

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes I hear someone say, "I'm just lucky to live in America." It reminds me of an ad in a newspaper for a lost dog.

LOST: One dog. Brown hair with several bald spots.
Right leg broken from being run over; left hip injured
from dog fight; right eye missing, left ear chewed off.
Answers to the name "Lucky."

That dog doesn't sound very lucky to me. And you aren't lucky to be living here in America; you're BLESSED to be living here.

We're all familiar with the song, "God Bless America." But here are some things you might not know about it. It was written by Irving Berlin, who also wrote "White Christmas." By the way, the Ku Klux Klan rejected the song because it was written by a Jewish man. Kate Smith first sang it on Armistice Day in 1938. Hitler was gathering his Nazi forces across the ocean and it was a tense time. This song became a powerful prayer that sustained our nation during World War II and it is still loved today. Sometimes we only sing the chorus, but the verse is important as well: "While the storm clouds gather far across the sea; Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free; Let us all be grateful for a land so fair; As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer. God Bless America, Land that I love. Stand beside her, and guide her; through the night with a light from above. From the mountains to the prairies; to the oceans, white with foam; God bless America, My home sweet home!"

That has become one of the most beloved patriotic songs in our nation. But it needs to be more than just a patriotic song; it must continue to be our heart-felt prayer. We need to beg God again to pour out his blessings on our nation.

I want to use the 85th Psalm as a prayer to ask God to bless us again.

Psalm 85:1-6. "You showed favor to your land, O Lord; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. *Selah* You set aside all your wrath and turned from your fierce anger. Restore us again, O God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?"

God had blessed the nation of Israel above all the nations on the earth. God told Abraham He would bless Israel so they could be a blessing to all the people. But they had forgotten this responsibility, and Israel sank into moral and spiritual decline. God sent prophets to warn the nation to turn to God, and there were seasons of revival, but Israel ended up turning their backs on the God who made them a great nation, and God allowed a pagan nation, Babylon, to conquer them and carry them off as exiles. America isn't Israel, but there are some similarities that cannot be ignored. Let me share with you three points of comparison with America and Israel.

I. GOD HAS FAVORED OUR NATION

The Bible says, "You showed favor to your land, O Lord." (Psalm 85:1) The Psalmist was referring to Israel, but we can say that same about America. God has shown His favor to our land.

In the World Trade Organization, there are nations designated as most-favored nations. These are nations who follow certain standards and human rights positions, which allow them to trade freely with the other countries in the WTO. There is a status much more coveted than being a most-favored nation in the WTO—it is being a favored nation in the eyes of God. Let me show you three ways God has favored us.

A. God has blessed us materially

All you have to do is travel around the country to see that God has blessed us with abundant natural resources. Thirty years ago, we were dangerously dependent on foreign oil. And we still import foreign oil, but in 2014 U.S. oil production soared to its highest level since records were kept in 1900. The U.S. produced 8.7 million barrels of crude oil. This past year the U.S. passed Saudi and Russia to become the leading oil producing nation in the world.

Compared to the rest of the world, most Americans are wealthy. If you have more than one change of clothes, a car to ride in, and a roof over your head, and at least one hot meal today, you are richer than most people in the world. You can go online to a global wealth calculator and see where you income falls compared to everyone else on the planet. For instance, if you make \$24,000 a year you are wealthier than 92% of the people in the world. If you make \$40,000 a year, you are wealthier than 96% of the world's population. If you make \$100,000 a year, you are in the top 1% of the world and are wealthier than 99.75% of the world's population. God has blessed us materially. But remember, wealth will never make you happy. God gives you income so you can use that income to be a blessing to Him.

B. God has blessed us politically

I'm not here to talk about politics. I don't like politics. The word politics comes from two words, *poly*, meaning "many" and *tics* meaning "blood-sucking varmints." Remember Columbus who sailed in 1492? Someone has said Columbus was the first American politician. He didn't know where he was going. When he got there, he didn't know where he was, and when he got back he didn't know where he had been—and he did it all on someone else's money!

I'm not talking about politicians; I'm referring to our political system. We have a republic based upon law, and we can all vote to elect our leaders. Our founding fathers developed three branches of government to provide a system of checks and balances. And while other nations around the world are fighting with different factions trying take control. It's a blessing to see how our nation has an orderly transfer of power from one President to the next.

But we must remember that John Adams wrote. "Our constitution was made only for a religious and a moral people." The scary thing about that is that as our nation slips deeper into immorality and our people turn from faith in God, our Constitution could become worthless and we'll be left at the mercy of activist judges who rule based on their prejudices rather than the Constitution.

C. God has blessed us spiritually

People came these shores seeking a place to practice their faith. One historian said explorers came to Central and South America in search of gold, but explorers came to North America in search of God.

Our founding fathers saw the formation of our nation as a spiritual task. John Quincy Adams wrote: "The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: It connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity."

All the original twelve colonies had constitutions or laws that made reference to God and the Bible. For instance, early in our history, if you wanted to work in the government in Delaware you were asked to swear to the following oath: "I do profess faith in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, His one and only son, and in the Holy Ghost, who God has blessed forever more — and I do acknowledge the Holy Scriptures both Old and New Testaments to be given by Divine Inspiration."

Today, we often take our religious freedom for granted. You drove to church this morning, with no fear that you would be arrested. During the time of worship and praise you didn't have to look around to see if any government officials were spying on you. You can carry your Bible openly, and read it. You can turn on your radio, TV, or podcast and you can access the Word of God 24/7. We shouldn't take these blessings for granted. God has blessed us spiritually.

II. AMERICANS HAVE FORGOTTEN GOD'S BLESSINGS

Israel had been favored by God; but they forgot the source of their blessings. Like the Psalmist we should pray, "Put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever?" (Psalm 85:4-5)

When our founders wrote the Declaration of Independence. They said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident [in other words, there is absolute truth] that all men are created equal [they said that each of us exist because we were created by God]; and that they are endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights [there are moral absolutes given to us by God] among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

These wise men were declaring their belief in a Creator God who gives us our rights. But our modern culture has moved away from this archaic idea of a personal God. We have forgotten God. Let me give you a couple of symptoms of how we have forgotten the God who made us great.

A. We removed God-talk from our public life

For the first twenty decades of our history, God was a part of our nation conversation. We were a nation led to pray by our leaders. Our history books are full of how our leaders called our nation to prayer and humiliation. According to David Barton, up until the year 1815, there were 1,020

calls to public prayer. 792 of these were issued by our government and 238 were issued by church leaders.

Since Ronald Reagan, Presidents have been issuing a proclamation for the National Day of Prayer and they have hosted prayer services in the White House. President Obama still issues the proclamation, but in 2009 he stopped hosting a prayer service at the White House.

In East Texas we are still in a bubble of morality and sanity. And I'm glad many public events are opened with prayer. I prayed the invocation at an event at UT Tyler last Tuesday. There was prayer offered at both REL and John Tyler's graduations ceremonies. Our city council meetings are opened with prayer. But as I said, we are a remnant compared to the rest of our nation.

Seventy-one years ago, the allied forces had just launched the D-Day invasion. President Franklin D. Roosevelt didn't just issue a proclamation asking Americans to pray for our troops. In a national radio broadcast, he LED our nation in prayer. He prayed an eloquent, fervent prayer lasting over six minutes.

He said: I ask you to join with me in prayer: "Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity. They will need Thy blessings..." As he concluded the prayer he said, "And, O Lord, give us faith. Give us faith in Thee... With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy. Thy will be done, Almighty God. Amen. Wouldn't it be wonderful again if God would give America a president who would not just tell us to pray, but would lead us in prayer?"

B. We reversed our values

Today in our society, prayer and the Ten Commandments have been taken out of our schools. We have no more absolute standards, no right or no wrong—it's moral relativism. We've become a generation like the people in the Book of Judges that says every man did what was right in his own eyes. But we've gone beyond that. We've gotten to a point where our government is trying to impose morality on us. Sometimes people cry out, "You can't legislate morality." I disagree. Every piece of legislation reflects someone's morality.

In their excellent book, *U-Turn*, George Barna and David Barton point out that our national values have changed from our founding fathers.

THEN	NOW
Truth and Honesty	Truth is relative and be truthful only when it's convenient
Hard work was valued	Hand-outs are valued. Why work if you can get the government to pay you? According to an article in <i>Forbes Magazine</i> , in 2011 49% of Americans were receiving government benefits. With the addition of Obamacare, that number is now at 52%
Civic duty was valued	As we've seen in Baltimore and other cities, civil unrest is the new standard.

Family was first. The family was the building block of society.	Family has been redefined to include any group living together. In 1965 26% of babies were born out of wedlock. Today 41% are born out of wedlock.
Humility was valued	Free expression is valued—and people post their hateful, hurtful comments on every available social medium.
Faith and piety were valued	It's all about the next edgy experience, whether new age, or drug induced. This week the First Church of Cannabis opened its doors in Indiana; their non-profit status approved by the IRS.
Decency was valued. Profanity was never heard in public.	No rules. Every public platform in being bombarded with profanity bombs.

Our values have shifted because we have forgotten God. In the midst of the bloody Civil War President Lincoln issued this call to prayer: (March 30, 1863): "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!" If that was true 152 years ago, it is absolutely true today.

III. OUR SURVIVAL DEPENDS ON A SPIRITUAL REVIVAL

The Psalmist cries out, "Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?" (Psalm 85:6)

Israel had turned from God, but there were seasons of spiritual renewal. There have been three spiritual awakenings in America's history as well. In every spiritual awakening, there have always been two important steps that lead to revival.

A. We must be broken and have a burden to pray

In 2 Chronicles 7:14 God says that IF His people "will humble themselves and pray." Revival always begins with a heavy burden for a revival that produces a brokenness that produces prayer. Are you willing to ask God to break you of your pride and apathy?

The Third Great Awakening in America began in 1858. A Presbyterian businessman in New York City named Jeremiah Lanphier became burdened for the spiritual condition of his city and nation. He announced that he was going to have a noon prayer meeting at his church. The first day, six people came. The next week 14 came, the next week, 23, and 40 came after a month. They started having daily prayer meetings. Soon, 10,000 New Yorkers were spending noon in prayer. Shops had signs made that said, "Closed for Prayer." The movement spread across the

nation and soon many thousands of people were praying at noon. The result was over one million Americans were converted to Christ.

In 1900, the nation with the greatest army and the most influence in the world was Great Britain. Look at England today; there are more mosques than churches in London. In the early 20th century, a spiritual awakening was sweeping Britain; it started in Wales and was led by Evan Roberts, a simple coal miner. He attended church one evening and prayed this simple prayer, "God, bend me, break me!" God broke his heart under a burden for His people. He began traveling the countryside encouraging young people to gather and pray and repent. Thousands filled the churches. The revival was so profound that the mules in coal mines had to be retrained because the miners stopped using profanity.

There are two similarities to all spiritual awakenings. First, they aren't led by preachers. Second, prayer is always the catalyst for revival. Will you ask God to break your heart and give you a burden for revival in America?

B. We must turn toward God and away from sin

God says in addition to humbling ourselves and praying we are to "seek my face and turn from their wicked ways." After David and Solomon, the nation of Israel divided into northern and southern kingdoms, and both kingdoms forgot about God. But a boy named Josiah became king of Judah when he was only eight years old. When he was a teenager, God changed his heart to seek after the God of David. He commanded that the Temple be repaired and that sacrifice be restored. A few years later when they were cleaning out the Temple, somebody found a Bible – the Law written by Moses. They hadn't consulted God's Word in several generations. Josiah read God's word and ripped his clothes in anguish. He led the nation to renew the covenant and to celebrate Passover for the first time in many years. The nation experienced revival.

The same thing could happen in America if once again we would open this book, read it, and obey it. General Douglas McArthur was a deeply devoted Christian. He wrote: "History fails to record a single precedent in which nations subject to moral decay have not passed into political and economic decline. There has been either a spiritual awakening to overcome the moral lapse, or a progressive deterioration leading to ultimate national disaster."

C. God will hear and will heal our land!

As there continues to be a moral shift away from God, the church must become more and more counter-cultural. Our positions will become the minority and the world will try to silence us. That's the way it has always been with God's people.

We are in a culture war, and we must stand for biblical morality, but we must do so with biblical grace. "The Bible says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, and have not love, I'm nothing but a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." This is spiritual warfare and I want to remind you that victory is not about winning elections or winning court cases. It is about winning souls. A hundred thousand years from now after the last gay pride parade has long since ended, and the U.S. Supreme Court is nothing but a tiny blip in history, God will continue to reign. And every

person, black, white, rich, poor, gay, straight, will stand before a living God and will have to give an account for what they did with Jesus. Let's never forget that Job One for the church is spreading the good news that Jesus Christ can save sinners.

CONCLUSION

We must continue to pray the words in Kate Smith's song: God bless America! Land that I love. Stand beside her; and guide her through the night with a light from above.

Do you know what the tallest structure in Washington D.C. is? The Washington Monument. It rises 555 feet tall. Nothing taller than the Washington Monument can be built. Whenever you walk through the mall in Washington, it draws your eyes to the sky Do you know what is inscribed at the pinnacle of the Washington Monument in our nation's capitol? These words from scripture: Laus Deo, which is Latin for "Let God be praised." There may be legislators that don't know that. There may be presidents who don't know that. There may be Supreme Court justices who don't know that. But at the top, the point overlooking our capital city, we are reminded that the invitation of our forefathers will always be, "Let God be praised." America, let's lift up our eyes and let's praise God for the greatness and the blessings on this great land. And let's beg God to once again send His blessings on America. Ronald Reagan said, "If we ever forget that we are one nation under God, we will be a nation gone under."

OUTLINE

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"You showed favor to your land, O Lord." *Psalm 85:1*

God has blessed us:

- A. Materially
- B. Politically
- C. Spiritually

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"shall humble themselves and pray..."
- B. We must turn toward God and away from sin
"...seek my face and turn from their wicked ways"
- C. God will hear and will heal our land!

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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