

PSALM 85:

LORD, you poured out blessings on your land! You restored the fortunes of Israel. You forgave the guilt of your people—yes, you covered all their sins. You held back your fury. You kept back your blazing anger.

⁴ Now restore us again, O God of our salvation. Put aside your anger against us once more. Will you be angry with us always? Will you prolong your wrath to all generations? Won't you revive us again, so your people can rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.

⁸ I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people. But let them not return to their foolish ways ⁹ Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, so our land will be filled with His glory.

¹⁰ Unfailing love and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed! Truth springs up from the earth, and righteousness smiles down from heaven. Yes, the LORD pours down His blessings. Our land will yield its bountiful harvest. ¹³ Righteousness goes as a herald before Him, preparing the way for His steps. Psalm 85:1-13 NLT

The nation of Israel from its very beginning moved as a mighty group of people. They were called as a group and led as a group. God called them early in Biblical history and invited them to be His people. His idea was that they would follow His commands and do life His way and that He would bless them and their families in ways they couldn't even imagine. Sounded good but it didn't work out so well. The problem was not on God's end but on the people's end.

God promised them: "I will be your God you will be my people." The study of Israel is certainly a fascinating one.

God called them out of Egypt. Moses lead them. There was the Red Sea encounter, manna, quail, the Ten Commandments, a golden calf, 40 years in the wilderness, Joshua, Caleb, Kings, Prophets, backslidings and captivities.

Psalm 85 is a psalm that remembers with gratitude all that God has done. But what does it have to say to us?

As Christians, we are God's people, He has called us, He has led us, not from Egyptian bondage but the bondage of sin. He has given us leaders, His Word, not just the law but the New Testament with abundant grace. He has sent the Holy Spirit to be our guide, counselor, and comforter.

As Christians, we have the incredible opportunity to be serious disciples of Jesus Christ on this earth. With His power and our willingness we can impact our world in ways that are beyond our

imagination. The sad thing is that the typical American has developed a remarkable capacity for being serious about religion without taking religion seriously. From this Psalm I want us to embrace and internalize the message of these words found in Psalm 85.

There is a pattern of behavior here that translates well into 2014. Based on what they did and what the Psalmist wrote I believe we can come away today with four practices that are so important for every believer and to the health of our churches. They are important to know so that we understand how to live this Christian life; so we understand how to live the life of a true disciple.

Here's the first one:

1. **A Grateful Acknowledgement:** Disciples practice thankfulness

The Psalmist starts out by rehearsing some of the things God has done for the historic nation of Israel.

"Nothing we have is attributable to our own strengths and talents. People think so." It's an attitude that was expressed very effectively by James Stewart's character in the movie, *Shenandoah*. He was the patriarch of a large Southern family, running a very successful plantation when the Civil War broke out. Early in the movie the family sat down for dinner, and as they all bowed their heads, this is what he prayed: *"Lord, we cleared this land, we plowed it, sowed it, and harvested it. It wouldn't be here and we wouldn't be eating it if we hadn't done it all ourselves. We worked dog-bone hard for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you just the same anyway for this food we are about to eat. Amen"*

Spoken or unspoken, I think that may be the attitude of far too many hearts, even Christian ones. But the truth is that the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the very air we breathe, are a fresh gift from God every day, for every man woman or child, saved or unsaved. Nothing is ours; nothing."

LORD, you poured out blessings on your land! You restored the fortunes of Israel.² You forgave the guilt of your people—yes, you covered all their sins.³ You held back your fury. You kept back your blazing anger. Psalm 85:1-3 NLT

- a. You poured out blessings on your land! (1a)
- b. You brought us back from captivity. (1b)
- c. You forgave the sin of your people. (2a)
- d. You covered our sins. (2b)
- e. You held back your fury and blazing anger. (3)

We need to be grateful for what God is doing and what He does. It is a wonderful habit to develop. We need again to learn the power of being thankful to God.

A businessman said, “People are ingrates. It took me 61 years to find it out. I have 175 employees, men and women. At Thanksgiving, I sent them 175 choice turkeys. Only four thanked me: two by note; two said “thank you” when they chanced to meet me in the hall. Because of their thankfulness I’ve decided never to go out of my way to be nice again.”

If you want to find gratitude – better look for it in the dictionary. It is a lost art.

Teach your children to thank God daily for the blessings of our life. It will go along way to rid them of the great American entitlement attitude. Teach them to say thank you. Teach your children to write thank you cards.

How much gratitude does God get from us? He’s done more than 175 turkeys. Our power is shut off, and suddenly we become thankful for electricity. Our garbage is not picked up, and suddenly we become thankful for the garbage collector’s weekly stop. A good friend dies, and suddenly we discover how much he meant to us. Our water becomes too polluted to drink and suddenly we appreciate having good water.

Paul wisely instructed us to allow pure, true and good things to permeate our thinking and lifestyle (Philippians 4:8). In congruence to achieving a positive state of mind such as thankfulness, contentment and joyfulness, this practice would be necessary. When we accustom ourselves to finding and drawing the positive from everything, being anchored to our hope in Christ, we are actually training or disciplining ourselves to be consistently thankful. Notice that entertaining a healthy outlook of gratitude leaves very little or no room for discontent and resentment. As a great sage named Fred Smith once said, “I find that it is hard to be depressed and grateful at the same time. Therefore, I discipline my mind to be thankful for the blessings of the present.”

When it comes to your relationship with God, learn to practice thankfulness.

2. **A Great Appeal:** Disciples pray thoroughly

Praying is another practice that disciples will do. Speaking with God should become as natural as breathing for us. In the Psalmist case, he was praying for the whole nation of Israel but it is a prayer that we all should pray a form of on a regular basis.

⁴ Now restore us again, O God of our salvation. Put aside your anger against us once more. Will you be angry with us always? Will you prolong your wrath to all generations? ⁶ Won’t you revive us again, so your people can rejoice in you? ⁷ Show us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation. Psalm 85:4-7 NLT

Sometimes we need to acknowledge our need for restoration. Being honest before God is just plain smart and healthy. We were made for honesty and to be honest. When we are not, it affects everything about us including our emotional health and even our physical health.

Revive us: This prayer too ought to be one that we embrace. There should be periodic times in our walk with God that we press in a little harder to Him. There should be times when we again acknowledge that we have cooled off in our relationship and maybe our love for God. This should cause us pain and sorrow and draw us to a place of prayer and supplication before God.

Three Questions

1. Will you be angry always?
2. Will you be angry at every generation?
3. Will you not revive us?

The church in America should be on its knees every day asking God these questions. Churches often need restored and revived and renewed.

Here are some signs of needing God's restoring power in our church:

1. Very few people come to know the Lord due to the presence and testimony of the church.
2. Children in the church don't take the way of those who have gone before them.
3. When the church has a reputation for being harsh and critical of others mostly within.

An ungodly and unhealthy church will be known for its divisions, splits and internal fighting. One of the largest scandals in the United States is the ineffectiveness of the majority of churches across our nation. No one talks about it because it's not media worthy and frankly the people in the churches don't want to be bothered by the facts or the truth. The condition of our nation and its churches should drive us to our knees but saying this and preaching this is like spitting in the wind.

New Testament Church – Power Conscious We are – Problem Conscious

Will you not revive us again?

3. **A Godly Attitude:** Disciples pay attention thoughtfully

Attitude affects so much in our life. People with negative attitudes about everything will suck the life right out of a room. They will suck the life out of a relationship, a workplace and even a church.

⁸ *I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying, for he speaks peace to his faithful people. But let them not return to their foolish ways.*

A disciple's attitude will include having an ear and a heart that is tuned to God and that will hear and listen to what He has to say. We hear Him in our hearts. We hear Him in a sermon or a song. We hear Him in the quiet places in our lives.

The attitude that we must possess to hear God is one of paying attention to what God says so that we can do what He says.

“Jesus says in His society there is a new way for [people] to live:

you show wisdom, by trusting people;

you handle leadership, by serving;

you handle offenders, by forgiving;

you handle money, by sharing;

you handle enemies, by loving;

and you handle violence, by suffering.

In fact, you have a new attitude toward everything, toward everybody; toward nature, toward the state and nation in which you happen to live, toward women, toward slaves, toward all and every single thing. Because this is a Jesus society, and you repent, not by feeling bad, but by thinking different.”

I will hear what God the Lord will speak.

I will put into practice what I hear.

I will put God first.

I will read His word so that I know what He wants from me daily

I will spend time not just on my knees but engaging in His work so that I can be used by God.

4. A Glad Anticipation: Disciples persevere trustingly

⁹ Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, so our land will be filled with His glory.¹⁰ Unfailing love and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed!

¹¹ Truth springs up from the earth, and righteousness smiles down from heaven. ¹² Yes, the LORD pours down His blessings. Our land will yield its bountiful harvest. ¹³ Righteousness goes as a herald before Him, preparing the way for His steps. Psalm 85:90-13 NLT

- a. Surely His salvation is near those that fear Him.
- b. Mercy (unfailing love), truth met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed.
- c. God pours down blessings and our land can yield a bountiful harvest.

Are we anticipating great things to happen?

Sometimes we're like the man and woman listening to the preacher who announced, "Today I'm going to speak about ignorance and apathy." The man leaned over and asked, "What's ignorance and apathy?" The woman said, "I don't know and I don't care."

Listen, when you and I are in a vibrant relationship with Christ we will be filled with anticipation both short term and long term. By the way, a vibrant relationship means one uninterrupted by sinning or doing things our way, but enjoying God's blessing through obedience.

If you obey Him you can expect His blessings.

A small country church in Wisconsin has a special tradition that they have used at the close of their communion services for a number of years. It is adapted from an ancient Jewish closing of the Passover meal. Since it is the hope of every devout Jew to celebrate the Passover at least once in David's city, the Jewish custom is to end the meal with a toast. Passover participants raise the cup and say, "Next year, in Jerusalem!"

The cup in the Lord's Supper serves as two reminders: we are to look back to the shed blood of Christ and forward to the Lord's second coming. In other words, for all Christians, there will be a last sharing of the bread and the cup on this side of eternity: when they meet once again, they will be in Christ's presence. At the close of communion, the members of this church raise their cups in anticipation and say, "Next time, with Christ!"

Tomorrow with Jesus, tonight with Jesus, today with Jesus! My life with Jesus! My family with Jesus! My singleness with Jesus! My marriage with Jesus! My job with Jesus! My loves with Jesus! My entertainment with Jesus! My strengths, gifts and talents with Jesus! My priorities with Jesus!

Our faith and our relationship with Jesus Christ must be vibrant and living or we are not following Him at all.

It is hard work.

It is a walk that takes more than most are willing to give.

It takes determination. "Though none go with me still I will follow. No turning back . . ."

Be thankful people.

Be a praying people.

Be a thoughtful people.

Be a persevering people.

And now I want us to take a quiet moment to pause and let the Holy Spirit speak to us. . . Just for a few seconds allow your mind to quiet and your spirit to open up to God's voice. Let's do this together.

Now before we sing this song of surrender and commitment I want us to pray together.

Lord, give us the capacity to receive Your Word. Give the ability to be honest with ourselves and also with You. I ask that You will make us strong in our resolve but even stronger in Your strength which is made perfect in our weakness. We realize Lord that our righteousness is nothing but with Your presence in our lives, we know that we can live a life that is pleasing to you everyday.

Today Lord, and tomorrow we will follow You wherever You lead. We will take on what You want us to do and do away with whatever is displeasing to You. Lead us Lord and we will follow.

Amen