



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

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REVIVE US AGAIN

"The church's greatest need today is genuine revival." I made this statement to pastors and church leaders at a recent meeting. The room grew quiet. The pastors and leaders had offered a variety of solutions to church problems. They had discussed a variety of plans that could make a difference in churches.

All of the solutions that the pastors and leaders discussed could help. Their suggested plans could make tangible differences in churches. Yet, most of the discussion focused on surface issues. We never got to the heart, the root, of the matter – the absolute need for revival.

How do you respond to that statement "Revival is the church's greatest need"? You may ask why I am adamant about this. First, the condition of the church demands it. The apathy and backsliding in our churches is staggering. This is not confined to one location; it is nationwide. Second, the proneness of our hearts to wander and stray from God dictates the need for revival. Living in a secular culture that bombards us with temptations makes this even easier. We are in need of God's renewing and strengthening power. Finally, our inability to turn ourselves to God necessitates revival. Only God can grant genuine revival. It is His great work.

The church needs genuine revival – Holy Spirit generated, truth based, and God glorifying revival. Moreover, I don't mean revival in the modern sense of the word. Unfortunately, the word "revival" no longer holds its rich and powerful theological meaning of yesteryear. People now apply the word "revival" to a scheduled meeting during the life of a church. A meeting with special music and preaching now constitutes "revival". In addition, people apply it to any time intense euphoria or excitement is stirred up in a church. We must return to the concept that revival is God's work that changes lives and societies.

What we need today is a genuine revival that smashes the pride of our hearts. We have to have a revival that enables us to take back the ground that we have surrendered to the evil one. We need a revival that stirs our faith and renews our repentance. We need a revival that will return us to God's Word. In other words, we need God and His power.

This issue of *The Prayer Closet* will deal with praying for revival in the church. We will examine a variety of issues related to revival and seeking God for it. Yet, my goal is not simply to give you more information or just another prayer guide. My prayer is that God will kindle a passionate desire in you for revival – a

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passionate desire that will move you to seek God for revival in your church and the church nationwide and across the world.

What Is Revival?

Revival is the sovereign and powerful work of God that renews the spiritual life and labors of God's people. The psalmist cries out in **Psalm 85:6-7**, "Will you not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us Your mercy, O LORD, and grant us Your salvation." In these verses, the psalmist seeks God for His powerful work among His people. He focuses on God intervening and turning His people back to Himself.

Revival is His sovereign and powerful work among His people. Only God can grant revival. No methods or formulas can produce genuine revival. Human effort and ingenuity cannot substitute for God's almighty power. The sovereign exercise of God's power turns His people back to Him with renewed faith, repentance, and zeal.

Believers¹ did not save themselves. At the same time, believers cannot revive themselves. God alone can revive His people. The psalmist makes this known in **Psalm 80**, "Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved" (**80:19**). The psalmist offers this plea three times in the psalm (**80:3, 7, 19**). He does this because He knows that God is the only hope. Only God's power could turn them back to Him. The phrase "cause Your face to shine" means to grant His power and favor to His people. He knew that their restoration and deliverance from backsliding depended on the manifestation of God's reviving power.

God is the source of revival. It comes from His hands. It is His sovereign prerogative to grant revival. Neglecting or ignoring this truth will lead to a lack of prayer for revival. Since God alone can grant revival, we must seek Him. We must cry out to Him. This is a humbling truth – it should drive us to our knees with fervent pleas for God's power. Because God is the source of revival, it ought to stir our hearts to seek Him with all our strength for revival.

The results of revival are numerous. Yet, this sovereign and powerful work of God affects

believers in two basic ways. All the results of revival can fall into two categories – a renewed relationship to God and renewed zeal for God.

In revival, God renews the relationship of His people. Their faith is strengthened and encouraged. Their repentance is fresh and sincere. Their desire for God is increased. Their heart is set on fire for His Word and obedience to that Word. Revival renews the believers' relationship to God. He breathes new life into their relationship to God.

In revival, God renews the zeal of His people. They are convicted to share their faith. They are diligent in attending and serving in the church. They labor to live godly lives before the lost world. They give sacrificially and joyfully. When God revives His people, their zeal to serve Him burns in their hearts. They have new power and longing to serve Him in the church and in the world.

Revival then is the sovereign and powerful work of God in which He renews the believers' relationship to God and their zeal to serve Him. It is His work and His alone. It affects believers by restoring them to a vibrant relationship to God and burning zeal to serve Him.

The Need For Revival

Why do we need this sovereign work of God? Why is revival such a necessity? The psalmist gives us insight into why we need God's work of revival. His three petitions teach us why we need revival:

"Revive us . . . that Your people may rejoice in You."

The psalmist asks for revival that His people might rejoice in Him. If he is asking that God's people might rejoice in Him, it means that at that moment they were not doing this. In other words, they rejoiced in everything other than God. They found their delight outside of God, His Word, and His ways. This is one of the clear signs that revival is needed - when people delight in something or somebody above God and His Word.

Revival becomes a necessity when His people look for delight, joy, and hope in anything other than God and His Word. The New Testament equivalent of this is leaving your first love, "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (**Revelation 2:4**). As His people, God is to be our hunger and pursuit, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You O God. My soul thirsts for the living God" (**Psalm 42:1-2**). We may go through the motions of walking with God. We faithfully attend church and busily labor for God. Yet, when we no longer find our ultimate delight and joy in God and His Word, we need the renewal of our relationship to Him.

"Show us Your mercy, O Lord."

This petition focuses on their need for forgiveness. They had sinned against God. They needed God's mercy in forgiving their sins. They came to see that they had committed evil in the sight of God. The psalmist pleads with God to show them mercy by forgiving and cleansing them of their sin.

We need the powerful work of God to turn us from our sins and to seek God for His mercy. Complacency concerning our sin signals the great need for revival. Too many times, we go through the motions of confessing our sin. We need the work of God that shows us how evil our sin is and how much we need the mercy of God. We must have a powerful work of God that stirs our hatred of evil and moves us to seek God for genuine change.

"And grant us your salvation."

In the Old Testament, the word "salvation" can mean two things. It can mean salvation in the New Testament sense – forgiveness of sins and a right relationship with God. Yet, it can also mean deliverance from a variety of things. In this text, salvation means deliverance from their situation. They had backslidden. Their sins bound them. They needed God to free them of their backsliding and bondage. The psalmist knew that only God possessed the power to deliver them from their pitiful condition.

When God's people backslide and find themselves in bondage, they need God's powerful work of revival. They need the reviving power of God to shatter their bondage. Believers can yield themselves to sins and become bound those sins. Therefore, believers must have revival to break this bondage and to renew them to personal holiness.

The psalmist gives us three basic signs that revival is needed – looking to the world and the things of the world for joy and delight, the need for forgiveness and restoration, and the backsliding and bondage of believers. These things teach us of our need for God's reviving work. They show us that revival is our great need.

Seeking God For Revival

We have already examined what revival is. We have also looked at why revival is needed. Now we must examine how to seek God for revival.

As we have already stated, revival is the sovereign work of God. He and He alone can grant this renewal of believers. His prerogative and power make revival a reality. Yet, we must also understand that God has provided us with means for seeking Him for revival. He has appointed certain ways that we are to approach Him for this needed work.

Psalm 85 shows us the way that we are to seek God for His reviving work.

(1) Fervent Prayer

In **Psalm 85**, the psalmist cries out to God for revival. He pleads with Him to unleash His power and do a work among His people. This reveals to us how we are to seek God for revival. We are to cry out to Him. We are to ask Him for this needed work. God has ordained prayer as a means of receiving revival.

Prayer precedes and follows His reviving work. No genuine work of revival has ever taken place apart from fervent and intense prayer. If we desire revival, we must ask God for it, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (**Matthew 7:7**). Praying for genuine revival must

be persistent. We must plead with our God until He sends genuine revival into our lives and churches. We cannot allow discouragement to deter us from pleading with God for revival. We cannot let anything keep us from laying hold of Him by faith and pleading with Him for His sovereign and powerful work in our midst.

(2) Repentance

The broken and humble words of the psalmist reveal a repentant heart. He acknowledges that they did not seek their delight in God. He confesses that they needed God's mercy for their sin. He calls on God to deliver them from the bondage to which they had yielded. These petitions show the psalmist had a repentant heart. He comes to God in a spirit of repentance, pleading for revival.

In order to plead with God for revival, we must approach Him with repentant hearts. We have to come with the acknowledgement that we have sinned and that only God can deliver us from our sin. God wants a broken, contrite (repentant) hearts, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart – These, O God, You will not despise" (**Psalm 51:17**).

God is pleased to revive those who come before Him with repentant hearts, "For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (**Isaiah 57:15**). Repentance is an absolute necessity to experiencing God's reviving work. There can be no revival without repentance.

(3) Faith

The psalmist's plea for revival is filled with faith. His focus is on God. He pleads, "Will You not revive us **again**?" The psalmist asks God to unleash His powerful work in their midst once again. The word "again" teaches us that He is trusting in God because of what God had done in the past. In the past, God had revived His people. He intervened with mighty power. He had delivered His people and brought them back to Himself. This had happened throughout the

Old Testament. The psalmist now asks God to do this one again.

This provides us with crucial insight on how to seek God for revival. We must trust God for His reviving work. We must approach Him, believing that He is able to do this miraculous work among His people. Faith in God's reviving work has to fill our pleading for revival. We must fix our focus on God and trust Him for His work of revival. We cannot focus on the times or the situations of the church. When Peter took his eyes off the Lord and looked at the waves, he began to sink. The same is true of us. If we focus on the times or the situations of our churches, we will sink in unbelief concerning revival. However, we must turn our eyes to our sovereign God and believe Him for His reviving work. God has done this in the history of the church. We must trust Him again for this.

(4) Persistence

Persistence has to characterize our seeking God for revival. Revival comes in God's time and God's way. The psalmist submitted himself and his plea for revival to God. He says, "Will You not revive us again?" Do you hear the persistence in this plea? He knew God alone could restore them. He knew that God had the power to this. He determined to seek God until His powerful and miraculous work took place among His people.

Praying for revival consists of taking hold of God's promises, pleading them, and waiting on Him to work. We cannot generate revival. Religious excitement and euphoria don't constitute revival. We must persist in prayer until God unleashes His reviving work into our lives and churches. We cannot put praying for revival into our own personal time frame. We must continue to seek God by faith and wait for His reviving work.

The Hindrances To Genuine Revival

As we examine the truth concerning revival, we now need to turn our attention to hindrances to revival. God is sovereign in revival. He has given us a variety of means to

seek Him for that revival – prayer, repentance, faith, and persistence. At the same time, some hindrances to genuine revival do exist. When these exist in lives and churches, God is not pleased to unleash His reviving work. Therefore, we must repent and forsake any of these hindrances to revival.

Hindrance 1: Unbelief

Unbelief shuts the door on revival. God does not send revival into an atmosphere of unbelief. We must believe God for His reviving work. We must put away any unbelief concerning His ability or willingness to revive His people. The Bible teaches us that God works powerfully in an atmosphere of faith. At the same time, He will not work where unbelief reigns, “And He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (**Matthew 13:58**). If we desire the needed blessing of revival, we must believe God for this. We must trust His willingness and power to revive His church and us. We must put away unbelief concerning this. We cannot let our unbelief get in the way of experiencing genuine revival.

Hindrance 2: Lack of repentance

Repentance characterizes the beginning of a work of God. Repentance precedes and follows genuine revival. Our God is the Holy God. He hates sin. He is displeased with our backsliding. If we desire to see Him work, we must put away our sin. We must confront those things in our lives that are not right in His sight. If we desire genuine revival, we must repent. We must confront and call on God for His sanctifying power. If we do not repent, we cannot expect the powerful work of God in our midst. God tells us His response when we cry out to Him with known and cherished sin in our lives, “When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you: even though you make many prayers, I will not hear, your hands are full of blood” (**Isaiah 1:15**). God’s call to His church is summed up in **Isaiah 1:16**, “Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes.” We cannot cling to our sin and ask God for His reviving power. A lack of repentance hinders genuine revival.

Hindrance 3: Misunderstanding concerning revival

Revival is the work of God. It cannot be worked up or created. It is the gift of God, the working of His mighty power. The desperate need of the hour is a fresh understanding of this truth. Churches often hold services that they call “revivals.” The purpose of these meetings is to seek God for His reviving power. However, we cannot equate these meetings with “revival.” A church can have a meeting but it may or may not be revival. We must come back to revival as a work of God – a work that He does in His time and His way. We must determine to seek Him for this and continue to plead until He does this. Praying for revival is not only for a week before a meeting. It has to be the continual cry of the child of God.

Hindrance 4: A lack of consistent preaching on the essential truths of the faith.

One of the characteristics of past revivals is consistent and faithful preaching on the essentials of the faith. Many revivals came after years of faithful proclamation of the basics of the faith. The preaching that brings revival is anchored in the rock solid truths of God’s Word – repentance, regeneration, faith, God’s sovereignty, the absolute supremacy of Christ as Savior and Lord, the certainty of eternal judgment, heaven, and hell. Revival preaching applies and boldly declares the great truths of the Christian faith. Revival preaching is the fearless and relevant declaration of the fundamentals of the faith. We cannot expect God’s reviving power if the pulpit ignores these essential and necessary truths of God’s Word.

Hindrance 5: Lack of prayer

Revival and prayer are interconnected. Prayer precedes and follows revival. We must cry out to God for His reviving power. We must seek Him until He sends His reviving power. As we have seen, revival is the sovereign work of God. He alone can grant revival. Yet, He has ordained that we can receive this by prayer. We must be diligent to seek Him for the needed blessing.

How Can We Discern A True Work Of The Holy Spirit?

One of the questions that people ask me on a regular basis is, "How can I discern the true work of the Spirit in revival? How can we know when genuine revival comes?" These are valid questions and they need a clear answer.

God sent the First Great Awakening to America in 1732. This move of the Spirit reached its peak in 1740 and had continued influence well into 1770. This powerful move the Spirit transformed the churches and brought many people to Jesus Christ.

Jonathan Edwards was one of the preachers that God used during this work of God. In 1741, Edwards wrote a book entitled **The Distinguishing Marks Of A Work Of The Spirit Of God**. Edwards had studied, meditated, and prayed over the results of this work of the Spirit. He thoroughly explored the true and false signs of revival. In this work, Edwards sets forth the signs of genuine revival – the genuine work of God's Spirit.

Edwards bases his assessment of revival on **1 John 4:1**, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." This text provides the foundation for Edwards' examination of true revival. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. He inspired and illuminates the Word. Because of this, His work will line up with what the Word of God teaches about Him and His work. The Spirit will not work in a way contrary to His Word. He will work in the way that He has revealed.

Edwards' **Distinguishing Marks** has great value for our day. It provides a map to follow for all such periods of revival. He concluded that while excesses and actions of a questionable nature may accompany a movement, this does not necessarily disqualify it as a work of the Spirit. He stresses the need to embrace genuine works of the Spirit while at the same time practicing biblical discernment.

According to Edwards, **1 John 4** provides us with the following signs of a true work of the Spirit:

- (1) *It elevates peoples' esteem for Jesus (1 John 4:2-3).* Edwards writes, "When the Spirit is at work among people, He will plainly convince them of Christ and lead them to Him. He will confirm their minds in the belief of the history of Christ as He appeared in the flesh, the Son of God who was sent by God to save sinners . . . The Spirit begets in people higher and more honorable thoughts of Christ than they used to have and to incline their emotions more to Him."
- (2) *The Spirit operates against the interests of Satan's kingdom (1 John 4:4-5).* When the Spirit moves, He will lessen the esteem and desire of people for the world and the things of the world. The Spirit takes away their eager pursuit for the things of the world. The Spirit weans them away from their worldly lusts and worldly pursuits. This is the exact opposite of Satan's work. He is interested in people loving and pursuing the world. He wants people to seek the world and all its pleasures and prizes. When people turn from these worldly lusts and pursuits, you can know it is a genuine work of God.
- (3) *The Holy Spirit exalts the Scripture (1 John 4:6).* The devil will not seek to produce in people a love for and desire of the Scripture. Edwards writes, "Every text is a dart to torment the old serpent. He has felt the stinging smart thousands of times. Therefore, he is enraged against the Bible and hates every word in it. We may be sure that he will never attempt to raise persons' esteem of it or their affections for it."
- (4) *The Spirit lifts up sound doctrine (1 John 4:6).* The devil works for the cause of a lie, and as the father of lies he works on behalf of falsehood and error. The Spirit of revival is the Spirit of truth. He will revive His people in and through the truth of His Word.
- (5) *The Spirit produces a spirit of love toward God and man (1 John 4:7).* When the Spirit grants genuine revival, He produces love for God and men in people. When the Spirit of

God does a work among His people, they will have a more intense, greater love for God and for men. Genuine revival stirs the believers' love for God and man.

Praying For Revival In Your Church

The following is a prayer guide that you can use to plead with God for genuine revival in your church and area.

Father, I plead that You will grant genuine revival to _____ Church by Your sovereign power and grace. Bring us back to You as our greatest delight and desire (**Psalm 85:6**).

Father, I pray that the believers of _____ will confess and repent of their sins. Deliver us from complacency toward our personal sin (**1 John 1:9**).

Father, I ask in Jesus' name for You to unleash the spirit of prayer in this church for genuine revival; stir us to pray for Your reviving work (**Galatians 4:6**).

O God, create within the believers of this church the faith to receive Your reviving work. Empower us to trust You for this needed blessing (**Romans 10:17**).

Righteous Father, show us our need for Your work of genuine revival. Open our eyes to see our backsliding and complacency. Reveal to us our true condition (**Psalm 139:23-24**).

Father, deliver us from the pride that can hinder us from experiencing genuine revival. Set us free from the self-righteousness that ignores the need for revival (**James 4:6**).

Living God, grant new life into our relationship to You. Renew our faith and repentance. Lead us to deeper trust in Jesus. Stir us to hate sin in our flesh and to repent of it (**Psalm 85:7**).

Father, I pray that the Word of God will be faithfully and powerfully preached from our

pulpit. I ask in Jesus' name that the truth of Your Word will be boldly made known (**2 Timothy 4:1-2**).

Father, shatter the strongholds that have been established in our lives. Demolish every idol that we have built in our hearts (**2 Corinthians 10:3-5**).

Father, I ask in Jesus' name that the believers of _____ Church will hunger for Your Word. I plead that we will strive to hear and obey Your Word (**James 1:22-24**).

Father, open the eyes of any member of this church who is not saved. I plead that they will see their lostness and will repent and turn to Christ in true faith (**Matthew 7:21-23**).

Father, I ask that the believers of this church will seek to restore the broken relationships of their lives. Grant us genuine love and compassion for others. I pray that the Spirit will not be grieved but will grant genuine revival to this church (**Ephesians 4:30-32**).

Father, open our eyes afresh to the greatness and glory of Jesus. Instill in us a greater and deeper love for the Lord Jesus Christ (**1 John 4:1-3**).

O God, wean us away from our worldliness and lust. I plead that we would forsake these things. Stir us to desire, delight in, and love You, Your Word, and Your Church (**1 John 2:15-17**).

Preparing Your Heart For Revival

The following are suggestions that you might consider in preparing your heart for genuine revival:

- (1) *Ask God to increase your faith for revival.* Plead with God to strengthen your faith in Him – His willingness and His ability to revive your church and you.
- (2) *Pray for the Spirit's help in examining your life.* Call on the Holy Spirit to open your eyes

to those things in your life that are not pleasing to God. Ask for His power and grace; then confront, confess, and repent of all that He reveals to you.

- (3) *Study the Scriptures concerning God's sovereignty.* God can grant revival. He can restore His people and empower His church. Anchoring yourself in His sovereignty can enable you to believe Him for this.
- (4) *Fill your life with God's Word.* Read, study, meditate on, memorize and obey God's Word. Renew your commitment to the authority of God's Word and seek to conform your life to it.
- (5) *Read about past revivals.* The history of the

church is filled with numerous movements of the Spirit of God. Read the accounts of how God has worked in the past. This can strengthen and bolster your faith for future works of the Spirit.

- (6) *Commit yourself to praying regularly for revival.* Make praying for revival an integral part of your prayer life. Give yourself to asking God for His reviving power in your church and in your life.
- (7) *Join with other believers to pray for revival.* You might want to use your prayer partnerships for this. Pray with your partners about revival in your lives and church. You might even consider developing prayer partnerships for revival.



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