, not the hundreds, not the villages that crowded in around him.

It was consistently the 12. It was the 120. It was the 70 that he sent out.

It's that remnant, because if that remnant can reach the point where it gets it, where it understands, I say to every pastor, this is really the message of Jude. But you, beloved, when apostasy is everywhere, the book of Jude, when Christology is lost, and missiology is lost, and holiness is lost, and we don't even understand the transforming aspect of justification, and eschatology is a matter of confusion, look at the book of Jude. It is the greatest catalog, the simplest, most concise catalog on apostasy in all of Scripture.

And here's what Jude, the brother of Jesus said, but you, beloved, it's plural, but you, I'm looking for a remnant inside the church, you, you build yourself up on your most holy faith. You pray in the Spirit. You center yourself in the love of God.

You look for the mercy of God. And then he begins to talk about how you deal with the lost. You pull them out of the fire, heating the garment, spotting the flesh.

Revival begins with a remnant. It always begins, and there's one person at the center, two, three people at the center. And their fervency affects a small group.

And that small group spreads to the church until there's an overflow in the Sunday morning crowd. And by the way, and this is where I want to go in just a minute, that goes deep into homes. It has to transform our homes.

And this is where we're stuck right now. It has to transform our homes before in Nehemiah's day, it overflows in the city. One man, small group, Sunday morning, that's not enough to have an exciting service.

Not enough, not enough, not enough. It's got to move beyond that until we're willing to change our lives in the macro and drive the stake of faith deep into personal habits at home. And then it will overflow into the city.

And this is what we want. It's not an overnight process from Esther through Ezra to Nehemiah, from intercessors to pastors to business leaders to the marketplace is almost a 30-year biblical period. And that comes after 60, 70 years of spiritual drought.

And that's where we are now. Since the 1962 Supreme Court ruling, we've had 60 years of spiritual drought in this nation. And now there's an intercessors movement.

And now there's a stirring among pastors. And now there's a stirring in the marketplace and a recognition that God didn't give me this business just to make money. There's a divine purpose and I've got to make a difference.

And I can do some things in my business and through my business that my pastor and the church can't do because I can go places where they can't go. Oh, my goodness, if you can see what I'm seeing in this principle, this is what God is up to here. The solemn assembly is not an event.

I mentioned yesterday that in some cases in the early 90s, we released this and everybody said, well, we checked out. We had our solemn assembly. It didn't bring revival.

It's a process. It's a process. You do solemn assembly and then you do another one and then you do it because sin is layered.

It's layered in our homes, layered in our lives. This is why repentance is a process and redirection is a process. I can't take that change all at once.

God reveals this to me and I say, oh, I didn't see that. I didn't see that. God, help me.

Give me grace. And I struggle with that until the sanctifying grace of God comes and releases me and I go to another and then I backslide and you do too. And then God reveals something else and something else.

It's salvation. I was saved. I'm being saved.

I will be saved. This is a process. This is a process.

At the beginning of chapter nine, after the moment in the temple, here's what happens. The leaders, the people, the priests, the Levites, they come to Ezra with this confession. And won't you see this now? The priests, the pastors, the Levites, the leaders, and they say, we have not separated ourselves from the peoples of the land, the Gentiles, the non-Jews, with respect to their abominations.

Ezra is astonished. Ezra is shocked. It is unbelievable to him.

Here's what the priests say to him. Our sons, who will be priests, have married pagan wives and our daughters have married pagan sons, which means there cannot be a pure spiritual leadership in the future, which means the holy seed is mixed. Ezra pulls out his hair.

He tears his garments. He sits down in absolute shock. Everybody else might leave, but he can't.

He's there all day. He's astonished. There is no appetite.

There's no desire to go out and eat anywhere. There's no desire to take care of himself. He is all day long, from the morning sacrifice to the evening, from nine o'clock in the morning to three o'clock in the afternoon.

He's on his face prostrate. He's on all fours. He's on his knees with his hands lifted.

His posture changes from time to time. But he's stunned. He's shocked.

So here's the first thing that has to happen. I want to take you through a process. There has to be, beyond the man, beyond the small group, and beyond the Sunday morning moment or the moment in your congregation when God breaks in on the congregation and says to the congregation, I'm up to something.

When a revival spirit comes, when there's an obvious touch of God, there has to be, number one, a sense of awareness that what we have done, how we are living is wrong. We are living in compromise. We are living in sin.

And this is not right. This is conviction. This is conviction that comes by the awareness of God.

Up to this time, these people were fine with the way they were living. In fact, here's what happens. The fathers take pagan wives and they say to their sons, oh, I did it.

Why don't you do it too? The encouragement to sin in the next generation. And so there has to come a widespread awareness that where we are now is not acceptable to God. We are not here yet.

We are not at this point yet. This is a work of the Holy Spirit. You cannot bring conviction, nor should you try, to other people.

Your life can testify. You can share the principles of God's Word. You can preach.

You can testify. But only the Holy Spirit can bring the kind of awareness that causes people to acknowledge, I am not where I need to be with God. And I'm a pastor, a priest.

I'm a Levite. I'm supposed to be a holy man. I'm supposed to be set aside.

I'm a deacon in the church. I'm on the council. I'm not where I need to be with God.

Only the Holy Spirit can bring us to this place of awareness. And then there is astonishment. Astonishment is something that happened to Ezra.

He said, I sat astonished. There's no astonishment anymore in our churches, even by leaders at the degree of sin in the church. We've come to accept it.

And if it's among a leader who is paying a lot of time, we kind of go, well, we can't say anything to him. No, no, no. Listen, we have to, there's a point at which we have to ourselves be astonished at the gap between God's holiness and the lack of righteousness in our life, the lack of biblical moral integrity in our life.

And the fact that God wants to heal that gap. It's not that we're going to be perfect people. But there has to be a hunger for holiness and a hunger for righteousness.

There is astonishment by the leader. Because when you go into this, let me tell you something. When you go into this process, pastor.

When you go into this process, intercessor. When you go into this process, councilman or deacon or elder or whatever they call you in your church, here's what began to happen. God will begin to reveal to you the depth of sin.

The word of knowledge will begin to operate in your life. You'll see things that you never knew. A pastor told me, he said, I was about to turn the church over, a large church, huge church.

And he said, I walked up and sat down on the platform and I turned in and saw one of my staff members come in one door and one of my staff members come in another door and the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said, you can't leave until you straighten this out. That's a word of knowledge. And he said that night, he called them both and he said, I want you to know that I know.

And in the morning we have to talk. And that's all he said to them. In the next morning, he called the man and he said, I just want you to know I'm on my way to your house.

He said, we have to, we have to talk this out. And by the time he got there, she was there. And at least one of their spouses, maybe two, and they confessed the illicit affair that they were, that they were having.

Two departments of the church, it devastated, it devastated the church. When God begins to clean house, he will begin to reveal things. You will be astonished.

You'll be sure you can't handle it now. You'll be shocked. Ezra's astonished.

He's, he's shocked by the degree of sin that he is seeing in this place. And then, and then number three, and then number three, the Bible says that he sat down astonished and everyone who trembled at the word of God, at the words of God of Israel assembled to me because of the transgression. So the third thing, this is beyond awareness.

This is the point at which people feel an anxious, the old anxious seat idea, people feel an anxious awareness of the convicting presence of God. Well, I don't know when I have been in a service since the time of my youth, a hundred years ago, when people trembled at the word of God. When's the last time you saw people tremble at the word of God? People laugh.

They make smirking sounds. I won't forget preaching in a church. It was a pretty good sized church.

It's packed out and I used to begin to preach. As I began to preach, there was about four rows back, this person who just began to laugh. I was a joke to them.

I mean, I took this thing seriously. I took this thing seriously. I was a joke to them.

I was entertainment for them. Where is the awe? Where is the reverence? Where is the fear of God? Where is the trembling before the words of God? That's when you are, you're not there yet. That's when you are approaching a real revival.

Revival doesn't come with a slam bang Sunday morning service and a huge offering and a lot of visitors from out of town. Revival doesn't even come with the first wave of awareness. Revival doesn't come when God begins to reveal even deeper levels of sin and leaders are astonished before God and what God is saying to them about the church that they pastor.

Revival doesn't come yet, even when there is trembling before the word of God. Here's the fourth level. There is articulation.

Ezra begins to pray, oh God, I am too ashamed and I'm humiliated to lift up my face to you for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads. Now, we're in sin over our head and he mentions two things here. First, he mentions guilt.

This is conviction. Ezra, the people aren't yet praying. Ezra is modeling confession.

He is interceding for the people and modeling confession. He is offering the language of repentance, the language of confession. Intercessors lead the way.

There's a sense in which an intercessor, and by the way, intercession is not primarily about spiritual warfare. Intercession is about reconciliation. Because you've stepped into the middle between God and lost people or God whose relationship with God is threatened or imperiled in some way and you are the critical middle link in the process of reconciliation.

Because of that, you are likely to experience spiritual interference or what we call warfare. It's real. But it cannot be the center of intercession.

The center of intercession is less about the evil one and more about God and his purposes for the people for whom you are praying. There are times when you engage in priestly intercession. That's what Ezra is doing here.

He's praying as if he were the estranged people. We, our iniquities, we are in sin over our head. He's articulating in a priestly manner the sin of the people standing in their moccasins before God.

And this is exactly what Jesus came to the earth to do. He came to the earth. God wondered that there was no intercessor.

Therefore, his own arm brought salvation. He came to the earth not to preach, not to minister, not to heal. No, no, no, no, no.

He came to the earth to pray. He came to the earth because there was no intercessor on the earth. He begins his ministry in prayer and he ends the last night of his life praying.

We're not, in the strictest sense, we're not saved because he died on the cross. We're saved because he died on the cross praying, interceding, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. He goes to heaven sending his disciples to a prayer meeting and he goes to start a prayer meeting in heaven.

He ever lives to make intercession. I will pray the Father and he will send you another comforter and he will not only be with you, he will be in you. And this is the spirit of intercession that rises up, that lets us join Jesus in his prayer.

So just as he prayed for you and me, we now pray for others. We articulate in priestly intercession the sins of others and then at times we turn around and we engage in prophetic intercession. We speak the word of God over people.

We declare and decree the will of God over people. We give voice to God. At times we give voice to people before God.

At times we give voice to God before the people declaring the word of God. There's awareness. There's astonishment as God reveals the sin and the level of sin in the leadership.

There is awe trembling before the word of God. There is the articulation, the confession by the pastor, by the priest, by the intercessor of iniquity. And there is not only the expression of guilt.

I love this. There's the expression of grace. And for a little while, grace has been given to us.

You don't come to God whenever you want to. You come to God when he creates a window and he invites you. There are many people in my tradition who have the idea, I can pray anytime I want to.

I can go to the end of my life in the last few seconds. I can pray and then I'll go to heaven. No.

God opens a door. Let me listen. And at times he opens a door for a nation.

And if you miss that moment, you've missed that moment. He opens a door for a family. He opens a door for a life.

It's a season of grace. In the larger sense, this season of grace has been from the time they came back, 535, to this period in Ezra 546 or thereabouts. And yet in another time, it's this present moment.

This present moment. Can you see what God is doing in this present moment? This is a time of articulation of guilt and grace. There is a remnant.

There is a pig in the most holy place. I think it was Spurgeon. I was looking up the other day trying to find this.

There were pigs in the holy place, not the most holy place. One of those pigs was used for the high priest to hang his garment on. And because he went into the holy place and he dressed in the garment, he put over his simple tunic, which covered his legs, his loins, his chest and arms, and his head, symbolizing righteousness, the robe of blue, which symbolized the glory of God, which had at its hem a veil of pomegranate, the sound of joy.

And he never wore this, by the way, into the most holy places. Some people say, never. He went in simply in that plain garment of linen.

Over that was the multicolored apron of blue, the color of heaven, scarlet, the color of blood, rather purple, the color of royalty, and linen. And then, of course, the ephod of 12 stones. The value of those stones was almost \$200,000.

And every one had the name of a tribe, just as Jesus has our name upon his heart when he goes before the Father. And he prays for us, bearing us on his heart. We're always on his heart.

In the holy place is this peg that has the high priestly garment. It's almost an inference that we're waiting on the ministry of the high priest, our new high priest, Jesus. There is a peg in the holy place.

There is the garments of the high priest. There is the work of the high priest, not down here on earth, but in heaven, but in heaven itself. And then the aha moment, the aha moment, the aha moment is this moment.

We have forsaken your commandments. The land is unclean, and the peoples of the lands and their abominations with one another have produced purity. And you told us, because of this land and because of the people, the Gentiles, the pagans living on this land, and because of their abominations, you told us not to intermarry with them.

No, listen very carefully. I'm not talking about interracial marriage here. I'm talking about interfaith marriage here.

I'm talking about the purity. I'm talking about the integrity, the spiritual integrity of the home. I'm talking about believers and unbelievers.

He said, you told us, you told us to not give our daughters as wives for their sons. And what's happened here is the priests themselves have married pagan women. So you don't want to miss this.

You don't want to miss this because this is the aha moment. They have allowed the very foundation of their faith and the practice of their faith to be eroded by not keeping purity in their homes. So the prospect that future generations would be godly and holy and righteous, that's gone.

They have allowed an unclean place and an unclean people to make them unclean instead of being an infected in the land to change the land and transform the land. Instead of embracing differentiation, they have allowed themselves to be assimilated into the pagan practices and ideologies. That's not so bad.

She's not so bad. He's not so bad. You know what? I'm going to clean him up, clean her up.

The recognition that the great mistake was compromising the integrity of their homes, this is, in my opinion, the aha moment. We've not reached that aha moment here in America. We've not reached an awareness.

We've not reached shock over our sins. We've not reached the point of awe and trembling before the Word of God. We've not reached the point where we've caught the articulation of what we need to say to God, and we've not reached the point where we realize we can't fix this by fixing it in the church.

Going back to the church and cranking up the guitars again, that is not going to get it. Something deeper is wrong. It's the problem with our homes, with pastoral homes, with deacons and elders homes, with the homes of regular lay people.

We're too married to the world. We're too married to its practices. This is the aha moment.

Let me just go. I don't have a lot more to do here, but number one, and I'm going on into Ezra, let me see, chapter 10, chapter 10, verse 2. Now the articulation comes from the people. This is the act of turning.

When Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, we have trespassed. We have compromised our homes, biblically, morally, in terms of their godly purpose, in terms of their holiness, in terms of their sanctification, but there is hope. So I want to come back.

Here is guilt and grace. Here is the confession of sin and the confession of hope. You got to have them together.

The awareness of my sin has to dance with the awareness of God's grace. But we can't allow, as we often do, grace to quickly erase any sense of the motivation, that biblical guilt. I'm not talking about neurotic guilt.

I'm talking about a holy guilt. I'm talking about a holy ghost guilt. I'm talking about conviction of sin.

I'm talking about true repentance that leads to redirection. We can't allow, we can't allow grace to just quickly expunge. We need for a moment to recognize the depth of our sin and consciously hold that before God and then celebrate in that moment his grace and his transforming power.

There is hope in spite of this and we will make a covenant. This is a value issue. We're going to return to the word of God.

We're going to make a pledge to change our lives. So here is repentance and here's word-based redirection. Here's the second thing that happens.

It begins with leadership. This process begins with leadership. So Ezra rose and the priest and the leaders and the Levites with him and they swore an oath.

They entered into a declaration before God that they would do, order their lives according to the word of God. They ate no bread. They drank no water because of the guilt of those who came out of captivity.

You have to understand God had raised the nation from the dead just as he did in the Civil War after our great sin. And then in the process of our time since the Civil War, 150 years, about the same time as this, we've increasingly turned away from God. We are at the same place.

There has to be a recognition that God gave us a second chance to fulfill our purpose as a nation, which is to proclaim the gospel to the nations. I heard Doug, I think, talking about, Doug Stringer talking about sheep nations earlier and goat nations. God called us to be a sheep nation.

God called us to be the leader of sheep nations around the world that would differentiate themselves from an Antichrist spirit. We have one more chance to do this. One more chance to step out.

One more chance to say to God, we want to be renewed as a nation. We want to fulfill our purpose as a nation. So this is not light.

They're fasting. They are serious before God. Then number three, there's the call for the solemn assembly.

Now they're ready for a solemn assembly. Everybody will gather at Jerusalem and they will stand before him. And you know what happens? They're standing there in the rain.

They're listening to the word of God being read. It's all day long. And finally they say, boy, it's raining out here.

We don't have enough umbrellas to go around. Could we do this at another time? It's not lighthearted. In fact, what they decide to do after this word engagement, what they decide to do is enlarge the exposure and the transformation from one city to another.

It won't just be in Jerusalem. It will go from city to city, city to city. And elders and judges will be involved.

And the Bible says that men will come before councils in cities. This is really quite extraordinary. You know, I go back to the second great awakening.

I mentioned this yesterday. That the people would arrive on Thursday or Friday. Preachers would be preaching everywhere.

And people would be asking for a private audience with a preacher. And they would say, our family's not right with God. Would you pray with us? Because the next day on Sunday, they were going to receive communion together.

And they wanted to be right with God before that communion. This great respect for the holiness of God. This accountability.

To us, this sounds so Catholic that we don't do that. But because there is no accountability. I'm not talking about the imposition.

I'm talking about the seeking of integrity before God in such a way that I would ask for prayer. God, help me to be a better father, a better husband. Help our family to be, have more integrity before you.

I'm almost finished with my time. Let me just say as plainly as I can. It starts with one man.

It moves to a small group. It overflows, let's say, colloquially on the Sunday morning crowd. But that's just the beginning point.

Then there has to be a deeper awareness and a wrestling with leaders over the soul of their church, of the condition of their church, and awe before God and his word. And an aha moment. Oh, this is about our families.

It will never touch the city in a sustained way until our families are transformed. You can't have a healthy church without healthy families. You can't have a praying church without praying families.

You can't have a godly church without godly people. It's just impossible. Church problems are home problems that are not solved there.

And because of the lack of integrity, because of the lack of family altar, because of the lack of praying together, because we've not seen faith into our home, we need something on the order of a Jewish Sabbath every, at least every week, some kind of family altar experience where we come together and we pray and we bring Christ into our homes. Not until what's happening, what God wants to happen in the

temple of the church is driven deep into the homes. Not until then will we see anything sustainable happening in the city.

Nehemiah's work depends on Ezra's work. Ezra's work depends on Esther's work. Prayer, church renewal, city impact.

One final word. When Ezra first hears about the level of sin, he sits down astonished. He pulls out his hair.

He tears his robe. He's shocked. He's sick.

His appetite's gone. This is a picture of holy desperation, of brokenness before God. It's happening.

It never leaves. If you go back and read from that first moment in chapter 7 where Ezra pairs his heart over an open Bible, he begins in prayer, and then he goes deeper in prayer, and then he persists more in prayer, and then he articulates prayer, and again, he's broken before God. There is somebody in a city, somebody in a church that carries the revival.

You don't turn it loose. I mean, it isn't Ezra that is handed off to a small group, and then it's handed, no, no, no. No, no, no.

Ezra's intercessory ministry persists and deepens and broadens and becomes more painful. The small group, the remnant, persist in the whole process. The Sunday morning crowd is getting impacted over and over and over again until it begins to take what is happening home, and they say, all right, we're going to reorder our homes.

What would it look like for you to reorder your home spiritually? It's not a matter of legalism. It is a matter of holiness and hope bound together. Throughout this book, you see Ezra's brokenness.

You see it again in verse 5. You see it again in verse 6. You see it again in chapter 10, verse 1, confessing, weeping, mourning, weeping bitterly. You see it again in chapter 10, verse 6, grief, fasting, can't eat. His appetite is gone.

This is what drives spiritual renewal, brokenness. It's Gethsemane. It's the crushing.

It's deep, deep intercession. Let me just pray with you a few of these things. If you would just, if you would dare to pray this with me without any arrogance, without overstating my worth of value before you, Lord, just pray this with me.

If I could be somewhat like Ezra, if you could use me, if you could help me encounter you over an open Bible, if you could let this scripture leap off the page and burn in my heart, if you could change me, if you could transform me, I give you permission. Start with me. I give you permission.

Change my behavior. Change my attitudes. Infect me with the Word of God.

I pray for the groups that I run in. I pray for the groups that I have on Facebook, for the family members that I'm in touch with. For the friends, for my work associates.

I pray that you would change me so significantly that they would see something in me, not holier than thou, not too holy to be a part of them anymore. Just like God incarnate walked with disciples, with mortals, slept in the boat, expressed his own physical needs to them. Let me be very human and very real,

but somehow put a touch upon my life that causes people to see there's something different, something unique.

Oh God, please infect the group of people around me that I love and care about and cause them to become uncomfortable in staying the way they are if they're in a compromised state. If we're living in Babylon and we've become comfortable there, God, don't let us stay there anymore. I'm asking you so profoundly change me that you change them.

And then help us to make a decision together as a remnant to move closer to you. Whatever sacrifice we have to make to get closer to you, to move to our Jerusalem, to rediscover our purpose. And then God, we pray for the church that we're a part of, that something would happen that would overflow into that church.

We'd have a slam bang Sunday morning movement that would begin a process of heightened spiritual awareness that brought conviction of sin, that caused people to tremble before the word of God, that emboldened pastors, Ezra's leaders to see the depth of compromise and begin to pray and seek God and speak in ways that helped the church find their way out of this bondage to sin, that we would have an aha moment that gave us courage to go home and call a solemn assembly first in our own homes and drive the stake of righteousness deep in our own homes. Drive the stake of holiness deep in our own homes. God, forgive us that we've been so afraid of being different than the world.

The little church that I grew up in, it was a separatist church. It had strong views about holiness and worldliness, movies and ballgames and bowling. And even the high school band was sinful to them.

You almost got the idea somebody said, if it was fun, it was sin. But they had something we seem to have lost, and that is the moral courage to differentiate themselves from the world. Even if the symbols of their differentiation were misplaced, the boldness remained.

We have not differentiated ourselves from the world. As Barna said on 131 different measurements, there is no distinction between Christians and non-Christians. My dear brothers and sisters, it cannot be.

It must not be. The point of differentiation begins in our daily life at home. Doug Stringer said at the end of his time together, the question is what we are when we're alone, when nobody else sees us, when we're all by ourselves, when we're with our families.

God, would you change us? Would you change us in the most fundamental place in our daily time with you? Help us to recover the family altar. I don't think I touched on this yesterday. I said I was finished.

My time is just about up. Claude King, I don't know if you're watching this or not, but I'll blame you for this because you and I were talking one day and I was looking for something on the order of solemn assembly in family. You said to me, just one sentence, you said it's found in Jacob and he's returned to Bethel.

I began to look at it. Jacob passes through Bethel, Beth house, El, God. He makes a place to sleep for himself, spend the night.

I don't even think he had a clue that this is where his granddaddy Abraham had built his second altar. So he's parked on sacred ground, ground that's marked by his family's spiritual history. And he doesn't have a clue.

His name is cheater. His name is liar. His name is supplanter.

His name is deceiver, Jacob, the crooked one, the schemer. Boy, his values are messed up. And yet there's a part of him that longed for the spiritual.

This is the duplicity of Jacob. And it's the duplicity that we wrestle with sometimes. He has the dream, angels ascending and descending on a ladder.

God is at the top. He wakes up. He said, this is a dreadful place.

This is an awful place, an awful place, a full of all place. This is none other than the gate of heaven. He was absolutely right.

He was on sacred ground. He had stumbled onto sacred ground. He had not stumbled on sacred ground.

God had parked him there. God had led him there. But here's the sad thing.

He wasn't changed. He wasn't transformed. In fact, he tries to make a deal with God.

Okay, if you're the God of my fathers and you'll bless me, if I can get something out of this, here's the schemer, then I'll tip you. I'll make sure you get 10% of whatever I get. Sad.

And he scurries out of Bethel. 20 years later, he will move 10 miles down the road. He wants to be there, but he doesn't want to be there.

There's this ambivalence I sense in America, a desire to be close to God, but not too close. I'm willing to move back to Shechem, but boy, I don't think I want to be in Bethel. Angels coming and going, it's too hot for me to handle.

The glory of God, I don't want to do that. I don't want to do that. I don't want to have these direct fire brand transforming encounters with God.

So I'll come to church, sit on the back row, and I'll watch what's going on, but I'll be able to scoot out, beat everybody else to the buffet. That's Jacob. And finally, a family crisis forces him to do what he's been avoiding, to go to Bethel.

He tells his family, you can't go like you are. This is pitiful. He's allowed his family to develop habits.

They have earrings carved in the images of their God. They wear their gods. He's had this encounter.

His grandfather is Abraham. This is Yahweh. And two generations later, the faith of Abraham is about to be lost in his grandson.

He tells his family, I know you've got idols, and they do. Even his wife. Here it is.

Even his wife, Sarah, is an idolater. Remember, she took the family idol. She kept it with her.

In all these years, she's never, she's never, Rachel, I mean, Rachel, if you have a divided family, it's time to tell them, with as much grace as you can muster, God will give you grace. You've got to bury your idols. You've got to take off your earrings.

You've got to take off your pagan garments. We've got to bury them here at Shechem. We're going to make this a part of our past life, and we're going to go to Bethel, and we're going to meet with God.

Our family's going to meet with God. This is the turning point. This is when, this is when what God started in Abraham could now be sustained in the sons of Jacob.

They could go into Egypt, and the faith would survive. The faith would survive. You have to drive this stake deep into your family system until there is the embrace of faith.

Maybe not everybody in your family will do it. We expect taking our children to church to infect them with enough faith to carry them the rest of their lives. It is not enough.

A Swiss study says it's the power of the faith in the father's practice. Somehow, and the father and the mother together, it's exponential, the impact. But the power of a father, the sight of a father weeping, the sight of a father praying, a father and a mother praying together, that gets a hold of the next generation.

If it's sincere, if it's without coercion, if it's a gift that's embraced freely, it infects the next generation. I got to stop. Father, I make one final plea.

As we think about the need for a solemn assembly of the nation, that we don't think about it as an event in Washington, September 26, or an event at Plymouth Rock in early October, that we don't think about it in any other way that we think first and foremost about getting our own families right with you. Help.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/Jwvgwpi3YGE.mp4>

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