

## A Season of Prayer, Fasting and Repentance For Spiritual Revival and Community Transformation

### Introduction

*(Editor's Note: This article was originally written for a specific time and place, namely for a season of prayer and fasting during the 2004 Lenten season in Spokane, Washington. Since that time I have been asked if this message of repentance might be for the church-at-large [outside of the Spokane, Washington area]. My first response is that I do not feel personally called to be a "prophet-to-the-nations." My specific calling is to fast and pray for revival in the Pacific Northwest where God has appointed me to labor in the house church movement. That being said, I do believe that the call of God for repentance to begin among His people is a biblical and universal theme which seems particularly timely as the greater church seeks God for revival in our day. For this reason I have lightly edited my original article to reflect a wider potential audience in the prayerful expectation that our God, who gives grace to the humble, will bless all genuine steps taken to call His Church to genuine repentance and humility through fasting and prayer. I will leave it to the individual reader to draw any greater implications).*

This presentation is entitled "A Season of Fasting, Prayer and Repentance For Spiritual Revival And Community Transformation," and is sponsored by The Spokane Market Place Prayer Initiative, a prayer movement to encourage and empower Christians to get out of their traditional boxes and to pray in their homes, their neighborhoods, and their market places for spiritual revival and community transformation. This presentation represents what I believe to be God's next step toward opening up a season of divine visitation in revival and renewal. You see, I believe that God wants to send Spiritual Revival and Transformation to our community. He is calling His available church to seek Him in humility, in fasting, in prayer and in genuine personal and corporate repentance, asking God to have mercy upon us and to pour out His Spirit upon us, our churches and our community. This isn't about a program, a crusade, or a festival. It isn't even about your pastor or your church or your ministry. It's about the heart and desire of God to visit our city, to pour out spiritual revival and transformation, and its about the role He wants you to play.

Repentance has become the "lost heart" of the Church today. One seldom hears messages on the need for personal or corporate repentance from sin. And yet when we look at the New testament there are some 58 references to the need to repent. "Repent" is the most frequent instruction given by the risen Christ to the 7 Churches of Asia in Revelation chapters 2 & 3 (occurring 6 times). Repentance is a matter close to God's heart. I believe God is about to make repentance from sin as important to us as it is to Him. I believe that God is calling His Church into a season of prayer, fasting and repentance in preparation for revival.

When you and I stand before God on judgment day He will not ask you to give an account for anyone's sin but your own. That sin or issue in your neighbor's life that you thought was so terrible and which you believed cried out for repentance on their part will not even come up in the conversation. But God will ask you to explain the log in your own eye which you steadfastly denied was there and which you refused to repent over. Repentance isn't about any one else. It is about you. It isn't about anyone else's sin. It's about yours. It isn't about what you might think God wants to do in anyone else's life. It's about what God wants to do in your life. It isn't about the Church calling the world to repent of it's sin. It's about the Church wanting to be holy before God and living out a life of humility and repentance before a watching world that has yet to see a genuine role model of repentance and forgiveness. Perhaps the world will consider the claims of Christ more seriously when it sees the professing Church living out a life of humility, forgiveness and holiness more fully.

### Answering The Question

And as this season of spiritual outpouring unfolds, each one of us must ask ourselves a very simple yet very profound question. Your answer to this question will have a profound effect upon you, your family, your church & your community. Here's the question, in two parts: What do you want God to do in your life, the life of your family, the life of your church and the life of your community; and what price are you willing to pay to see Him do that? This is the question which confronts the people of God at the outset of every great move of God's Spirit in revival. The Presbyterian Church realized the importance of this very question as both the church and the nation stood on the verge of revival in 1857. Here is what they said in their official record, written 6 months prior to the outbreak of the great Prayer Revival of 1857.

*"Another and the last evidence, that we cite, of an increasing vigor and efficiency in our denomination is, the intense longing, breathed through all the Narratives for a general, glorious outpouring of the Spirit. The past year has not been one which may be characterized as a year of revivals, although many churches in many Presbyteries have been greatly quickened, and some have been favored with spiritual influences of extraordinary power. . . . This longing for revivals we cannot but consider a cheering indication of the noblest life. Next to a state of actual revival is the sense of its need, and*

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*the struggle to attain it at any sacrifice of treasure, toil or time.*

So, let me ask you again: What do you want God to do in your life, the life of your family, the life of your church and the life of your community; and what price are you willing to pay, in *“treasure, toil or time,”* to see Him do that? I believe that in this present season of God’s dealings He is calling you and me to pay the price of humility and repentance. I believe that humility, repentance and prayer are the first critical steps in every great move of God, including the one that is about to unfold. I believe God wants to ignite a prairie fire of prayer for Spiritual revival and Community Transformation throughout our area. And it starts here, today, with you and with me. Revival and community transformation are not going to come because your pastor preaches on it, or prays for it, or leads meetings to encourage it. It is going to come because hundreds, even thousands, of believers begin humbling themselves in personal repentance, fasting and prayer, asking God to open a window in the heavenlies over our City. The day of God’s visitation is approaching. I have been a Christian now for 32 years, and for the past 7 years God’s call upon my life has been to fast and pray for revival. In all that time I have never sensed the Spirit of God brooding over a city as powerfully as I do today. The day of God’s visitation is approaching, and He is asking each one of us a simple but profound question: ***What do you want God to do in your life, the life of your family, the life of your church and the life of your community; and what price are you willing to pay to see Him do that? Are you willing to pay the price of personal humility, fasting, prayer and repentance?***

### Seeking A Fresh Visitation From God

We are a community in desperate need of a visitation from God. But such a divine visitation does not come to a people who are satisfied with themselves. It does not come to a people or group because they demonstrate themselves powerful enough or worthy enough either to earn it like a deserved blessing, or to usher it in themselves like the fruit of their own labor. Such a divine visitation comes to desperate souls who are willing to acknowledge their own failures, their own weaknesses and their own need. It comes to a church which is willing to confess before God that they themselves are the stronghold which holds back what He wants to accomplish. All of our failures can ultimately be traced back to one common source: ***ourselves.***

Scripture teaches and warns us that *“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* (1 Peter 5:5). As a church desperately seeking a fresh visitation from God, and desperately in need of greater grace to fulfill all that God has called us to do, it is important beyond description for us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt us at the proper time. Now is a time for humility, not exaltation. It is time for the Church of the Living God to die, in order for it to truly live. Resurrection power comes only to those who are willing to die: to themselves, to their own plans and agendas, even their own ministries. Death is God’s prerequisite for resurrection life. And genuine repentance, both personal and corporate, is one of the ways we as believers and as a Church “die” to ourselves. A person or a Church that is unwilling to seek God in humility and repentance for their own failures, sins and shortcomings is a person or Church with no adequate spiritual foundation for moving forward into God’s new season. That is a person or a Church without the foundation necessary to either receive or sustain the new thing that God may want to do and to impart.

Scripture reminds us that there is *“A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.”* (Ecclesiastes 3:4) I believe that now is a time for weeping and mourning in Zion. This is the season for individual believers as well as Churches to weep and mourn for our sins and our failures. The purpose of such a time is to acknowledge and confess that the blood of the lost in our community is upon our heads and our hands, and that we have failed to be an effective living witness to the Gospel. This is the season for us to acknowledge and confess that we are the stronghold, that we are the problem, that we are the reason why revival does not come. This, I believe, is God’s season of fasting, prayer and repentance for His Church.

### A Season of Revival Versus A Season of Church Growth

A discussion of repentance and revival raises the inevitable question: What exactly is revival? The best way to illustrate this question is with an example of how people misunderstand revival. Consider the following quote, then I’ll tell you where the quote came from. Here’s the quote: *“If your church baptized 671 new believers, added 1,200 new members, and increased your average attendance by 2,000 in just 40 days, would you call that a revival? If, during those same 40 days, 2,200 previously uninvolved people volunteered to serve in a ministry of your church, and another 3,700 committed to go on missions somewhere in the world next year, what would you call that? An awakening? What term would you use if your members became so burdened for their neighbors that they started 2,400 Home Bible Study groups and convinced nearly 25,000 of their friends, neighbors, and co-workers to attend for six weeks? A miracle? Whatever you call it, this actually happened at Saddleback Church in the Fall of 2002 during an incredible spiritual growth emphasis called 40 Days of Purpose.”* I took this quote from the official website of The Purpose Driven Church. It is Rick Warren’s personal introduction to the 40 day campaign to a purpose driven church that over 1,500 churches around the country are currently participating

in. It is really a perfect illustration of the confusion surrounding the issue of revival. Are the things he describes there a revival? I would say "No." And I want to explain why, and I want to explain why with some help from Arthur Wallis. You may have read some of his works in the past, such as **"God's Chosen Fast"** or **"Pray In The Spirit"**. But he also wrote another wonderful book on the topic of revival entitled, **"In The Day of Thy Power."** And I would like to share some of what he has to say on the issue of "What is revival?" Listen to Arthur Wallis:

*"There was never a day in which the term "revival" needed to be more carefully defined. It has come to be used in relation to spiritual things so widely and so loosely that many are perplexed to know what it does mean. To some prejudiced or misinformed people the term is synonymous with excessive emotionalism and mass hysteria. Others use the word to describe a successful evangelistic mission. When they tell us that their church is "having a revival", we understand them to mean that a gospel campaign is being conducted there. This use is possibly a relic of days when the Spirit was working widely, and one had only to arrange such a mission to witness a quickening amongst the believers and an ingathering of the lost. Today it is otherwise, but in any case to use the term thus is misleading. Some, adhering closely to the etymology of the word, use it to describe a personal reviving of the believer by the Holy Spirit. If an individual or group is quickened in holiness and brought into a place of blessing, that is what they call "revival", even if there is little extension of the work. Similarly others, whose emphasis is more on a definite experience of the Spirit, will claim that when an individual or group has been filled with the Spirit they have "got revival", regardless of whether there are any repercussions outside their circle. In so far as revival always involves the reviving of individual believers these views are true, but as definitions of revival they are inadequate.*

*Revival is more than big meetings. It is more than religious excitement. It is more than the quickening of the saints, or their being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is more than a great ingathering of souls. One may have any one of these without revival, and yet revival includes them all."*

Do you see what Wallis is saying? He is pointing out that there is a fundamental difference between a very effective evangelistic program or campaign (such as Rick Warren is describing) and a spiritual revival. You can have a very successful Church growth program without ever experiencing God's Presence in revival. Let's listen to more of what Arthur Wallis has to say about this:

*"There is a wealth of difference between missions or campaigns at their best and genuine revival. In the former man takes the initiative, it may be with the prompting of the Spirit; in the latter the initiative is God's. With the one the organization is human; with the other it is divine. There is no intention here of disparaging the work of missions, or of denying that God has owned them to the conversion of multitudes, but it must be made clear that they do not constitute revival. Missions may be a part of the continuous programme of evangelism which is the task of the church, but revival is a thing of special times and seasons. Revival may of course break out during a mission, but when it does so certain features will appear which are peculiar to revival, and certain features will disappear which are characteristic of missions. However, while revival tarries, the normal evangelism of the church must continue, but let us keep the distinction clear. The meaning of any word is determined by its usage. For a definition of revival we must therefore appeal to the people of God of bygone years, who have used the word with consistency of meaning down the centuries, until it began to be used in a lesser and more limited sense in modern times. Numerous writings on the subject that have been preserved to us will confirm that revival is divine intervention in the normal course of spiritual things. It is God revealing Himself to man in awful holiness and irresistible power. It is such a manifest working of God that human personalities are overshadowed, and human programmes abandoned. It is man retiring into the background because God has taken the field. It is the Lord making bare His holy arm, and working in extraordinary power on saint and sinner.*

A successful church growth program may change your church and cause it to grow in numbers, but God's Presence in revival will transform your church and endow it with the Kingdom Power necessary to reach and transform a city.

### **The "Wall" Of The Status Quo**

Now, this presentation you are listening to (or reading) has been revised and updated as of Mid-2004, and this requires an explanation. In September of 2003 *The Spokane Market Place Prayer Initiative* sponsored and put on a Public Commemoration of 9/11 in the River Park Square Mall in downtown Spokane. You can see a picture summary of this event on our website at [marketplaceprayer.org](http://marketplaceprayer.org) and I talk about this event and how it came about in my Overview of The Spokane Market Place Prayer Initiative. After that event, which God greatly blessed, we began asking God "What's next?" because it felt as though Spokane had hit what I call a "revival prayer wall." I began sensing (and it was confirmed by others) that God is calling His available church into a season of prayer, fasting and repentance as the next step in His unfolding season of revival. In response to this call, beginning in January of 2004, we mailed out over 200 information packets to area pastors and churches. The packets included a call to "40 Days of Purposeful Repentance" during the 2004 Lenten Season, an audio tape (similar to this message which I am now updating), a written copy of this message, information on how to participate

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in this season, a "Repentance Petition" and more. We also began sending out over 200 weekly e-mail devotionals focusing upon prayer, fasting and repentance to area pastors, churches and leaders.

When I looked back and reflected on this time I was reminded of several conversations with believers who were involved in the "40 Days of Purposeful Repentance" and they all had the same basic question: *"Have you heard anything from the Lord; has anything been accomplished?"* That's a good question that deserves a response. As the "40 Days" progressed I began to receive feed back (usually through the grapevine) from intercessors who said something like this: *"Yes, we have received the same word from God that He is calling His people into a season of repentance, and we have shared this word with our leadership."* The story usually ended with some statement that the leadership had "received" the word but had not yet acted on it. Such stories finally led me to a conclusion. Much of the Church and its leadership during this season has often resembled the parable which Jesus told in Matthew 21:28ff. It went like this: *"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' And he answered and said, 'I will, sir'; and he did not go. And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, 'I will not'; yet he afterward regretted it and went. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said, 'The latter.'"* We like to give the appearance of obedience by agreeing with the intercessor who bring us what they believe to be a word from the Lord, like the son in the parable who said "I will, sir" but did not go. But God isn't looking for "lip-service agreement." It is better to be the son who answered, "I will not"; yet he afterward regretted it and went." Obstinance which turns to regret, repentance and obedience is something God can work with for blessing. Hearing and false agreement which leads to disobedience is something that God will eventually judge. If you aren't going to listen to your intercessors & prophet with a heart of obedience then you would be better off to not have them, because now you are accountable for hearing, knowing and disobeying. Ouch! So, back to the question. What was accomplished in this season? Let me mention just a couple (there are more, but I am not sure that this is the time and place to discuss them). **First**, we have the accomplishment of obedience. In Luke Chapter 17 Jesus told another parable which ends like this: *"He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"* (Luke 17:9-10) At the end of the day (or season) we have the joy of knowing that while God is not "impressed," He is pleased with our obedience. We have done what He told us to do. And when we obey, the results belong to God. Just as when we disobey, the results belong to us. **Second**, we have the accomplishment of having entered into and waged warfare in the heavenlies on behalf of our city and the people who live here. I am no expert on spiritual warfare (nor do I know many people who are, despite their protestations to the contrary), but I have learned over the years that, as Daniel discovered during his fasting times, changes in the heavenlies precede changes on earth. And I know that prayer, fasting and repentance bring about changes in the heavenlies. How those changes will be manifested here where we live is yet to unfold . . . but be assured that they will unfold. The obedience of all who have participated in this season of prayer, fasting & repentance has had an impact upon the coming day of God's visitation in our area. We are all now waiting for God to reveal to us what that impact will be.

As I mentioned earlier, back in the Fall of 2003 I sensed that Spokane had hit a "revival prayer wall." Even at that time I was afraid that this would happen. Now, six months later as I look back over what God has done and how His people either have or have not responded, I am more convinced than ever of this wall. Everything that has been done up 'til now (prayer walking, spiritual mapping, proclamations, etc.) has been the "easy" work of clearing away the brush and rubble which, when removed, reveals "the wall" which had been concealed there. Now the question is whether or not we will do the genuinely hard work of pressing in with persistent and devoted prayer, fasting and repentance. This isn't about planning new outreaches or new programmes or new activities. It is about the church's willingness, our willingness, to press into God's Kingdom Purposes for our community through individual as well as corporate prayer & fasting & repentance.

As I have prayed and sought God about this situation over the past several weeks, I have sensed the Holy Spirit saying that one of the Church's greatest "enemies" in this season is . . . the status quo. God hates the status quo, because it represents present complacency waging warfare against revelation and vision . . . and revival. The status quo represents complacency attempting to hold a "middle ground" somewhere between revival or judgment. But in God's spiritual economy there is no such "middle ground." A person, a church, a community and a nation is always moving in one direction or another, either towards spiritual revival and transformation on the one hand, or towards judgment on the other hand. Men (individual Christians as well as churches) attempt to mask the status quo with activities which keep people busy and which divert their attention from the reality that nothing has really changed (revealing the stark difference between "activity" and "impact"). The current status quo is like the lukewarmness of the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:16. It is activity masking spiritual poverty and complacency, and it nauseates the Lord Jesus because we are neither hot nor cold. Jesus didn't suffer & die so that we could be comfortably complacent while our churches swap congregations and call it church growth and while our city perishes around us.

The Church now stands at a spiritual crossroads. After many years of prayer for revival, and many prophetic words promising a season of revival, we now stand at a critical crossroads where we must choose. We can choose to continue

on in more man-made structures, activities, programs and coalitions which will do nothing but mask spiritual poverty with activity while perpetuating the status quo, or we can choose to lay aside all other considerations and enter into a season of prayer, fasting and repentance which will lead to genuine revival. In this season, God is not looking for empty, ritualized and formalized repentance events. Rather, He is looking to raise up men (and women) like Ezra who are genuinely appalled at the condition of God's people and who are willing to weep the prayers of the broken hearted over the sin of God's people and the failure of the Church. All future seasons of God's blessing are contained in this present season which now looms before us. For if the Church fails to embrace and enter into this season, there may be no future season of blessing in our generation. I believe that God wants to send Spiritual Revival and Transformation to our community, and at this current point in time He is calling His available church to seek Him in humility, in fasting, in prayer and in genuine personal and corporate repentance, asking God to have mercy upon us and to pour out His Spirit upon us, our churches and our community.

### The Role of Repentance In Revival

Why is repentance important for revival, and why should we be pursuing and praying for it in this season? Let me offer two thoughts. **First**, repentance is important because it clears the way for God to do more and greater things in our lives, by dealing with past sins or issues which may be standing in the way of a deeper relationship with God. Do we really want God to bless our sin? But, Christians who are stuck in self-satisfied complacency & the status quo often respond to calls for repentance by saying, *"I don't have anything I need to repent of. I'm already working hard and doing my best, and we've got a great program underway at our church and everything is O.K. So, why do I or we need to repent?"* That's actually an important question. And I want to offer three specific answers: **First**, 1 John 1:8-10 says, *"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."* Notice that according to this verse there are 2 basic kinds of Christians: those who deny they have sin in their lives and are therefore self-deceived, and those who acknowledge and confess their sins (by the way, that's repentance) and experience God's forgiveness and cleansing. To say that we have no need to repent is the same as saying that we have no sin in our lives and no need for forgiveness and cleansing. I wonder if that's really true; and I wonder if that's really what you want to tell God - *"Don't mind me God, I'm sinless and perfect. Go on to some poor sinner who really needs you."*

My **second** answer to this question of why do we need to repent is found in Revelation 3:14-20 which describes the Church of Laodicea. Now, some Bible teachers teach that this represents the end-time apostate church. But as I study this passage, what I see is not an apostate church, but a complacent one. You see, the problem in Laodicea wasn't that they were apostate, but that they were lukewarm, complacent and blind to their own spiritual poverty and need. Here's my point from this passage: the Christians in Laodicea didn't realize they were the complacent church in Laodicea until Jesus revealed it to them. And what was the antidote to their spiritual poverty, blindness and lukewarm complacency? We see it in verse 19: *'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent.'*

My **third** answer to the question of why we need to repent has to do with our community. In the greater Spokane-eastern Washington area reliable surveys show that only 18 out of 100 adults attend any form of Church. To put this in simple terms that we can all understand, as Christians we have failed our community to the point that 82 out of 100 people have no interest in the gospel or the Kingdom of God. Rather than defending our failed programs and activities, we need to acknowledge and confess our failures, repent before the throne of Grace, and beseech God in humility and tears for a fresh visitation.

Now, **my second thought** on why repentance is important to revival is that *repentance is to revival what roots are to a tree.* A tall tree with shallow roots is a disaster waiting to happen. And trees develop shallow roots because the available water supply is close to the surface and there is no immediate need for it to send its roots deep into the earth in search of water. When the winds of adversity blow, tall trees with shallow roots are easily blown over with disastrous results. Much of our life in the church today is likewise shallow. We are often spiritual trees with shallow roots, never having been either forced or challenged to dig deep into God's Presence, and never discovering that the sins and issues which we dismiss so lightly are in reality things which break the heart of God. I believe God desires and intends to send powerful revival to His Church and awakening to the world, but I believe He wants to grow it among a people with roots of repentance driven deep into His Presence, in fulfillment of Isaiah 61:3 - *"To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."* I believe God will be glorified when His "oaks of righteousness" have roots of repentance driven deep into His Presence.

### What Exactly Is Repentance?

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Now there is a question which we haven't yet answered, which is: What exactly is repentance? In the O. T. repentance was a very concrete thing. It was most frequently expressed by the Hebrew word *shuwb* which means "to turn". Repentance meant that you were going in the wrong direction away from God and that you needed to turn and go in a different direction - toward God. This is the emphasis throughout the book of Jeremiah where this word occurs some 112 times in 52 chapters (look particularly at chapter 3). In the New Testament the emphasis in repentance was upon a change of mind or heart. It is expressed in the Greek word *metanoia* which literally meant to have an "after thought" or a "change of mind" which resulted in a change of direction or action. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says about repentance as he describes his ministry among the Ephesians from Acts 20:18-21: "And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Most Christians probably think of repentance as something negative, as turning away from something we don't really want to give up. But Paul talks here about "repentance toward God." The Christian life must never be defined by what we are against. Ultimately, our spiritual lives must be defined by what we turn towards. Repentance is turning towards God. Repentance is saying no to anything which separates us from a deeper walk with God. And that is a good thing. Now, many Christians, maybe some of you hearing or reading this, think that repentance is only a message for believers to preach to unbelievers, but that is not true. We see this most clearly in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 where the command to "repent" is the most frequent instruction given by the risen Christ to the 7 Churches of Asia in Revelation chapters 2 & 3 occurring 6 times. God earnestly desires a people who will repent by turning away from and saying no to anything that separates us from a deeper walk with Him, and which compromises our witness and testimony to the world. One of my favorite Christian thinkers during my college days was Os Guinness. His book, *The Dust of Death*, a critique on the collapse of western thought, was "required reading" among Christian college students during the 1970s (It is still an excellent read). Guinness studied under Dr. Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri and Schaeffer's thought resonates through much of Guinness' writings even today. In one of his most recent books, entitled *The Long Journey Home*, Dr. Guinness discusses the three impediments to Christianity most often cited by unbelievers. The first impediment to faith among unbelievers is the problem of pain, evil and suffering in the world. The second impediment cited is the problem of the historical Jesus in light of such things as The Jesus Project (which questions the historical veracity of the biblical accounts of Jesus' life). The third impediment to Christian faith cited by unbelievers is . . . "Christians." That's right. When it comes to evangelism and the gospel, we are often our own worst enemy. At least, that's how unbelievers often see us. Sometimes the worst thing we can do for an unbeliever is to bring him or her to Church! What makes us think that the sins of pride, gossip, prejudice, anger, judgmentalism and the like are somehow OK in the life of God's people, but are condemned in the life of an unbeliever. And how can we ask and expect unbelievers to repent of those things which separate them from God when God's own people are unwilling to do so?

Perhaps the best biblical example of both inward and outward repentance is found in Luke Chapter 15 and the story of the Prodigal Son. The interesting thing about this story for our purposes in understanding the need for repentance in the Church today is to note that there were, in fact, two sons. One was a prodigal who went away, squandered his inheritance, repented, returned and was joyously restored to fellowship with his Father. But there was a second son who didn't do anything wrong, except live in self-righteousness about how good and obedient he was, and in judgmentalism toward his wayward but repentant brother. Now, here's the question. Which one of these represents you? And which one represents me? And which one represents the Church today? Here's the point. Genuine repentance is always welcomed and blessed by God; but complacency, self-righteousness and judgmentalism are NEVER welcomed or blessed.

Let's take a moment to put this into strictly human terms. I'm a father. I have two children, a son and a daughter, both in their early twenties. But suppose for a moment that one of them had come to me when they were younger, had gotten down on their knees and said something like this: "*Dad, I want to tell you how sorry I am for the ways I have failed to be the son or daughter you've wanted me to be. If there are specific things I've done or not done that I need to correct, I want you to tell me. And I want to do whatever you think is necessary to change. I really want to love you more and to honor you as your son or daughter, and to do the things that please you. I genuinely want to build a deeper relationship with you. Would you tell me what it is I need to do?*" Now, after recovering from the shock of this experience, how do you think I would respond? How would you respond? Would you dismiss it or minimize it or trivialize it? Or would you be deeply touched and moved to the point of doing whatever you could to encourage your child and to build a deeper, more vital relationship with him or her? And how do you think God will respond to his people; how do you think Jesus will respond to His bride doing the same thing with Him? This is the Church driving deep roots into the Presence of God through repentance, in order that the tree of revival which will grow from those roots will be strong and tall. This kind of repentance requires humility rather than pride. It requires a people and a Church willing to acknowledge their weaknesses and failures, rather than proclaiming their power and strength. If we cannot see our own need for repentance, we may be like the Laodiceans of Revelation Chapter 3. Remember, the Laodiceans didn't think that they were the Church in Laodicea either. We seldom see ourselves as God sees us. We often need God's prophetic voice breaking through to us, calling us to send our spiritual roots deeper into His

Presence through prayer, fasting and godly repentance. Now the question is, are you willing to take the first steps toward God in repentance, asking Him to meet you in this process and to reveal to you those areas of your life or your ministry where, like the Laodiceans, you may have become blind to your own spiritual poverty and need. And in this process I am reminded of Paul's words to Timothy when he said, *"And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth . . ."* (2 Timothy 2:25). Our goal should not be to artificially "create" something to repent over, but to ask God Himself to grant to each of us personally, and to His Church, a genuine spirit of repentance that expresses the heart of God, and the spiritual need of our own hearts and lives.

### The Relationship of Fasting & Repentance

Now let's talk some about the relationship between fasting and repentance. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, was a highly disciplined person in his personal spiritual devotions. He fasted two days every week, every Wednesday and every Friday, from the time he got up in the morning until after 3:00 in the afternoon. And he refused to appoint to the Methodist ministry any man who would not commit himself to fast two days per week. Listen to what Wesley has to say about fasting and prayer: *"And with fasting let us always join in fervent prayer, pouring out our whole souls before God, confessing our sins with all their aggravations, humbling ourselves under his mighty hand, laying open before him all our wants, all our guiltiness and helplessness. This is a season for enlarging our prayers, both in behalf of ourselves and of our brethren. Let us now bewail the sins of our people, and cry aloud for the city of our God: that the Lord may build up Zion, and cause his face to shine on her desolations."* As one of the leaders of the First Great Awakening in England, Wesley understood the important role fasting plays in confession of sin, repentance and preparation for revival. The reason I wanted to share this quote, and the reason I want to talk about the importance of fasting and prayer is this. As we enter this new season of God's dealings with His church, one of the crying needs of the church in our relationship with God is to enter into a season of earnest repentance for our sins. And biblically, fasting plays an important role in how the people of God deal with their sin. When we look at the Old Testament we see the people of God practicing fasting in order to deal with their sin in four ways:

**1. They fasted in order to humble themselves before God.** In 1 Peter 5:5-6 Peter exhorts elders to *"clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God . . ."* The Old Testament mentality was very practical and concrete. Fasting, as taught and practiced in the Old Testament, provides a practical means for us to humble ourselves before God and one another. There is a clear scriptural relationship between humbling ourselves and fasting. In Leviticus 16:31 God instructed the Israelites to "afflict" their souls each year on the Day of Atonement. The Hebrew word translated "afflict" in Leviticus 16:31 means *"to be bowed down or afflicted."* It is the same word which is translated "humble" in Psalm 35:13 where David declared, *"I humbled my soul with fasting."* The same word is found along with fasting in several passages, including Ezra 8:21 where Ezra proclaimed a fast, "that we might humble ourselves." The word for "fast" and "humble" are used together. In Scripture, fasting is God's appointed means for believers to "afflict" their souls and to humble themselves before God, demonstrating our earnestness and sincerity of purpose in confronting sin in our lives.

**2. They Fasted As A Means of Confessing Their Sins.** The relationship between fasting and the confession of sin can be powerfully seen in Ezra 9:5ff, *"But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the Lord my God; and I said, 'O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to Thee, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads, and our guilt has grown even to the heavens.'" The Hebrew word translated "humiliation" here means "to afflict or humble oneself by fasting."* The remainder of the chapter is Ezra's confession of the people's sin and his prayer for God's forgiveness. The result of Ezra's fasting and confession was that a spirit of conviction over sin began to spread among the people, *"Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women, and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly"* (Ezra 10:1). Ezra's time of fasting, humiliation and confession of sin had a powerful effect upon the people of Israel, resulting in their own conviction, confession, mourning (as evidenced by their "weeping bitterly") and repentance from sin. God intends for times of personal and corporate fasting to be times of acknowledging and confessing our sins, confessing them first before God and secondly before those persons against whom we have sinned.

**3. They Fasted In Order To Mourn Their Sins.** In the Old Testament there is also a relationship between fasting and mourning. In the passage from Ezra 10 referred to above the word "mourning" is found in verse 6, *"Then Ezra rose from before the house of God and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib. Although he went there, he did not eat bread, nor drink water, for he was mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles."* Here the relationship is clear between fasting (*"he did not eat . . . nor drink"*) and mourning. Ezra fasted as an expression of mourning over the sin of the people. Ezra didn't simply confess his sin and the sins of the people as some form of "intellectual agreement" with God. It went

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much deeper. As a result of his fasting, Ezra's heart was broken by the sins which broke the heart of God. It is one thing to intellectually and mentally acknowledge our sin and to confess it. It is quite another when God touches our heart and causes it to break over our sin, just as His heart breaks over our sin. Ezra expressed his mourning by fasting, but his fasting led to a deeper mourning because his heart had been broken over sin. We see the relationship again in Nehemiah 1:4, *"Now it came about when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven."* Here we see fasting that results specifically in mourning and weeping over sin (the sin is specified in Nehemiah's prayer for forgiveness in verse 7). In the Old Testament, fasting is a form of mourning, particularly mourning for one's sins. Biblical mourning is neither the self-centered remorse nor the hopeless grief of the unbeliever. Instead, biblical mourning through fasting is a response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit through which we share in a small measure in God's own grief over our sin. Fasting is a time when we consider and mourn our own sins, failures and shortcomings before God. As John Wesley observed, *"Let every season, either of public or private fasting, be a season of exercising all those holy affections which are implied in a broken and contrite heart. Let it be a season of devout mourning, of godly sorrow for sin. . ."* It is this kind of godly mourning is followed by *"the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified"* (Isaiah 61:3)

**4. They Fasted As A Sign of Repentance For Their Sin.** Fasting, when combined with humility, confession, and mourning over our sin, is a true indication of genuine repentance. No where is this more clearly seen than in the example of Jonah and the Ninevites. In Jonah 3:5, in response to the preaching of the prophet, *"the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them."* Their action of fasting was matched with an attitude of repentance, *"let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands"* (Jonah 3:8). God graciously acknowledged the fasting of the Ninevites as an indication of genuine repentance, *"When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it"* (Jonah 3:10).

### Calling A Coalition For Repentance & Community Transformation

There is much talk today among ministry people about forming "coalitions" to partner in ministry to reach our community. Coalitions and partnerships are good. But as good as they can be, they are irrelevant at this moment in time. Changing our working structure to a coalition, a partnership, a "ministry hub" or anything else is meaningless if we are not willing to obey God in the one thing He is calling us to do at this moment in time. God is calling Churches, ministries, leaders and believers into a season of genuine soul-searching repentance. It's time for God's people to *"weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, 'Spare thy people, O Lord, and do not make Thine inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations.'" (Joel 2:17)* To labor on building coalitions, partnerships or hubs, while ignoring God's call to repent and to seek Him first and foremost in this season, is to do nothing more than to tie together the tails of many "dead cats" in the vain hope that there is somehow life and strength in numbers.

There is also much talk today about the need for "unity" among believers, churches and ministries in our area. And unity, like partnerships and coalitions, can be a good thing. And what greater unity could there be than for the visible church of Jesus Christ in our community to unite in the single-minded purpose of meeting before the Throne of Grace in a concert of prayer, fasting and repentance, beseeching God to have mercy upon His people and to send a genuine season of spiritual revival and community transformation. In the words of John Wesley, *"And with fasting let us always join in fervent prayer, pouring out our whole souls before God, confessing our sins with all their aggravations, humbling ourselves under his mighty hand, laying open before him all our wants, all our guiltiness and helplessness. This is a season for enlarging our prayers, both in behalf of ourselves and of our brethren. Let us now bewail the sins of our people, and cry aloud for the city of our God: that the Lord may build up Zion, and cause his face to shine on her desolations."*

All future seasons of God's blessing are contained in this present season which now rises up before us like a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. For if we are unwilling or unable to embrace and enter into this season of repentance and preparation, there may be no future season of blessing in our generation. I believe that God wants to send Spiritual Revival and Transformation to our community, and at this current point in time He is calling His available church to seek Him in humility, in fasting, in prayer and in genuine personal and corporate repentance, asking God to have mercy upon us and to pour out His Spirit upon us, our churches and our community.

### What Are We Repenting For?

There are no cookie-cutter patterns, programs or solutions here. Repentance is always personal, and will vary from individual to individual, as well as from Church to Church. My sins are not your sins. What God convicts me concerning will

be different from the things He wants to deal with in your life. While one church may need to repent of a spirit of false authority and abuse by its leadership towards its people, another church may need to repent of a pattern of the congregation abusing pastors and leaders, or of the people closing their hearts to the needs of its missionaries, or of saying “go, be warmed and be filled” to the poor in their midst while never giving sacrificially to meet their needs. And don’t be taken by surprise by the depths of the enemy’s work among God’s people. I am personally aware of situations where Christian marriages are being destroyed by addictions to pornography and internet sex, or where Christian families are being torn apart by drug addictions, or spousal abuse and other attacks of the enemy. Like the Church of Laodicea it does us no good to deny our spiritual poverty and to proclaim our false prosperity, while Jesus stands outside the door, knocking and calling His people to repentance and deeper fellowship with Himself. The choice we make whether or not to confront these realities in ourselves and our churches and to repent of them is a choice as to whether or not we will pursue a deeper and more intimate relationship with Jesus Himself and the revival and transformation He has promised, or keep Him on the outside and allow this season of revival to pass us by unclaimed. The choice is ours.

### So, What Do We Do Next?

Let me begin by saying, there is never a bad time to repent and seek God for personal and corporate revival. So, please don’t feel limited by any artificial time constraints. But at the same time I believe that there are times and season which God determines in His Providence when He calls His people to seek Him in humility and repentance. I believe that we have entered such a time. For this reason *The Spokane Market Place Prayer Initiative* and *The Parousia Network of House & Cell Churches* are encouraging individual believers and churches to set aside dedicated and concerted times and seasons of fasting, prayer and repentance, asking God to visit us, our churches and our city in spiritual revival and community transformation.

Now, I want this to be as practical as possible, so I want to give some specific vision and an action step. **First, the Vision.** Let me re-state the vision with some help from the great Welsh Revival of 1904. On Friday morning, November 4, 1904 Evan Roberts wrote to Mr. Hartley Aspden, the Editor of the ***Sunday Companion*** newspaper asking for a cost quote for printing up some “*Revival Picture Post-cards*”. At the conclusion of his letter Roberts added, “*We are on the eve of a great and grand revival, the greatest the world has ever seen. Do not think that the writer is a madman*”. Those picture post cards never got printed, but the revival came and Mr. Hartly Aspden never forgot that note. I believe that God has opened a season for revival among His people. I believe He wants to pour out the River of His Spirit in power and blessing and transformation the likes of which we have never seen or experienced before. What God wants to do will take your breath away. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah in Chapter 64 and verse 3. “*When Thou didst awesome things which we did not expect, Thou didst come down, the mountains quaked at Thy presence.*” God is about to come and do new things “which we did not expect.” **Second, the Challenge.** I believe that in order to fully enter into this season of promised revival, God is calling His Church to a season of humility, fasting, prayer and repentance for all our sins and failures. I believe that God wants His people, as individuals, ministries and Churches, to form a coalition for prayer, repentance, for revival and for community transformation. It is time for the visible Church to unite before the Throne of Grace and with many voices as one voice to weep between the porch and the altar, and to cry out saying ‘Spare thy people, O Lord, and do not make Thine inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations.’ **Third, the Action Step.** Make a personal commitment to fast, pray and repent in your own devotional life. Ultimately, all prayer, fasting and repentance are personal. Encourage your church or ministry to declare a season of prayer, fasting and repentance and to encourage everyone to participate. Your pastor, your church or your ministry may need your personal encouragement to become involved with this season. Make sure they have a copy of this article and encourage them to circulate it to people in your church or ministry. You can also do such things as cover your church with fasting and prayer by setting up a “Daily Prayer Calendar” where individuals volunteer and sign up to fast and pray for one particular day or part of a day.

I would like to end this presentation with a personal story. Roughly 7 years ago I began working on my book on the great Welsh revival of 1904. During that time I traveled to London and Wales to do research. When I arrived at London-Heathrow I immediately caught the subway (the “Tube”) to downtown London, looking for the hotel which the travel agent in Toronto had booked for me. I spent the next two days in London doing research and visiting old book stores. On Wednesday morning I woke up at 4:00 AM with a powerful dream on my mind and heart. In my journal for that day I recorded, “*I had a dream last evening that was very intense. I dreamt that I met Evan Roberts and we talked about the Welsh Revival and what God did during that time. In my dream we ended our time by praying together for revival.*” I suppose that it is possible that my dream of encountering Evan Roberts was what C. H. Spurgeon described as nothing more than “*the steam from an overhead brain,*” since I was in the process of writing a book on those events. But I sensed that it was much more, like “*fire from off God’s altar.*” I spent the following hour, from 4:00-to-5:00 AM in intense prayer, with the deep sense that God was telling me that He intends to send the fire of His Holy Spirit in revival and renewal, just as He did in Wales and around the world from 1904 to 1907. May God in His Providence during this Season of Fasting, Prayer and Repentance ignite that same fire that caused Evan Roberts to pray the prayer that changed himself, a nation and the world - *O Arglwydd, Plyg ni -*

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*“O Lord, Bend Us”* May God bless you and bend you as you fast and pray and repent before Him for spiritual revival and for the transformation of our city.