

# 3 Characteristics of a Sacred Assembly

by Shane Idleman

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*A sacred assembly is a gathering of believers where they come to seek God, fast, weep, and mourn, and position themselves to receive from God, with the goal of experiencing revival and God's presence.*

**Duration:** 24:13

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 58:6, Joel 1:14, Joel 2:12, Zechariah 7:5, Matthew 5:4, Romans 12:2, James 4:8, 1 Peter 5:6-7

**Topics:** "Repentance", "Sacred Assembly"

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## Description

Shane Idleman emphasizes the significance of a Sacred Assembly, highlighting three key characteristics: the necessity of fasting to prepare the heart, the importance of gathering in a holy place to seek God, and the need for genuine repentance and brokenness before the Lord. He draws from the book of Joel, urging believers to turn to God with all their hearts, recognizing the urgency of the spiritual condition of society and the need for heartfelt prayer and worship. Idleman calls for a collective response to the moral decline around us, encouraging a deep, sincere connection with God that transcends mere ritualistic practices.

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## Transcript

The title of a brief message here is Three Characteristics of a Sacred Assembly. Three Characteristics of a Sacred Assembly. Okay, Shane, we call it a Sacred Assembly.

What exactly do we do? What's this about? Well, I'm glad you asked. This is actually the opposite of Las Vegas. What goes on here doesn't stay here.

This goes out, and it will affect your family, it will affect your spiritual health, it will affect many areas of your life, when you come to church, when you seek God, when you worship. And we drew this from Joel 1.14 on Sunday. Declare a holy fast.

It means you're setting apart your hunger for the body to be hungry for more of God. You're showing that there is a call to a deeper devotional. And you call a fast, you call a sacred assembly, you summon the elders, all who live in the land to the house of your Lord, the Lord your God, and you cry out to the Lord.

That's what you do. Well, Sunday we talked about the cure for judgment. So what we just saw here, fasting precedes the assembly.

Like soil, we must prepare the heart. That's a lot of times what fasting does, it prepares the heart. You're not hungry and full of the world and food, you're hungry for more of God.

Now, you might be thinking, well, that would be good to know, hours ago or yesterday, but it's too late now. But I still believe that people can go home and say, Lord, instead of eating this evening, or instead of breakfast tomorrow, I'm going to seek you. And it isn't about rules or regulations, or you have to do this, or oh gosh, here we go, Old Testament again.

It's biblical to just take it, you know, Lord, I'm not going to eat, I'm going to seek you. And that's a good step if you haven't made that step. God will still honor that, even tonight, even tomorrow morning.

And the call is to all believers, so all believers come together, and where do they go? They go to the place of anointing. It didn't say just go in the field or go to your neighbor's house, it said assemble them to the house of the Lord. Call the sacred assembly, go to the place of anointing.

Basically, we say we've had enough. Has anybody had enough? I don't even want to click the news sites anymore. I don't want to hear about this and that and the mayhem and the murders and the violence.

Oh my Lord, I've had enough. It's time to call God Almighty. It's time to pull down heaven.

Because all the political issues and Facebook posts and people getting angry and upset doesn't do anything. You've got to call on the one person who has the answer. And that's why you call the sacred assembly.

You fast. You get the heart ready. You call everyone to the anointed place, to God's holy place.

And this is interesting. People ask me this question so it might help. Isn't God everywhere? Yeah? But there's a difference between a believer and an unbeliever.

God's not in the unbeliever. God's in the believer, but He's everywhere. Same thing with a holy place, an anointed place, a house of worship, a home that has worship music on and is wanting to honor God.

That's a holy place, an anointed place where God, I don't know how it works exactly, but God's presence is in places that honor Him. You just travel to different countries, you feel that the presence of God is gone. You don't feel that there.

There is a place of anointing. But the three characteristics of a sacred assembly, what we're doing right here, I'm going to read from Joel 2.12. Now therefore, says the Lord, therefore, once you're here, turn to me, oh it's on the screen, good, turn to me with all your heart, all your heart, with, well let's just skip that word, right? We keep coming across that word. What is wrong with the authors of the Bible? Turn to me with all your heart, with fasting.

Because see, there's a time for fasting, there's a time for feasting. There's a time to celebrate, there's a time to mourn. There's a time to say, you know what, this is of such magnitude that I'm denying the flesh, King's stomach, and I'm going to seek that King.

So he says, call a fast with weeping, with mourning. Now we can't manufacture this. You can't just manufacture weeping and mourning and crying out to God.

It's terrible when it's manufactured. It's baloney, it's hypocritical. It has to, it's a move of God that is moving the hearts.

So rend your hearts and not your garments. Well what does that mean? Well in the Old Testament, what would they do? Right? They would render, that's blasphemy, like the high priest you've seen in some movies. They would rip their garments, they would, that's blasphemy, they would, it's terrible.

So they would rip the garments and God said, stop doing that, rip your heart. Break your heart. Have it cut and pierce your heart.

I don't care about outward things, I care about what's going on in the heart. So return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful. Isn't this incredible? The God we serve is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and He relents from doing harm.

Who knows if He will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him. Joel, the people during Joel's time just experienced a devastation. Their crops were ruined, financial disaster, and yet he still says that God is gracious.

He's not slow to anger, He's merciful. He might relent, He might change the course, change that action. He might, and leave a blessing behind? Wait a minute, what about this wrathful, vengeful God? Yes, the wrath of God is true, but so is the love of God.

And once we see, and often He'll use judgments to get our attention. Right? We usually don't wake up until that attention has been given by God and something wakes us up. So a few things I'll pull from here and then we'll get into worship.

Turn to me with all your heart. There can't be hidden areas of rebellion, ulterior motives, or plan B's. It must start with complete turning, a heart breaking, and a prideful man repenting.

And we all say, oh that's for sure, I agree with that. But how many of us actually do that? There's no ulterior motives here, there's no hard heartedness here. There's no sins of rebellion that we're continuing in, in this whole room.

Nobody's hanging on to sin that they know God's been convicting of them. Please come on Sunday, we need this crowd on Sunday then. But that's, come on, all of us, many of us.

There's things sometimes that, yes we'll come and worship, but I'm going to hate that person. I'm going to come and worship, but I'm going to hold on to this addiction. I'm going to come and worship, but I know I've got this hard heart, this critical heart, that's just, I'm just Irish.

And I'm German and Irish, I'm told, and that makes it double whammy, right? And we have these excuses. But no, God says you have to come to me with a complete ripping of the heart, openness of heart. I remember, I'll never forget the day God did this to me in 1999 or so.

I was on my floor near Rancho Vista, and just the whole heart just broke, and it's this sobbing, this weeping that you just, oh my God, I've drifted. My God, I've drifted, and the heart just breaks, and God says, I can use that. I can fill that vessel, because they've emptied themselves of themselves.

Zechariah 7, 5, this is so interesting. God said, when you fasted, when you mourned, when you came to church, when you did these things, did you really fast for me? For me? And I thought of that. I know a lot of

people that come to church, and it's not for God.

It's, I went to church, right? I got it off, it's on my calendar, right? Well, NASCAR's starting, so now I'll have to, maybe every other. You know, can you have earlier services? And we checked God off. Did you, God says, and I just, every time I read this verse, it's like a plea from, did you really come for me? For me and me alone, did you come for me? Is that why you're here? And then the second point we see here, position yourself to receive from God.

Fasting, weeping, and mourning. But, of course, the question comes up, well, why should we weep? I'm not that sad. A statistic I just came up, and it brought me to tears in my home.

And it was under teenagers. The most popular site, especially, the most popular website, especially among teenagers, is a pornographic site, withdraws in 80 million visitors a day. More than PayPal? More than Pinterest? More than Tumblr? Folks.

What in the world is going on? 80 million. Mass shootings, we've talked about. Children, teens, young adults are lost.

Our future leaders. You're not weeping over the condition of the next generation? The next, you know what they're doing now? They're eating Tide Pods. Tide, you wash your clothes in.

They're eating the Tide Pods. That's the new thing. And they're going to be governing and leading our children and our grandchildren.

God, we need you. Now, people say, well, Shane, things aren't going to get better. You can't change the world.

Well, I'm going to die trying. I'm praying. If you read the accounts of revival, when God would move in a country, in a state, in a city, they would shut down saloons.

They would shut down bars. The police didn't have much to do. Families would be worshipping.

They'd be walking down the street. They would hit by the power of God. This is all recorded history, church history.

When God meets and God transforms a place, it's not just a little sprinkling. It's the presence and the power of God falling upon His people and unbelievers. God can radically change a society.

He can radically change a city. Yeah, we don't see it much, but that doesn't mean it doesn't happen. And maybe we don't see it because we're not sad.

We're not sad at the condition of what's happening. Marriage is being mocked all over the news. I don't want to alarm you with things that secular society is trying to do, but it's not pretty.

I've got friends in Washington. They send me stuff sometimes. They're on different councils there.

It's like Satan is in full throttle gear. It should concern us. Marriage is mocked.

If you say a man and a woman, oh, come on, brother. But young adults don't dare say you're waiting for your wedding night. Oh, my Lord.

See, everything's so twisted. Everything's twisted. We are a society in a spiral downward.

What about I looked up this statistic yesterday. Abortion is now taking nearly 3,000 lives a day. 3,000 children were slaughtered today.

And it's funny. I get sometimes people from other churches, you know, in Stafford, different things. They're on kind of liberal churches.

And why do you talk about abortion? Why don't you? I love your homeless outreach, but you don't care about 3 million kids that are murdered? What's our problem? The problem is they're cowards. The easy route. They don't want to talk about controversial issues.

I'm going to put a number up on the screen. That is the number of children America has murdered since 1973. Does that sink in or is it just me? And there's nothing to weep about.

There's nothing bothering us. We're going good. 56 million.

All the wars put together. World War I, World War II, Vietnam. You just add them.

And there's not a heart broken. I understand we don't make it a hot button issue every Sunday. I got it.

But if there's, I mean, correct me afterwards if I'm wrong here. But isn't there a brokenness or a weeping? And, you know, I've shared before. One of those numbers is mine 25, 26 years ago.

I don't forget about that often. There's grace. There's love.

God covers all that. But something should break our heart. See, if things aren't breaking our heart, if, oh, yeah, boy, that sure is a lot.

What's for dinner? You think God's going to move in that atmosphere? You think you're going to experience revival in your own life? Because revival comes from a broken, contrite heart breaking for the things that break God. And then as you break, you're filled with his spirit. Would the blind beggar have been healed if he didn't beg? Son of David, Son of David, have mercy on me.

Have mercy on me. Oh, shut up. And he just got louder.

Think about it. Would the blind beggar have been healed had he not begged? Had he not sought Jesus? Rachel, give me a child lest I die. God, give me a child lest I die.

Hannah, give me a child. Lord, you have to move. There's a begging.

There's a travail. If it doesn't mean anything to you, it doesn't mean anything to God. There has to be a brokenness there.

Blessed are the beggars is what the Scripture says. No, it says blessed are the poor in spirit. Well, guess what that means? Begging.

Desperate. You know what a beggar is? I have nothing. I have to beg for food.

That's what we should be to God. See, we think, I've got this. This is my job, my money, my home.

That breath you just took, God owns it. Daniel told the king. He said, king, God holds your very breath in the palm of his hands, and he owns all your ways.

If that doesn't make us a beggar, I don't know what else will. God, thank you for the breath. Thank you for the heartbeat.

Thank you for everything's yours. I'm desperate for more of you. Because the more desperate you become, the more filled you become with his spirit.

You become a channel and a vessel for his glory. You want to pray for healing? You better be filled with the spirit. If not, it's just dead prayers.

God says, I hear the groans and the cries of my children. The Bible clearly teaches that. God says, I hear the cries of my children.

Watch a young mother with a very young child. They'll avoid that kid's room if they hear, oh, she's playing. But that child starts screaming? You've never seen somebody make a beeline to that room, right? What is that? They hear the cries of their children.

It's no different with God. And I often wonder, you look at church services sometimes. And not here, I'm just saying everywhere.

Are they at a cemetery? Or are they truly open and begging for more of God? I'm not talking about weirdness, but my goodness. We get more excited at everything but God. So there has to be a heart transformation.

Something has to break. Real prayer is travailing. It's travailing.

It's seeking. It's breaking. It's hoping for the things.

It can't be faked. It can't be mimicked. It's not by the volume, right? The louder the prayer, oh, God, and fake tears.

It's none of that. The reason most people aren't moved is because the heart's not broken. And then the third thing we see here is the obvious thing.

Rent your hearts, not your garments. A hard heart will prevent revival. A hard heart will prevent God doing things.

A hard heart will prevent something happening in your own life. I like what Jonah 4.2 said. I think we covered this last week.

If not, we'll cover it the upcoming week. Oh, Lord, is this not what I said when I was yet in my country? This is what I made haste to flee. This is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish.

For I knew that you were a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster. Jonah was ticked off that God was not going to judge Nineveh. But see, this has a big overreaching boundary here because Jonah is an indication.

His heart is an indication of the heart of many Christians. He had a hard heart. He was mad.

He was critical. He was judgmental, and he was negative. Here's the definition of negativity.

It's a tendency to be downbeat, disagreeable, and skeptical. Is that you? It's not biblical. It's been me.

Come on, let's be honest. Show me one verse that encourages being downbeat, disagreeable, and skeptical. A pessimistic attitude and always expects the worst.

See, we need to stop the criticism. We need to stop the complaining. We need to stop the polarization of politics.

Everybody is so upset. Aren't they so upset? Is Trump going to build a wall or isn't he? Both sides, right? Oh, everybody is upset. Why is nobody upset at what's happening to the things of God? Should the dreamers stay? Should the dreamers go? Oh, let's get all arguing on Facebook.

Stop the silliness. That's not the heart of God. Yes, we have concern for people.

Now that concern, God will begin to move. But be positive. Be uplifting.

Seek God and let him work in these areas. We've become very critical. I can't go on Facebook much.

Right? Everybody is critical of everything. It's just negative. Oh, what's happening? Believers are supposed to be joy-filled, praising the things of God, praising others, encouraging.

Finally, brethren. Finally, brethren, Paul said. Finally, brethren, whatever is wholesome, whatever is good, whatever is uplifting, whatever is motivating, whatever is encouraging, meditate on those things.

We actually do all the opposite. So when you meditate, when you're critical, right, and negative, look at how much money the government is taking. The people in Africa would love to have the money the government is taking as their annual income.

Put things in perspective. And I'm only saying this because it's everywhere. The church has become critical and negative.

It's always just walking around critical and upset and negative and disagreeable and finding fault, that you're not filled with the Spirit. You're filled with negativity. They can't exist in the same body.

Now, obviously, there's concern. Obviously, sometimes, you know, we just get frustrated. But it's not a good, healthy attitude to have.

A complainer will not experience renewal. A critical heart will not feel the love of Christ. So Joel says this, Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful.

So no matter if this hits us, right, no matter where it hits us, God says, Listen, I'm gracious, I'm merciful. Return to the Lord, for he is gracious and merciful. Slow to anger and of great kindness, and he relents from doing harm.

Who knows if he will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him? It's this image of God judging, right, the children of Israel speaking through Joel. He's judging them. The crops are devastated.

And they say, God will turn, he'll relent, and he'll leave a blessing behind. It's the same thing when we position ourselves. We know everything I just said.

Nobody in this room is going, I didn't know that was in Scripture. Wow, that's a deep truth. I never even caught that one.

We know this. See, the problem is not knowing. The problem is doing.

That's the thing. Don't be knowers of the Word, but be doers of the Word, or you live in deception. So I didn't want to come and just browbeat, but I want to tell you that's what a sacred assembly is.

And if you want to get the most out of it, the heart has to be right. It just has to be open, it has to be broken. How many of us need to confess of certain things, certain sins we've been allowing, certain critical spirits, negative, condescending, argumentative, unforgiveness, anger, jealousy, backbiting, down-talking, gossiping? Want me to keep going? Anybody convicted yet? So see, if we come with that, though, and we're not going to release it, we're still holding on to that sin.

We're still holding on to those things that God says remove. So let's have the prayer team come up, I mean the worship team come up, and we're just going to go into some more worship, just getting our hearts right before God. And I'm just going to have them put up, Christine's going to put up just a few prayer points while they're going into their first song.

And this is where you can really focus on praying for the leaders of our country, praying for the government, praying for the educational system. And it's funny, God is being mocked, is he not? And the Bible says, I will not be mocked. Well, you're being mocked right now.

No, I won't be mocked. See, we are confusing, I'm clearly convinced of this, we are confusing God's patience with his approval. Boy, he sure is patient, long-suffering, that must mean he approves.

No, he says, I won't be mocked. Whatever a man reaps, plants, he will sow. We can contend.

How do you know if you don't have your children little, or you've got grandchildren, how do you know that your prayers tonight won't make a difference? How do you know that we can't make a difference in the lives of our community? I believe we can. If we can't, you've got the wrong guy. I need to go find a normal job, right, and just nine to five, but I believe in a living God who answers vibrant, heartfelt prayers from people seeking his will.

He moves all around as we pray, as we pull down heaven.

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