

## Sacred, Solemn Assembly - February 6, 2008

### **Objective:**

To facilitate a "spiritual repositioning" of the congregation in such a way that we might experience a mighty movement of the Holy Spirit.

### **Spiritual Preparation/Purpose**

**Focus:** Returning to the "Holiness of God"

As Moses turned to look at the strange sight before him, God said Moses; take off your sandals for the ground upon which you stand is holy ground.

God had business to do with Moses (deliverance of the nation of Israel from captivity)

God also has business to do with/through us. We too must come before God with a spirit of Holiness.

**Holy means:** to be separate; to be apart; to be different from that which is common.

Holy is the word most often used in scripture to describe the character and the nature of God. When we seriously reflect on the holiness of God, his holiness evokes a sense of awe; reverence and fear. Holy speaks to the might, the mystery and the majesty of God – who reigns above all creation. And as his people - we are called to be holy - I Peter 1:15

... to belong to God AND through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called to reflect His nature. We fulfill God's command to be holy when we obey His will and live consecrated lives that reveal His character.

Tonight we kick off a 40 day return to holiness – a period of spiritual cleansing, as part of our journey towards spiritual wellness. Where we stand tonight – as a people and as a congregation, we are in desperate need of a mighty movement of God.

I am convinced that a serious return to holiness lies at the heart of God moving in a mighty way. A key requirement to God moving in a mighty way in your life is found in Isaiah 59:1-3.

Although God is able and willing to move in a mighty way among his people, unconfessed sin blocks answers to prayer. In order to move in power, God requires deep cleansing and repentance among his people.

### **Psalm 66:18 – makes this very clear**

God will not move if unconfessed sin remains in the lives of his people – that's both corporate (church) and individual. For this reason, God seems distant to many believers – it's as if we are just going through the motions.

Because of unconfessed sin, crucial prayers go unanswered and many believers settle for less than God's best – living lives of defeat and pain.

If we hope to experience God's power and blessings, deep spiritual cleansing is not an option, it is essential!

The sad reality is that typically - our times of genuine confession before the Lord are far too infrequent and shallow. Because we tend to rush through confession so we can do the work of the church, we often are not even aware of the sins that have built up between us and God.

But over the next 40 days, we have an opportunity to experience a level of confession and cleansing that can our lives – this entire experience is based simply on the word of God – and we know that God's word does not return unto him void – it will accomplish its purpose in our lives.

James 4:8 &10 – Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners and purify your hearts you double-minded. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

In Isaiah 1:18 – God extends an awesome invitation to each of us: Come let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are as red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

In John 1:9, God gives a further promise: if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

What this means is that no matter how much we have struggled, how far down we have fallen – we can experience spiritual cleansing and filling of God's spirit.

This spiritual cleansing and renewal will not happen with a brief, casual prayer time.

The Psalmist in 139:23-24 says; [search me oh God and know my heart, and know my thoughts: and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.]

Serious cleansing requires getting alone with God for a thorough examination of your life – that's what the 40 Days of spiritual Cleansing and Renewal are designed to help us do.

At the end of this session, Rev. Hopewell will provide us an overview of the 40 Days Plan. Ours is just a suggested plan, feel free to use any plan.

What really matters is that over the next 49 days, we make a deliberate and concerted effort to return to the holiness of God; to return to the true heart of worship – with clean hearts!

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## **Congregational Songs: “The Heart of Worship”**

### **“Give Me A Clean Heart”**

**CONFESSION:** Confession and repentance are absolutely essential to spiritual cleansing.

And for repentance to be acceptable unto the Lord – it must be from the heart.

Joel 2: 12 & 18 – “ Now therefore says the Lord, turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. Then the Lord will be zealous for his hand, and pity His people.]

Based on the Word of God, true repentance is characterized by fasting, weeping, and mourning. If we could see ourselves from God’s perspective – if we could really grasp – really get an accurate picture of how sin has hindered us; how it has neutered us; how it has disempowered us; how it has separated us from that abiding presence of God, we would be compelled to cry out to God – for forgiveness and help.

The good news is that whenever we truly broken and genuinely humbled by the reality of our sins, God will have compassion on us and forgive our sin.

When we have experienced God forgiveness, the outcome is a new beginning, a real change in the direction of our lives and the lord’s blessing rather than his judgment.

### **Corporate Confession**

This evening, we want to engage in two types of confession: Corporate (Congregational) & Personal confession.

The heart of a solemn assembly is the confession and putting away of corporate and individual sins.

Corporate confession deals with the confession of leaders to members and the entire church confessing to God.

**Leadership Confession Focus:** Leaders acknowledging their sins before the congregation

*[Project on screens a list of corporate sins to be confessed by ministry leaders]*

- Invite all ministry leaders who’d like to, to come to the altar and face the congregation.
- A corporate confessor will read from a list of corporate sins (Deacon Hicks).
- As each corporate sin is read, the ministry leaders will say to the congregation:

“As a ministry Leader, I have sinned Greenforest, please forgive me.”

## LEADERSHIP SINS

1. Failure to model at all times, a Christ-like attitude in my speech and conduct towards you and other leaders
2. Failure to keep church fully informed on all financial related matters
3. Failure to ask the right questions, of the right people, in the right way at the right times
4. Allowing the church to be placed in its present financial situation
5. Failure to insure that the church stayed focused on fulfilling the Great Commission
6. Failure to insure that all new members are fully assimilated into the church
7. Failure to insure that all the spiritual gifts, skills and expertise in the body are utilized

### Congregational Forgiveness

- After the ministry leaders have confessed their sins before the congregation, Deacon Hicks asks the congregation to stand facing the ministry leaders and state: "just as Christ loves and forgives us, we love and forgive you."
- Deacon Hicks leads in a prayer for forgiveness & healing between congregation and its leaders

**Congregational Confession: Focus:** Members acknowledging before God our church-wide sins

*[Project on screens a list of sins to be confessed by entire church]*

1. Ministry Leaders along with the entire congregation, will stand or kneel facing the cross
2. A corporate confessor will read from a list of congregational sins
3. The entire congregation will respond by saying: "we have sinned against you Oh Lord, please forgive us"

### CHURCH-WIDE SINS

1. Failure to make the fulfillment of the Great Commission – a top priority
2. Disunity and bickering – in the fellowship
3. Lack of prayer as a top priority
4. Failure to make sharing my faith and participating in Evangelistic Blitz's
5. Financial unfaithfulness to God – failure to trust God with my tithes
6. Failure to discover and apply my spiritual gifts in building up the body of Christ
7. Failure to care for the sick, the hurting and those missing from the fellowship
8. Failure to fully embrace our mission and ministry to residents the Forest of Columbia
9. Failure to set an example by inviting those I meet to church

- **Corporate confessor will lead the congregation in a prayer of repentance**

**Congregational Song:** *"Spirit of the Living God"*

## **Personal Confession**

We now shift our focus on to personal/individual confession and repentance. Over the next 40 days, we will be asking God to reveal to us those sins, those behaviors that are unacceptable to him. When God reveals sins in your life, you will need to deal with it and move to confess and repent of it. That may very mean, going to a brother or sister and seeking forgiveness and reconciliation.

## **Individual Confession**

I want to call your attention to a specific sin – we as a body need to be mindful of. It is the Sin of Unhealthy Relationships.

One of the often overlooked areas where we lose God's fullness is in our relationships. We fail to realize that an unhealthy relationship with people is in reality, a reflection of an unhealthy relationship with Christ.

The more deeply we are in love with Christ; the more intimately we walk with Christ, the easier it is for us to love, to work with and walk along side others.

Relationship sins generally fall into five areas. In each area you must be willing to take specific actions of repentance.

### **Three simple questions:**

- 1. People you may have hurt or offended in some manner.** Matthew 5:23-24 – Jesus says, don't come to God until you get things right with others. Many people lack power because they can't get this right. Don't go trying to defend, go with humility and love. Little rifts can quench power of the spirit.

#### **Holding bitterness or grudges against someone who offended you?**

Strained relationships. Matthew 6:14-15 – many prayers don't get through because of bitterness/grudges. Forgiveness must be authentic and from the heart. Not subject to be revisited. Watch out for bitterness towards God (personal tragedy; failure to answer prayer)

- 2. Involved in improper relationships:** Anything from adultery and fornication to being inappropriately close to someone; Emotional involvement with a co-worker of the opposite sex; Husbands and wives sharing things with others that should only be shared with mates; Parents too involved in lives of married children; married children too dependent on parents; Improper relationship with work. We had a pastor's wife committed adultery. When asked why, she said her husband had done the same thing – he had placed the work of the church before his family. To her, that was a form of adultery; Ask God to reveal any relationships that are improper or out of balance. Stop it now before it gets worse.
- 3. Relationship with and service to the church.** Hebrews 10:25 – it is a serious sin to neglect regular fellowship and worship with the body of Christ; God does not intend for their to be any lone ranger Christians or any isolationists – we are all in this together; Sadly, there are many people who prefer to join a large church so they can hide out, get lost in the crowd; Come to receive blessings and go home without any real involvement. Such is an unbiblical and selfish spirit.

Some seek a church that will bless them without asking or seeking ways to serve or give in return. Some shop for a church like a health club – the most benefits and least cost. A believer's primary prayer should not be what can this church do for me, but what can I contribute to the work of this church?

It is a major sin to not be involved in consistent giving and service through a local body of baptized believers.

**Reflections:**

1. Who have I offended?
2. Who am I holding grudges against?
3. Who do I not trust?
4. What am I angry about and to whom is my anger directed?

**Prayer of Confession, Repentance & Commitment: Altar Call (Soft Music: "Breathe")**

**Overview: 40 Days of Cleansing and Renewal (Hopewell)**