



Dedicated to Helping You Succeed

Four Keys to be Called by God's Name

- Humble Ourselves
- Pray
- Seek God's Face
- Turn from Our Wicked Ways

Prayer: God Hears Us but is He Listening?

For over twenty years serving in many different capacities within my community, I've heard many people claim the importance of prayer. I've been part of multiple group prayer meetings and I've attended a number of lectures on the subject of prayer. I've heard many community leaders claim

that God has something special in mind for our city and I'm well aware of how desperately many people within our community are praying for spiritual revival. With all of this in mind I continue to ponder why there seems to be little response from the Lord on healing our land. So why might this be the case? From the research I've done, I've come to believe that God hears every word that we pray but He is not listening because many of us, as believers, are not adequately praying within the will of God.

Praying within the will of God is to entrust ourselves to God's loving authority, focusing on God's priorities, and following God's Spirit. To be certain that we're on the right track for God to listen and respond to our prayers, there is no better instruction than what is provided in 2 Chronicles 7:14-15. Ezra wrote the following words issued by the Lord: *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to their prayers offered in this place (NIV)."*

To be able to accurately assess our condition to meet these instructions, please consider the following:

- ◆ To be called by God's name: For God to claim us as His very own requires our ongoing efforts to humble ourselves, to pray, to seek His face, and to turn from our wicked ways. When these four assignments are fulfilled through the heart we demonstrate our true faith in God and are able to call for His grace and mercy. In turn, God includes us as His very own.
- ◆ To humble ourselves: We must lead off with this step and consider it most important as it's only through our humility that we can relate to God. True humility offsets our greatest risk, which is pride. In Matthew 23:12 Christ states, *"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (NIV)."* The Hebrew translation for humility is assessing one's self in light of one's sinfulness. The Greek translation adds that humility is the disposition of evaluating one's self appropriately, especially in the light of one's sinfulness. And from the Christian perspective, humility means to maintain a subordination to God in Christ, holding loosely to the need to be right. Self obsession is to be replaced by a healthy self awareness. From my perspective, humility lies as our greatest fault, largely because most people believe that they do very well in fulfilling this assignment. I once heard a pastor state that he was preaching that Sunday on the subject of humility and that he was very good at it. Jesus reflects on this same type of incident in Luke 18: 9-14, when he tells the parable of the two men who prayed: He spoke of people who were confident of their own righteousness and who looked down on everybody else. Of the two men who were praying, the first, a Pharisee, prayed about himself and thanked God for making him better than other men. The Pharisee even boasted to God how good he was in his habit of giving. The second man, a tax collector, was so spiritually broken he stood at a distance from the rest and couldn't even lift his head to look up to heaven. He beat his breast saying, "God have mercy on me, a sinner." While the tax collector went home justified, meaning that he was right with God, think how terrible it would be

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to pray and not be right with the Lord. True humility emanates from the heart and keeps us in the position of believing that others are more important than ourself. Humility is shown through kindness, gentleness, and even temperament. And it's only through humility that we can be reconciled unto God and receive His grace and mercy. Probably the best news is that no one graduates from the class on humility; it's a daily discipline that we must conscientiously work at. As a valuable footnote, remember that a common state of humility held by the believers of Christ is the best means of demonstrating our unity as a body of believers.

- ◆ To pray: We are taught to glorify the Lord in all that we do and are called into fellowship with God, Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Fellowship is a partnership and communion. And there is no better expression of communion than prayer. There are over 650 prayers recorded in the Bible, and twenty-five of them are prayers of Jesus. We are to pray regularly and frequently, and isn't it interesting to learn that Americans who do pray do so for an average of eighteen minutes per day. Jesus did provide great instruction on how to pray, recorded in Matthew 6:5-14. Jesus stood strongly against the practice of hypocrites who prayed for the purpose of promoting their own righteousness. Instead, He advised us to go privately to the Father and share what was on our hearts, not worrying about what words to speak. I've always benefited from the "ACTS" concept of prayer that rounds out and completes the subjects to pray through. This acronym stands for: adoration, cleansing, thanksgiving, and supplication. Each is an important category of consideration when going before the Lord in prayer. Corporate prayer is advised as well, where the body of believers can join for the good of unifying and edifying the body of Christ.
- ◆ To seek God's face: When I hear this phrase, it always takes me back to a story told by a well known evangelist concerning a dear friend of his who spent his life serving the Lord in a multitude of ways. This man, a theologian, lay dying in his bed praying in sorrow over how he wasn't able to finish his work. The day prior to his passing, the Lord spoke to him saying, "All that you've accomplished for My Kingdom is great, but I would trade it all for you merely seeking my face in all that you do." Such a story indicates how close the Lord desires to be with us in every thought and step that we take in our journey serving Him. Further investigation on what it means to seek God's face indicates that we are to know God's character, give God control, give Him our attention, our thoughts, and our ways. In summary, to keep God's presence before us.
- ◆ Turn from our wicked ways: This instruction is last on the list for good reason – this assignment is referred to as repentance, and it's by completing the previous three steps that repentance is able to be accomplished. We must be reconciled to the Lord daily and do so by confessing our sins, and this stage is best accomplished through our humility, prayer, and seeking God's face. A major reason why confessing our sins is important is that it indicates our agreement with God that our sin is really a sin and that we are going to turn away from it. Here we discover a real opportunity. What I refer to as the "major" wicked ways that are well defined within the Bible cover the subject areas that most Christians hold fast to not committing, such as idolatry, adultery, murder, and more. But what about the "minor" wicked ways, such as idle gossip, judgement of others, political injustice, lies, anger, discrimination, boasting, and so on. How many of these so called "minor" infractions are carried by the bag full into our times of prayer? While God abhors idolatry more than any other sin, all others are equally bad and must be confessed if we are to be right with God, and able to meet His instructions from 2 Chronicles.
- ◆ Conclusion: It's time to do our part if we truly desire God to open His eyes, hear our prayers, and heal our land. A very plausible step is to first prayerfully consider what sins that the Lord is convicting us of, and confess them to Him, all within the cleansing process of ACTS, prior to moving into the prayers of supplication.