

“It Is Time To Get Real With Dr. Phil”

II Chronicles 7:11-16

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It is one of the most important days on the Jewish calendar, maybe the most significant. Yom Kippur comes at the end of the ten-day celebration known as Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. This year, our Jewish friends will observe Yom Kippur on Monday, September 16.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is a day of reflection, confession and renewal. It is a time for fasting and laying aside all responsibilities so that a person can receive God's grace and head in a new direction, if necessary. Many refer to it as the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. Its roots go back to Leviticus 16 and Numbers 23.

If you go to a synagogue tomorrow, you will hear worship leaders read Old Testament passages calling people to confess their sins and repent. Chances are you would hear II Chronicles 7:14, *“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.”*

This morning, I want us to examine this verse of scripture as we join Jews all over the world in confessing sins and receiving God's mercy.

What is the context for II Chronicles 7:14? The Israelites built and dedicated a new temple under the direction of Solomon, David's son. Although the temple was shiny and new, the people's hearts were not. There was unconfessed sin in their lives and God was troubled about this. The beauty of this new temple did not distract Him, however. He saw beyond the brick and mortar to their lives and used Solomon's words to encourage them to make changes.

For you see, these were His people and He knew them. *“If my people who are called by my name...”* These people were known by their neighbors as God's people. This was how they were identified and rightly so. God chose them to be a blessing to the world and make Him known. As a result, He knew them and knew them well.

Upon reading this verse, I am immediately drawn to the last part and overwhelmed by God's willingness to forgive and restore His people. There is no doubt He loved them even though He knew they were not perfect. He wanted the best for them and was anxious to help them but would not force them to receive His aid. He told them what they must do to receive His grace and left the decision with them.

He does this with us, too. We are confronted with the same choice the ancient Israelites were. It is my prayer you and I will take up His offer to be forgiven and healed.

What must we do to receive God's grace? According to Solomon, we must humble ourselves, pray, seek His face and turn from our wicked ways.

First of all, we must humble ourselves before God. *“If my people who are known by my name will humble themselves...”*

From the first time I saw her on television, I have been impressed with Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's National Security Advisor. She projects an image of serenity and sincerity. I have a lot of confidence in her.

Perhaps this is because she is no stranger to adversity. Terrorism touched her life at an early age. She grew up in Birmingham, Alabama just blocks from the 16th Street Baptist Church. She heard the explosion and felt the blast when that church was bombed on September 15, 1963. One of her schoolmates was killed that day.

The impact of that horrible incident had a profound effect upon her. In some ways, it has propelled her all the way to the northwest corner of the West Wing of the White House. She has risen to become one of the most influential and powerful persons in the world.

Do you know what she does every night before going to sleep? She prays on her knees. She humbles herself before God and asks Him to help her walk in His way not her own.

That's what Solomon encouraged the Israelites to do. He wanted them to acknowledge their humanity and their need for divine guidance and strength. This was the beginning of their relationship with God. It is where ours begins, too.

Secondly, to receive God's grace, we need to pray. Dr. Phil McGraw is the hottest talk show commodity to come along since Oprah. This week, he will begin his own show that will be seen in an unprecedented ninety-six percent of this country's television market.

Dr. Phil, his stage name, is a counselor. He has a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. Many refer to him as America's most prominent self-help guru because he has written three best sellers. For the past four years, he has been the guest on Oprah every Tuesday. Each time he is on the show, her ratings go up twenty-four points. That's how popular he is.

What does Dr. Phil do so effectively? He gets people to talking about their lives, where they have been and where they are going. He has no patience for dishonesty or indifference. His favorite phrases are "get real" and "either you get it or you don't." He is often as blunt as a screwdriver and confronts people with choices and consequences.

I think this was what Solomon was referring to when he encouraged his people to pray. It was time to "get real" with God and talk to him about choices and consequences, values and priorities, attitudes and relationships. It was not a time for dishonesty or indifference. It is not now, either.

Thirdly, to receive God's grace, we need to seek His face. Do you recall traveling through unfamiliar territory as a child? Perhaps you were playing on a new playground or walking through a mall. As you ventured out, you became apprehensive until you turned and saw your mother or father. When you saw their face and approval or disapproval of what you were doing, you received both guidance and confidence. I believe that was what Solomon was referring to in this part of the verse.

Solomon was not content with his people talking to God. He knew they needed more. They needed to be so close to God that He was always in sight giving direction, confidence and courage.

We must desire more than conversation with Him, also. Too much is at stake. We need to look upon His face when He speaks so there will be no distractions or misunderstandings. We need to be close to Him so that He can give direction and instill confidence and courage in us.

Finally, to receive God's grace, we need to repent. Solomon challenged his people to "turn from their wicked ways." He knew that God could not bless bad behavior. To do so would have been irresponsible and led to confusion and chaos. It still would.

How many times have you heard the phrase, "wrong thinking won't get right results?" It's true spiritually, too.

By the way, where does a person go after she has turned from her wicked ways? This is the time to "seek the face of God."

If we do these things, how will God respond? He promises to "hear our prayers, forgive our sins and heal our land." How comforting to know that God will compassionately respond to the prayers of humble and repentant sinners. How liberating to know that sins can be erased like chalk on a board. How reassuring to know that the destructive process of sin can be reversed and health can be restored to a person, family, nation and world.

Tomorrow is Yom Kippur. Let's join our Jewish friends in repeating this verse and following its advice.

