

If Only
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How many times in our life have we said “if only?” The Bible is full of “if only-s.” Most of them seem to deal with the benefit, guidance, and promises we receive “if only” we follow God’s commands, wisdom, and instruction to us and be obedient to follow and serve Him. Life follows the same path with conditions that must be met before something happens, or consequences that result from certain actions. While God’s intent, I believe, was to keep it simple and protect us from harm or poor decisions, we seem to want to step out and test those conditions or “if only-s.” Being the think ahead God He is, and knowing we are a rebellious lot, He gave us the formula to find our way back. Thank You God!

- After Solomon completed building God’s temple, he offered a prayer of dedication to God (2Ch 6:14). When he finished praying, fire came down from Heaven, consumed the offering, and God’s glory filled the temple (2 Ch 7:1). Some time later, the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and told Solomon He had heard his prayer (2 Ch 7:12). God’s response and the basis of this article:

- *“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, 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 the prayers offered in this place”* (2 Ch 7:13-15). Even though the Lord was responding to some specifics that Solomon prayed, there is a wider application we should look at.

- *When I shut up the heavens, send locusts, or command a plague:* these can be examples of anything in our lives that God uses to point out our sinfulness or discipline us, and get our attention to return to Him. Sometimes we may have left the path of following Him, made wrong choices or decisions, or may have not followed Him at all. He may just be trying to get our attention to begin following Him. Whatever the reason or whatever the method, He wants us to look to Him.

- *if my people, who are called by my name:* Israel means “struggles with God” and was the name given to Jacob after he wrestled with God all night (Gen 32:22). According to the Zondervan NIV Bible Dictionary, *the name “children of Israel” became known to represent God’s whole body of chosen and saved people.* We too are included in those “called by His name” as Christ followers and His saved people.

- Now it begins to get personal. God want us to humble ourselves in a way that will take the focus off us and place it on Him -- Creator. This can be hard to do if our world revolves around us and our needs or desires. But until we can let go of any pride or self focus, we can never get to the next place God wants us to be – in prayer.

- Prayer has a way of placing us in a position of submission to something greater than ourselves – God, praise for who He is, thanksgiving for all He does, and an understanding of the control He has in our lives. It also helps us recognize our need for His help and realize we don’t have all the answers or solutions to life. Prayer brings us into a place of communion with our Creator that brings us to a level and a world beyond anything we can find by looking inward. Which is exactly the point: He wants our fellowship and our life to be based on that relationship. God wants to be in the center. Everything we do to remove God from the center of our lives usually takes us to a place of sinfulness or pride. The result is God doing or allowing something in our lives that will prompt us to give Him back control.

- When we pray, we are seeking God’s face. As we turn to look TOWARD God, we are turning AWAY from our wicked ways. As we get our eyes refocused and adjusted to see the pure, holy, perfect God, our sinfulness and wicked ways become amazingly clear. Humbleness and forgiveness are all we can seek. When we do? God promises to hear from Heaven, forgive our sin, and heal our land. And what about our land?

- During our recent election, this verse from the Bible received some extra attention as many Christians prayed to God for our country and leaders. We know that our land can be our country as it was in the days of Solomon. But what about the land of our individual lives? We're not talking houses and property here either. Think about our land as all the stuff of our lives; whether job, relationships, children, decisions, ministries, and/or our spiritual lives.

- Following God is like showing up on the football field in a football uniform. Not following God is like showing up on the football field in a baseball uniform. We're dressed, but for a different game. Something just isn't right. It might not make sense to us, but everyone else sees it. Doesn't it also make sense that if we are going down the broad path of sinfulness, wrong focus and poor decisions, chasing everything the world says we need, that the things in our lives (our land) will become messed up. Our land, the land of our lives, will become like a toxic waste dump that needs serious cleaning up or healing. And who offers that clean up/healing service; none other than God, waiting where He has always been.

- Amazingly, after all we have done, or what path we took, God reminds us in the last verse that He waits with open eyes and attentive ears to the prayers offered up. The place doesn't really matter. God always hears our prayers and is always ready to listen. Are we as ready to listen and offer prayers to God as He is willing to receive them? If only – if only we would seek our God!

- Heavenly Father, we thank You for not leaving us to our own wisdom or lack thereof. We thank You that You have provided us with a way back to You from wherever we end up. We pray for Your continued grace and mercy to forgive our sins and heal our land as we come humbly before You in prayer. Thank You for all You are and all You do. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.