

Calling and Leading a Solemn Assembly

Renewing Our Covenant Commitments to Jesus Christ

The following suggestions are designed to assist pastors in leading a time of solemn (or sacred) assembly for the purpose of returning to our first love, for confession and repentance of sin, and for renewed commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. Prepare for a Solemn Assembly

- *Solemn Assembly* by Richard Owen Roberts (pdf)
 - *Sound the Alarm: Call a Sacred Assembly* by Claude King (pdf) (Text included below on pages 8-13.) These resources give more detail about biblical solemn assemblies. Biblical solemn assemblies normally were a day or more in length. If your solemn assembly is going to be a shorter time, you need to guide your people in heart preparation so they will be prepared to respond (see E below).
 - For video segments to help leaders to understand Solemn Assemblies go to:
<http://www.vimeo.com/album/1495849>
- A. Enlist or identify a leadership team (2 or more including the pastor)
 - B. Study “The Call to Prayer and Solemn Assembly” issued in 1989
Prayerfully read “The Call to Prayer and Solemn Assembly” (on pages 5-6 of this file) issued by the SBC prayer leaders in 1989. Read the Scriptures referenced in each section. Ask God to give wisdom and insight on how He wants to turn the hearts of His people back to Him in love and obedience. What actions does He want you to take to lead your church to return to Him?
 - C. Pray for the Lord’s specific directions for your church.
 - D. Call the entire membership to participate. If you have space limitations for one large group, pray for the Lord’s directions about multiple sessions or locations.
 - E. Reproduce or purchase copies of the *Consecrate the People* booklet for all students and adults in your church. You have permission to print your own, print quantities for your church, e-mail the booklet, translate and print, or you may purchase copies in packs of 10 for \$4.95 by calling toll free (800) 458-2772 or order online at www.lifeway.com/product/005354150/
Heart preparation is most critical for a solemn assembly. Unprepared people will not be orientated to what you are attempting to do. Numerous other excellent resources can be used for this purpose. Consider the following (links are embedded):
 - *A Covenant of Prayer for Revival and Spiritual Awakening* (pdf)
 - *Come to the Lord’s Table* by Claude King
 - *Downpour resources* by James MacDonald
 - *Fresh Encounter resources* by Henry & Richard Blackaby and Claude King
 - *How to Deal with Sin* (pdf)
 - *Seeking God* (booklet) (pdf) by Rick Shepherd
 - *Preparation Guide for Biblical Repentance and Prayer for Spiritual Renewal* (pdf) by Greg Frizzell
 - *Returning to Holiness* by Greg Frizzell
 - *“Scriptural Soap”* by Elaine Helms

II. Sunday #1: Call a Solemn Assembly

- A. Using the example of the Ezra/Nehemiah revival (Nehemiah 8–9), call your church to a time of solemn assembly where you renew your covenant commitments to Jesus Christ.

The revival under Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrates several elements for a solemn assembly: the value of multiple leaders, the importance of God’s Word as a plumb line for measuring our lives, the value of remembering God’s blessings and provision, the necessity of confession and repentance, and an example of renewing or establishing a covenant. If you are facing a major crisis or judgment, you will do well to preach a message from Joel 1–2 on sounding the alarm and calling a solemn assembly as your church cries out to God.

- B. Explain the goals of (1) becoming the people God desires us to be and (2) consecrating ourselves to Him for His divine purposes.
- C. Explain the importance of preparing ourselves individually and corporately as holy and acceptable, living sacrifices to present to our Lord (Romans 12:1).
- D. Distribute *Consecrate the People* and together agree to faithfully prepare this week.

III. Consecrate the People

- A. Individually work through *Consecrate the People*, renew your first love for Christ, confess and repent of known sin, and prepare to renew your covenant commitments to Christ.

The solemn assembly suggestions given have a greater emphasis on individual sins rather than corporate or church sins. You may want to consider the following suggestions to deal with corporate sins in your church.

Identify Corporate Sins

[Fresh Encounter: God’s Pattern for Spiritual Awakening by Henry & Richard Blackaby and Claude King (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2009), 281-2. All rights reserved. Used by permission.]

Ask people to identify anything that may be a sin your church has committed. Help people understand that this is a positive process that can restore church health.

Collect a list of possible sins the church has committed. As the pastor, gather church leaders together. Pray and discuss the issues that have surfaced. Compile a list of things the people believe are sins of the church. You will want to deal with this list in a time of corporate worship. You might ask one or more leaders to read through the list of corporate sins. Call the church to confess their sins. Guide the people in corporate prayer for repentance like that in Daniel 9, Ezra 9, or Nehemiah 9.

What are corporate sins? Any occasion the church sinned by its action or lack of action is a corporate sin. Corporate sins might also include an individual sin that is common to a large number of your people (for example, the intermarriage dealt with by Ezra in Ezra 9–10 might be similar to a church with widespread sexual immorality or divorce). Churches need to deal with all sin for which they have not repented—including past sins. Examples of corporate sins might include such things as:

- participating in a church split
- adopting the world’s ways
- allowing an ungodly person (or persons) to “run off” an innocent pastor or staff person—especially if your church has a pattern of doing so
- choosing to do good things instead of God’s will
- beginning a church, group, or denomination in a sinful way, such as a split, envy, controversy, or pride
- covering up past sins
- defaulting on a debt

- disgracing God’s name in the eyes of the community (for example, a leader or member experiences moral failure that became known in the community with no response by the church)
- failing to care for the needs of members, families, or couples
- failing to take a strong stand on God’s standards for family and marriage and failing to support those needing help
- forcing agreement or compromise on a decision with no unity of mind, heart, or spirit
- isolating yourself from other believers, churches, denominations in your community or state—doing your own thing when others needed your help, encouragement, or leadership
- lacking faith when confronted with a God-sized assignment and deciding not to trust God with your limited resources
- leaving a field of ministry to take an easier path (like leaving the inner city for the suburbs rather than dealing with the problems of the people in the inner city)
- making a decision contrary to God’s guidance
- mistreating a pastor, staff member, or family member
- permitting controversy, strife, or dissension
- practicing prejudice or discrimination
- refusing to follow God’s commands related to church discipline of sinful members
- refusing to pursue stray members who have become inactive
- refusing to obey God because it would “cost” too much
- shifting control of the church from Christ as its Head to anyone else: pastor, deacons, elders, board, or power block in church
- tolerating evil in the congregation
- trying to save your life rather than give it away in service and ministry
- selfishly using resources for personal comforts and not responding to the needy or missions opportunities

This is by no means a comprehensive list. Perhaps it has given you an idea of what we mean by corporate sin. Pay attention to what God brings to the minds of your members. Take every suggestion seriously.

- B. Provide a small-group opportunity for people to share victories, confess sin to one another in same-gender groupings of 2 or 3, and pray for one another in final preparation for the solemn assembly. This could be done in Sunday School classes prior to the solemn assembly. Normally, “the circle of confession should be as large as the circle of offense.” Some sin can be confessed privately to God. Some should be confessed directly to the person, persons, or group affected by the sin or those who have knowledge of the sin. In some cases, believers need to practice James 5:16 and confess their sins to one another and pray for one another. Unless the larger congregation needs to be involved, this may be done most appropriately in small groups of men with men and women with women. People are more open to asking for help in same-gender groups, but also sin of a sexual nature can be shared and prayed for without opening individuals up to further temptation by inappropriate responses by persons of the opposite sex.

If your church has corporate sins to confess, you can deal with those during the solemn assembly.

IV. Sunday #2: Conduct a Solemn Assembly

- A. Acknowledge God’s presence, holiness, sovereignty, love, and mercy. A solemn assembly is a gathering of God’s people to stand before Him. Through Scripture, prayer, explanation, and song

get the focus on your people on God and His holiness. The experience of Isaiah in the temple in Isaiah 6 is an example of what can happen when God's people get a right view of God's grandeur and holiness. Usher them into the very throne room of heaven to meet with the Holy One.

- B. Remember how Christ loved by paying for our sins on the cross. Reflect on the difference He has made in your lives because of forgiveness, redemption, and salvation. Solemn assemblies were times to remember God's provision, protection, and blessings for His people. As we remember Christ's love our hearts may be more likely to turn toward Him. We're more likely to recognize the seriousness of our sinful offenses toward the One who loved us.
- C. Identify Christ's invitation to consecration and full surrender to Him. See days one and two in *Consecrate the People*.
- D. Provide for corporate confession, repentance, and prayer. (For example: invite people to confess sin by standing if they have identified idols of the heart. Then ask a leader to pray for cleansing, forgiveness, and restoration for those standing.) (For example: invite people to confess sin by standing if they have identified idols of the heart. Then ask a leader to pray for cleansing, forgiveness, and restoration for those standing.)
- E. Make final preparations in a time of prayer and meditation.
- F. Extend an invitation for people to acknowledge their consecration and full surrender to Christ. (Follow the following link to see video message on [Renewing Our Covenant Commitments to Jesus Christ](#).)
- G. Sing "I Surrender All" (or a similar song of commitment).
- H. Renew your covenant commitments to Jesus Christ. Read Scriptures and guide the congregation in responsive commitment to be the people God asks us to be (*Consecrate*, p. 16).
- I. Celebrate Christ and the New Covenant He has provided by His blood.

Call to Prayer and Solemn Assembly*

WHEREAS God has revealed to us through His Word and His activity that:

1. The times are very serious. Many factors indicate that the church should be preparing for the return of the Lord. Revelation 19:6-9 says that the Bride will prepare herself for her union with Christ.
2. He is calling extraordinary numbers of people to pray for spiritual awakening and we are seeing more prayer than at any other time in decades (Isa. 62:6-7; Zech. 8:20-23).
3. He has begun awakening a growing number of His people who are making radical adjustments in their lives to God (*Acts 2:16-21*).
4. Because of our impurities, God is bringing judgment on America and on His church in America by removing His hedge of protection and giving us over to the consequences of our sins (Isa. 5).
5. Unless we repent, the gravity of His judgment will intensify with each passing day as He begins to pour out His wrath in turning us over to disasters (Ezek. 7:1-14).

WHEREAS God has revealed His displeasure because:

1. His people have disregarded His Lordship for their own selfish desires and self-serving practices (Matt. 7:21-22; Luke 6:46).
2. His people have not honored His holiness and are not becoming holy as He is Holy (1 Pet. 1:16-17).
3. His standards and commandments in His Word are not being used to determine right and wrong (Isa. 5:20).
4. His people are disoriented to Him and apathetic to His voice and activities (Luke 19:41-46).
5. His Bride has prostituted herself with worldly values, priorities, and methods and is not preparing herself for the wedding feast at Christ's second coming (Eph. 5:25-26).
6. His warnings have been ignored again and again (Rom. 10:21; Ezek. 12:21-28).
7. His house is not known as a "house of prayer for all nations," and He is displeased with much of the religious activity and worship of His people (Matt. 21:13).
8. Many leaders remain in personal sin and disobedience and have not led His people to corporate repentance (Jer.23).

WHEREAS God has given us a way to come to repentance and spiritual awakening:

1. Individually by confessing and forsaking our sins (1 John 1:9).
2. Corporately by calling a solemn assembly to seek the Lord (2 Chron. 7:14; Joel 1:13-15; Joel 2:1, 12-17; Daniel 9).

THEREFORE we urge all leaders to call a solemn assembly of the people they lead.

1. *WHAT is a solemn assembly?* The urgent call of a leader to all the people he or she leads to come together:
 - to humble themselves
 - to seek God's face
 - to fast and pray
 - to turn from their wicked ways
 - to hear God's Word read
 - to remove all things and practices from their lives that are displeasing God
 - to worship God with all their hearts
 - to make a solemn covenant with God to become God's instruments to spread the gospel to all the world.
2. *WHY hold a solemn assembly?* Because of God's judgment on His people, a fresh revelation of God, or a rediscovery of truth from His Word.
3. *WHO should call a solemn assembly and who should attend?* The leaders in Israel called all the people together. Usually the call came from the prophet, priest, and/or the king.
 - 2 Chronicles 12:1-8 Rehoboam
 - 2 Chronicles 15:1-19 Asa
 - 2 Chronicles 20:1-29 Jehoshaphat
 - 2 Chronicles 29-31 Hezekiah
 - 2 Chronicles 34 Josiah
 - Ezra 10:7-9 Ezra

- Nehemiah 8-9 Nehemiah
- Joel 1-2 Joel

In our day solemn assemblies should be called by every leader for the people he or she leads. The call could be for a family, church, state convention, national convention, or the whole country by leaders of each respective body.

4. *WHEN should a leader call a solemn assembly? At God's sovereign direction. As soon as possible!*

“Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say. Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?” (Joel 2:15-17, KJV).

THEREFORE we also plead with all Christians to join in prayer groups on a continuing basis until spiritual awakening comes in our churches and nation by including:

1. *Explicit Agreement*

Make a covenant with one another to pray for at least one year for spiritual awakening in your church, association, convention, and nation. Consider renewal of the covenant at the end of the first year.

2. *Visible Union*

Set a specific time and place for your group to meet on a regular basis. We recommend that it be on Saturday or Sunday for an hour, and occasionally for a day or a half-day of fasting and prayer.

3. *Extraordinary Prayer*

Make the prayer extraordinary in asking God to do extraordinary things, praying at extraordinary times, with extraordinary fervency, depending on the sovereignty of God and the extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit.

“Who knows? He [God] may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing” (Joel 2:14. NIV).

* Issued by the prayer leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention on September 17, 1989
(Douglas Beggs, Henry Blackaby, Minette Drumwright, Barbara Elder, T. W. Hunt, Avery Willis).