

# AN URGENT APPEAL

Dear Friend,

Paul Revere is famous in American history because he brought the urgent message to the colonists: “The British are coming.” Like Revere, we, the writers of this document, bring another urgent appeal to you. The situation is not the same but the urgency is.

Surely no one looking at the New Testament in contrast with much of the American Church can be fully pleased with what they observe. Many churches in America are in trouble. By almost any standard that is used to measure biblical conformity, the American Church is found wanting. The church continues to decrease in size. It makes relatively little difference in the society. Contrasts in the lifestyle of a Christian as compared to a non-believer are often negligible. Christ is not glorified, as He deserves to be. Something must happen to change this, and only God can do it. The times are URGENT for the Church in America. Something must be done.

As members of the drafting committee, we believe, as do hundreds of others, that it is urgent that Christian leaders unite in consensus and collaboration on the biblical nature and hope for corporate revival. This conviction is woven throughout *An Urgent Appeal*. Our prayer is that thousands of Christian leaders will explore and then embrace the message of this Appeal, by signing the Declaration of Intent, which you will find in this document. The appeal is for pastors and leaders to be not only *for* corporate revival but to be *about* it--men and women who understand that the condition of the church is that desperate and who will be like the widow in the scripture, those who give the Lord no rest until He sends this needed revival.

We encourage you to go to our websight: [www.urgentappeal.net](http://www.urgentappeal.net). You'll find there the complete text of this document that may be easily downloaded so that you can disseminate it to others. Also, at this websight, you will find regular updates regarding future plans and activities surrounding *An Urgent Appeal*.

*An Urgent Appeal* moves us beyond empty rhetoric about revival. It takes us to new levels of unity and action about revival. Our prayer is that, through the ongoing conversations it stirs up among leaders, all of us may become more fully engaged with Jesus Christ and with the magnificent implications of His supremacy over all things.

The Drafting Committee, *on behalf of*  
The Mission America Coalition,  
The National Revival Network,  
America's National Prayer Committee

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## PREFACE: A NATIONWIDE CALL

*“You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come . . . for the Lord will re-build Zion and appear in His glory. He will respond to the prayer of the destitute: He will not despise their plea.”*

*Psalm 102:13-17*

In San Francisco in January, 1998, nearly forty denominational leaders, on behalf of the 400 members of Mission America, signed a newly issued “*Nationwide Call to Prayer to the Church in America.*” Subsequently, *The Call* was published as a full-page ad in *USA TODAY*, signed by denominational leaders such as Bishop George McKinney (Church of God in Christ), Robert Watson (Salvation Army), Thomas Trask (Assembly of God), Robert Reccord (Southern Baptist Convention), William Hamil (Evangelical Free Church), and ministry leaders such as Billy Graham, John Perkins, Paul Cedar, Bill Bright, Jesse Miranda, Ron Sider, and over one hundred other national Christian leaders. Since then it has circulated widely throughout the body of Christ.

*The Call* has two parts: “A Call to Extraordinary Prayer” and “A Call to United Action.” It sets forth consensus on an agenda for prayer and calls for collaboration in mobilizing concerted prayer. The focus of *The Call* is corporate revival. As such, it provides a major step toward the document you now hold.

This newer document, ***An Urgent Appeal to Christian Leaders in America for Consensus and Collaboration on the Biblical Nature and Hope of Corporate Revival***, is designed to bring about even deeper levels of consensus and collaboration around the focus of *The Call* which reads in part:

*In recognition of our absolute dependence on God; the moral and spiritual challenges facing our nation; our national need for repentance and divine intervention; our great hope for a general awakening to the Lordship of Christ, the unity of His body, and the sovereignty of His Kingdom; the unique opportunity that the dawn of a new millennium presents to us for offering the Gospel of Christ to everyone in our nation—*

*We strongly urge all churches and all Christians of America to unite in seeking the face of God through prayer and fasting, persistently asking our Father to send revival to the church and spiritual awakening to our nation, so that Christ’s Great Commission might be fulfilled worldwide in our generation.*

In the spirit of *The Call* and with its vision, the National Revival Network of Mission America has drafted, with input from nearly 100 national Christian leaders, ***An Urgent Appeal.***

# THE APPEAL: AN INTRODUCTION

*“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you . . . .”*

*Ephesians 1:17-18*

## AMERICA AND BEYOND

The primary audience of *An Urgent Appeal* is Christian leadership in America. However, the general principles are equally applicable to revival issues in the church worldwide. The Appeal celebrates significant renewal and revival movements in other parts of the world that illustrate many of the issues explored here. They hold out great hope for God’s mercies to yet reawaken the church in America.

## STARTING THE CONVERSATION

*An Urgent Appeal* is not intended to be a “primer” on revival. Instead, it presents an analysis on revival that attempts to be biblical, simple, and generally self-evident. The goal is to capsule major themes on revival around which consensus and collaboration can be built as the American church stands at a new threshold in the Kingdom purposes of Christ.

Primary objectives of the Appeal include:

- ◆ **To cultivate** and promote increased consensus and collaboration about what the Holy Spirit has said and is saying concerning corporate, biblical revival.
- ◆ **To establish** a starting point for in-depth discussion on biblical revival by leaders of various denominational and ethnic backgrounds.
- ◆ **To provide** common language and a context within which Christian leaders can work together to foster this vision throughout the Body of Christ.
- ◆ **To help** leaders who seek corporate, biblical revival to preempt unnecessary chaos and division among ourselves and our people as God grants our prayers for revival.

**Ultimately**, it is hoped the Appeal will stimulate collegiality among Christian leaders and will help cultivate a climate conducive to a theologically sound reawakening to Christ within our churches and throughout our nation.

## THE TITLE

A brief survey of its title may help further clarify the purpose of this document:

**URGENT** — We are standing at a crossroads moment in the life of the American church. Many believe we are at the threshold of a season of either revival or further judgment.

**APPEAL** — This is an invitation to give immediate attention to the topic of revival. The document is consciously prophetic, calling Christian leaders to repent and wait on God with expectant hearts.

**CHRISTIAN LEADERS** — If a new work of God is on the horizon, the leaders must lead the way, and must do so together.

**IN AMERICA** — This document addresses all U.S. Christian leaders, at all levels, in all parts of the Body of Christ, across ethnic, denominational, generational, and ministerial boundaries. Further, it deals preeminently with the condition, needs, and hopes of the American church. However, most of the document is relevant to Christians worldwide.

**FOR CONSENSUS** — This Appeal does not require total agreement or total uniformity of thought. Instead, as one dictionary puts it:

*Consensus means: group solidarity in sentiment and belief; a general agreement; to give assent or approval; expression of common vision on which common action can be taken.*

**FOR COLLABORATION** — Urgency requires more than intellectual assent. Leaders must also find ways to act together to meet the challenge of the hour. The dictionary defines collaboration as follows:

*To work jointly with others; to labor in and advocate for a common endeavor; to cooperate around fulfilling a shared mission.*

**BIBLICAL** — This Appeal is to Christian leaders who see the Scriptures as the final authority and ultimate measure of truth on the subject of revival. The more theological precision we can gain, the better we can navigate together between revival and “revivalism.”

**HOPE** — This refers to any God-given vision for the future that is shaped by the Christ-centered promises of the Scriptures.

**CORPORATE** — Revival deals with the affairs of Christ’s church. In Scripture it is preeminently a corporate phenomenon. Thus, this document speaks primarily to corporate revival. At the same time, it recognizes that community-wide renewal will always include the reviving of individuals.

**REVIVAL** — Fuller definitions will be found in the following pages. To this end, the rest of the document will:

- ◆ **Provide** a brief analysis of our need for revival.
- ◆ **Give** definitions to the hope of biblical revival.
- ◆ **Set forth** an apologetic for confessing such a hope in our generation.
- ◆ **Survey** three major affirmations about revival.
- ◆ **Identify** important cautions.
- ◆ **Propose** practical responses leaders can make together.

## **MAKING IT PERSONAL**

Finally, please note that at the conclusion of each section there are a few application questions and other exercises designed to help the reader (whether alone or in a small group) to engage the Appeal on a personal level. These sections will also assist readers in determining further steps they might take toward consensus and collaboration. This document was drafted with one special group in mind, the local ministerial fellowship or pastoral prayer group. Each section of *An Urgent Appeal* provides content for discussion and prayer, using the “Reader’s Reflections.” All of this could be developed into a sermon series on the biblical nature and hope of corporate revival.

# THE SEASONS OF GOD

*“As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.”*

*Zechariah 9:11-12*

## JUDGMENT AND HOPE

One year passes into another, one century into another, one millennium into another. Great leaders, great movements, great nations come and go. Only a few things remain. Only a few things stand the test of time.

God’s truth remains, as His Word will not pass away. When God speaks, it is sealed in Heaven: sure, dependable, alive.

There are clear patterns in Scripture regarding how God speaks. Sometimes He speaks messages of warning.

Sometimes He speaks messages of hope. With His Word come seasons . . . epochs of His special activities, across the centuries, in fulfillment of His Word.

For those who do not heed the warnings, there come seasons of judgment. For those who do heed and repent, the Holy Spirit gives seasons of new beginnings—resurrections, as it were.

Yes, God does judge—both individuals and whole civilizations. Sometimes His judgment is remedial. His discipline is meant to bring a people to their senses, to lead them to turn and to return to Him.

At such crossroads moments, God ultimately confronts His people with their sin. They have grieved Him deeply by embracing the idols of their age. Offended by their betrayal, He turns away. He must uphold the honor of His holy name among the nations. He withdraws the showers of His blessing (Ezekiel 34:26). The rains of His righteousness are withheld (Hosea 10:12). His people find themselves in “waterless pits” (as He terms them in Zechariah 9:11). Yet, the God of everlasting love, the “God of hope” (Romans 15:13) is not far from His covenant people. He continues to call them to pray, to repent, to turn from their idolatry and unbelief, and to once again place their wholehearted trust in Him alone. Then He summons them to hope. To seasons of renewal, restoration, revitalization, reformation . . . *revival*.

## WATERLESS PITS

*What does God see as He looks at the American church?*

Many claim that the church in the U.S. may be the most organized, populous, financially prosperous, visible, and culturally pervasive of any Christian movement in the history of the world. Reports of

renewal abound: liturgical, theological, ecumenical, charismatic, lay, youth, missionary. Volunteerism and faith-based ministries remain strong. Stadiums overflow with zealous disciples. There is much for which we can praise God.

But what else does God see in the church? Despite the glitz and glamour, does He also find waterless pits? Is there a sense that in spite of all our measurable activity, the church generally is paralyzed? Are we outwardly prosperous while being inwardly weak and stagnant?

Do the great doctrines of the Bible fail to grip our congregations and move the hearts and minds of our people? Does religious flesh and fleshly religion dominate, marked by self-sufficiency and self-promotion? Have we so domesticated Christ and privatized the Gospel that we have become impotent in our impact on the social and spiritual crises of our nation? Is this why there has been negligible overall church growth nationwide during the past decade? Many church leaders would sadly confess it is so.

Research tells us that there is little difference between the lifestyle of Christians inside the church and our society as a whole. The disintegration in our culture is also found in our churches: Racism. Hypocrisy. Hero worship. Materialism. Busyness. Lack of social conscience. Road rage. Disintegration of the family. Pornography. Abortion. Status quo mediocrity. Self-indulgence in our abundance. Self-satisfied with our kingdom accomplishments. The sad part in all of this is that the living Christ Himself is marginalized; He is not glorified as the Supreme Lord of the church.

*What does God see as He looks across America?*

Surely God sees spiritual erosion, moral bankruptcy, and the loss of fixed, transcendent values and absolutes. Mother Theresa concluded that America's "poverty of the spirit" was the greatest poverty she found anywhere. Traditional American religious impulses may be up, but morality and ethical cohesion are down, unchecked by a flourishing neo-paganism that has become the serious pursuit of multitudes of our citizens.

In addition, God sees our 50 million urban poor, where a gap between rich and poor grows wider every year. He knows that half our marriages end in divorce. He grieves that we have lost our sense of the sanctity of life, that we have become increasingly a culture of death. He beholds the incarceration of millions of our citizens. He sees our self-consuming consumerism. All of it: "waterless pits."

Christians today, like Israel before them, find themselves wandering in a desert of their own making because they have too often chosen what was expedient and disobeyed God. Many have become "nominal Christians," possessing a form of godliness but forfeiting the power of God.

In this condition, we must pause and face a sober and humbling truth: The hope of revival is not offered to the Church Militant but rather to the Church Repentant. There is a danger here. If the

church is blind to its true spiritual condition, then revival will simply be viewed as a divine additive, given basically to increase the effectiveness of our ministries instead of restoring the glory of God in His church.

But once we recognize how far we have fallen (Revelation 2:4-5) and again realize our covenant relationship and responsibilities to God, then we will humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, turning from our wicked ways. It is then we learn the ancient yet ever relevant lesson that the road to revival is paved with contrite and broken hearts. With such a people our God is pleased to dwell (Isaiah 57:15). Repentance is the pathway to revival.

## IS THERE HOPE?

In the extended hands of a forgiving God comes the offer of hope (Hosea 14:1-4). Our waterless pits can become pools of living water as the refreshing rains of His Spirit return to pour upon us again (Hosea 6:1-3).

Our God is a God of *promises*. His promises focus on new beginnings, seasons of renewal, especially for those in waterless pits. The Holy Spirit desires to take us together where we have never gone before, just as He has done with His people so many times in the past.

He is able, for He remains forever the God of revival. Should we not speak of it and prepare for it with full resolve, and without any reserve? Can we not trust Him in this? Since to the whole church the Holy Spirit proclaims, “Christ is in you, the hope of all the glorious things to come” (Colossians 1:27), how can we trust Him for less?

As you look at the landscape, what do you sense? Are we at a threshold? Is it too late? Or is there a season of hope before us? Is it a time to get ready for an extraordinary awakening to Christ—to get ready for biblical revival? Do you sense an urgency?

Nationally respected Christian leaders have expressed hope for a comprehensive work of God’s renewing grace among American Christians in this crucial hour. It is an extraordinary hope, a claim that, despite our sin and paralysis, God desires to do something radically new with His people. It is an expectation of an amazing work within Christ’s church in our nation that actively engages us in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform our cities and culture, to evangelize our friends, to touch unreached peoples worldwide. *Revival!*

*An Urgent Appeal* is presented by the National Revival Network of Mission America in the conviction that multiplied Christian leaders across America increasingly desire to pursue consensus and collaboration for corporate revival, and to help their people to do the same.

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## MAKING IT PERSONAL: READER'S REFLECTIONS

- ◆ What are some of the developments in the moral and spiritual condition of the United States at this present time? Do you think that the essay you just read was accurate in describing these factors? Or, did it go too far? Why or why not?
- ◆ Do you feel the essay was too hard or too soft on the condition of the church of Jesus Christ in the United States? Why do you feel this way?
- ◆ The essay says: “Nationally respected Christian leaders have expressed hope for a comprehensive work of God’s renewing grace among Christians.” On what might such a hope be built? Are you hopeful? Why or why not?
- ◆ Where can I/we find common ground with other leaders in the issues covered within this section?
- ◆ Centered on Christ, do I/we have sufficient consensus about the previous section to proceed to explore the next section together?
- ◆ Is there a prayer response that would be appropriate right now before I/we move to the next section? (Spend time praying.)
- ◆ Scripture for meditation: Isaiah 49:5-20; Acts 11:19-25

# DEFINITIONS OF CORPORATE REVIVAL

*“This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people . . . .’ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call . . . Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord . . . .”*

*Acts 2:16, 39; 3:19*

## THREE SCHOLARS SPEAK

Let’s call on three evangelical scholars, with well over 100 years of scholarship and five earned Ph.D.’s between them in the study of biblical and historical revival. They provide us with excellent definitions as a starting point for our considerations.

First, J. Edwin Orr distilled his decades of research into the following definition:

*An Evangelical Awakening is a movement of the Holy Spirit bringing about a revival of New Testament Christianity in the church of Christ and in its related community. Such an awakening may change in a significant way an individual; or it may affect a larger group of believers;*

*or it may move a congregation or the churches in the city or district, or the body of believers throughout a country or continent; or indeed the larger body of believers throughout the world. The outpouring of the Spirit affects the reviving of the church, the awakening of the masses, and the movement of uninstructed peoples toward the Christian faith; the revived Church, by many or by few, is moved to engage in evangelism, in teaching, and in social action.*

Theologian J. I. Packer concurs with this perspective when he writes:

Revival, I define, as a work of God by his Spirit through his Word bringing the spiritually dead to living faith in Christ and renewing the inner life of Christians who have grown slack and sleepy. In revival God makes old things new, giving new power to law and gospel and new spiritual awareness to those whose hearts and consciousness have been blind, hard and cold. Revival thus animates or reanimates churches and Christian groups to make a spiritual and moral impact on communities. It comprises an initial reviving, followed by a maintained state of revivedness for as long as the visitation lasts.

Writing as a senior pastor, and former Old Testament professor, Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. provides a vivid description of revival:

When God rends the heavens and comes down on His people, a divine power achieves what human effort at its best fails to do. God's people thirst for the ministry of the Word and receive it with tender meltings of soul. The grip of the enslaving sin is broken. Reconciliation between believers is sought and granted. Spiritual things, rather than material things, capture people's hearts. A defensive, timid church is transformed into a confident army. Believers joyfully suffer for their Lord. They treasure usefulness to God over career advancement. Communion with God is avidly enjoyed. Churches and Christian organizations reform their policies and procedures. People who had always been indifferent to the gospel now inquire anxiously. And this type of spiritual movement draws in not just the isolated straggler here and there but large numbers of people. A wave of divine grace washes over the church and spills onto the world. That is what happens when God comes.

## **BIBLICAL EMPHASES**

Revival, by whatever term, appears to be a distinctive and recurring pattern in God's work with His people. Church historian Dr. Richard Lovelace observes that God's predisposition is always toward revival: "The great theme of Scripture is God's recovery of an apostate people." Yale scholar Kenneth Scott Latourette, in his seven-volume work on Christian history, observed that there were "ebbs and flows" of the Christian movement over the past 2,000 years that invariably issued out of seasons of spiritual awakenings.

More importantly, the Bible itself contains revival narratives, revival prayers, revival predictions, and revival principles. Thousands of verses deal with the promises of God for revival, the ways of God in revival, the manifestations of God during revival, the impact of God on His people out of revival, the personal and corporate dimensions of revival, and, ultimately, the centrality of Christ throughout any revival. Although the theme is set forth under both the Old and New Covenants, in the latter there is a much greater range of God's work in revival because it is now secured, mediated, and expanded through the finished work of the ascended Christ.

From one perspective, revival is where all the purposes of God ultimately end up. The last two chapters of the book of Revelation describe what some have called the "Final Revival," of which every other season of revival is a prototype. Every historic revival is, in a sense, an "approximation of the Consummation"—that is, an intermediate expression, or a preliminary but substantial demonstration, of Christ's Kingdom in all of its glory. It is a dress rehearsal, if you will, of the climactic "renewal of all things" that transforms heaven and earth when Jesus returns.

## TERMS AND METAPHORS

That being said, in time and space and history, revival comes according to patterns generally revealed throughout the Scriptures and church history. As a result, a number of terms have emerged to delineate various facets of biblical revival. These include:

- |                                   |                             |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ◆ Renewal                         | ◆ Reformations              |
| ◆ Awakenings                      | ◆ Visitations               |
| ◆ Effusions of the Spirit         | ◆ Outpourings of the Spirit |
| ◆ Fillings of the Spirit          | ◆ Baptisms of the Spirit    |
| ◆ Quickenings                     | ◆ Revitalizations           |
| ◆ Restorations                    | ◆ Times of Refreshing       |
| ◆ Christ-awakenings               | ◆ Jubilees                  |
| ◆ The manifest presence of Christ |                             |

Various metaphors have also been used such as:

- |                                     |                          |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ◆ Waking up                         | ◆ Latter rains           |
| ◆ Fire falling                      | ◆ Turning back captivity |
| ◆ Deserts blossoming like a rose    | ◆ Rivers of renewal      |
| ◆ Winds of renewal                  | ◆ Beneficent sabotage    |
| ◆ Overthrowing of the status quo    | ◆ Spiritual revolution   |
| ◆ Seasons of springtime and harvest |                          |

Whatever the term or metaphor, most would agree that revival is a season when God mercifully turns away His judgments from the church, deserved because of her lukewarmness and disobedience. Instead, God moves to comfort and restore her, to intensify, accelerate, deepen, and extend the work of His Son in and through her.

## CYCLES OF REVIVAL

Latourette's metaphor describes revival epochs as waves of the sea washing up the shore as the tide comes in. Implied in that picture is the fact that there are episodes of advance and recession throughout the history of God's people—cycles, some call them.

This is not to suggest some kind of arbitrary interpretation that causes previous awakenings to limit or predetermine our expectations of the steps God might take in some future outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We can never put God into some kind of a "revival box."

Yet seasons do unfold, and patterns can be seen. Why have cycles of revival been required through the ages?

Again, our consideration is with corporate revival rather than personal revival. Most agree it is possible for an individual believer to live in continuous renewal, or “revivedness” (Packer), even if the Christian community around him is in spiritual recession.

But regarding corporate revival, there are at least five reasons for the cycles or waves:

- 1. Spiritual gaps**, as a new generation rises up that does not know Christ in the depth and intensity of former ones.
- 2. Previous blessings**, which have, over time, fostered a sense of self-satisfaction and complacency in the body of Christ.
- 3. Theological neglect**, that has permitted imbalances and divergences that diminish or obscure our vision of who Christ really is as well as our theological precision.
- 4. A new era of expansion**, when the re-awakening of the church is related primarily not to God’s rescuing her from judgments, but to God’s intention to reactivate the church for new advances of the Gospel in our communities, throughout a nation, and among the unreached peoples of the world.
- 5. God’s sovereignty** — Sometimes there is no other apparent explanation except that God chooses to do so for the glory of His Son simply because He is God.

## REVIVAL IS CHRIST!

Preeminently, all true revival is about God bringing glory back to His Son by the power of the Holy Spirit through His church. Between the Ascension and the Consummation, this is one of the most strategic activities of the Holy Spirit. In fact, corporate revival necessitates Trinitarian activity: Father-initiated, Spirit-driven, Son-centered.

Yes, biblical revival is supremely Son-centered—it is utterly Christ-dominated. Some have even called it a “Christ-awakening.” We can only think rightly about revival when we think rightly about Christ’s place in revival. He is the criterion by which we define it, measure its legitimacy, and vindicate its impact.

This is the heart of the consensus we seek. Further, our collaborations must coalesce around Christ. Any spiritual experience, whether called revival or something else, that diminishes Christ, bypasses Him, or actually leads away from Him, is not of God and holds no hope for any generation.

*The first issue before us as Christian leaders, then, is not to define the characteristics of revival. Rather, it is to comprehend more fully the Christ who is at the center of corporate revival.*

Fundamentally, revival is an awakening to all that Christ already is for us. Saint Irenaeus said: “Christ brought us every newness by bringing us Himself.” In the same way, in revival God does not make new things. Rather, He makes things new. He does this by reintroducing us to Christ who stands at the epicenter of His renewing purpose among the nations. As said earlier, in revival God accelerates, intensifies, deepens, and extends the newness that Christ secured for us. Revival increases our capacity to express this newness and to minister it to others. In revival God invites the church into more of who Christ is for us, even as we invite Christ into more of who we are for Him.

After all, Scripture’s revival promises were secured for us by the *cross* of Christ. The cross marks the most decisive moment in God’s ongoing commitment to “the recovery of a backslidden people.” Everything that revival brings has been bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus. In addition, the message of the cross exposes, rebukes, and replaces every false hope on which the church might depend, giving us the greater hope of God’s inexhaustible and unconditional renewing grace. The cross acts as a hinge to open the floodgates of God’s reviving bounty for any generation of His people.

## FOUR TESTS

Four Christological tests of the legitimacy of anything calling itself “revival” might be applied:

- 1. Existential** — Does it exalt Christ, revealing Him to be the centerpiece for God’s people? Does it give evidences of His lordship over peoples, institutions, and the Powers of Darkness? Does the Holy Spirit have greater freedom to manifest the ministries of Christ among His people?
- 2. Ethical** — Does it multiply evidences of Christ-likeness throughout congregational life? For some, does it increase a spirit of daily repentance or efforts at racial or denominational reconciliation?
- 3. Ecclesiastical** — Does it sharpen and empower the life and work of a local congregation in such things as worship, teaching the Word, prayer, spiritual gifts, love for one another, and outreach with the Gospel?
- 4. Eschatological** — Does it appear to be, in principle, a reflection of the Final Revival; that is, an approximation of the Consummation? Does it reinvigorate the Church to work toward the End by spreading the Gospel in ministries of social reform, compassion to the poor, justice, reconciliation, community transformation, as well as the many facets of global missions?

## A SUGGESTED PATTERN

In conclusion, whether revival is chronologically near or not, we can be certain the Holy Spirit always keeps it Christologically near. To use another term, revival is about arrival—when, through the Spirit, Christ shows up afresh (as it were) to invade His church, to capture and conquer us anew, to re-energize us with His eternal purposes, and to take us with Him to fulfill them more fully than

ever. No wonder the 18th century New England Puritans called corporate revival, quite simply, “the manifest presence of Christ.”

As noted above, a general pattern in biblical revival, observable throughout church history, highlights this dominance of Christ in all revival. The pattern might be outlined in this manner:

- ◆ **Realization:** Revival desired. A people alerted to seek more of Christ.
- ◆ **Preparation:** Revival sought. A people repentant and ready to receive more of Christ.
- ◆ **Manifestation:** Revival received. A people confronted and changed by more of Christ.
- ◆ **Consecration:** Revival applied. A people devoted to live more for Christ.
- ◆ **Revitalization:** Revival absorbed. A people enlivened to express more of Christ in all of life.
- ◆ **Penetration:** Revival unleashed. A people actively sharing more of Christ by word and by deed.
- ◆ **Expansion:** Revival fulfilled. A people taking more of Christ to the nations.

## SOME WORKING DEFINITIONS

Revival is utterly Christological. Along with the views of Orr, Packer and Ortlund above, other working definitions that capture this might include:

*“Revival is the Church falling in love with Jesus all over again.” (Vance Havner)*

*“Revival is a community saturated with God.” (Duncan Campbell)*

*“A revival means days of heaven upon earth.” (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones)*

*“Revival is ultimately Christ Himself, seen, felt, heard, living, active, moving in and through His Body on earth.” (Stephen Olford)*

*“Revival is God purifying His church.” (Erwin Lutzer)*

*“Revival is that strange and sovereign work of God in which He visits His own people, restoring, re-animating, and releasing them into the fullness of His blessings.” (Robert Coleman)*

*“Revival is a sudden bestowment of a spirit of worship upon God’s people.” (A. W. Tozer)*

*“A true revival means nothing less than a revolution, casting out the spirit of worldliness and selfishness, and making God and His love triumph in the heart and life.” (Andrew Murray)*

*“Revival is the reformation of the Church for action.” (Max Warren)*

*“Revival is God revealing Himself to man in awful holiness and irresistible power. It is God’s method to counteract spiritual decline and to create spiritual momentum in order that His redemptive purposes might be accomplished on earth” (Arthur Wallis)*

Whatever definitions we create, those who have lived in a season of revival record three consistent, Christ-honoring dimensions: (1) In revival God gives His people a renewed focus on Christ’s person. As a result, (2) we experience together in new ways the fulness of Christ’s life within the Church. (3) All of this presses us into new involvements in the fulfillment of Christ’s mission, both where we live and among the nations.

Whatever definition one may favor, it appears that in the end, *revival is Christ!*

### **MAKING IT PERSONAL: READER'S REFLECTIONS**

- ◆ In your circle of relationships, is the term “revival” understood the way it is set forth in this section? Why or why not?
- ◆ What definition of revival resonates best with you? Why?
- ◆ Do you agree with the reasons given for “cycles of corporate revival?” Why or why not?
- ◆ Are there any other tests that you would add to the four given in this section regarding the validity of a revival?
- ◆ Where can I/we find common ground with other leaders in the issues covered within this section?
- ◆ Centered on Christ, can I/we find sufficient consensus about the previous section as I/we proceed to explore the next section together?
- ◆ Is there a prayer response that would be appropriate right now before I/we move to the next section? (Spend time praying.)
- ◆ Scripture for meditation: 2 Chronicles 15:1-7; 1 John 4:1-7

# AN APOLOGETIC FOR CORPORATE REVIVAL

*“The people were waiting expectantly, wondering in their hearts . . . John answered them: ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire . . . He will gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’ And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.”*

*Luke 3:15-18*

Christian leaders will seek consensus and collaboration on corporate revival to the degree they are thoroughly *convinced* it is a legitimate, necessary expectation for their generation. Without such confidence, we will be reluctant to invest in something that simply may never happen.

In 1 Peter 3:15 we are told to be ready at all times to give an answer to those who demand reasons for the hope that is in us. Often, however, Christian leaders struggle to maintain confidence about the

hope of revival, and thus to lead their people into the same vision. This happens for a number of reasons, including:

- ◆ **Lack of study** on the ways of God in corporate revival.
- ◆ **Ignorance of the cycles** or seasons of revival throughout church history.
- ◆ **Insipid rationalism** that causes us to function, for all practical purposes, as if the supernatural is of little consequence.
- ◆ **A sense of being overwhelmed** by the great needs of the Body of Christ and the mission of Christ in our generation, as we face difficulties and challenges that seem almost insurmountable.
- ◆ **Personal disappointments** from past ministries that make it difficult to trust God for a greater work today in the life of the church at large.
- ◆ **Weariness** in the midst of current personal ministries that inhibit one’s ability to reflect on the larger work of God in revival.
- ◆ **Isolation** from other leaders who have this hope and who promote it among their people.

Thankfully, there are multiple reasons to embrace and foster the hope of corporate revival with confidence. For leaders who are growing in their desire to see revival, the following seven-fold apologetic is offered. It is not intended to take the place of the hundreds of biblical promises for

revival. This apologetic is supplemental—a unique way to organize the rationale for our hope. It can buttress our consensus and galvanize our labors. At the same time, these seven arguments can double as fresh perspectives on all that corporate biblical revival encompasses.

The seven-fold apologetic includes:

1. The decisive person
2. The divine pattern
3. The dark prospects
4. The disturbing paralysis
5. The dramatic preparations
6. The distinctive praying
7. The determined people

### **THE DECISIVE PERSON**

The Scriptures promise repeatedly that God intends for His Son to be decisively at the center of everything, both at the end of history and every step along the way. In revival, God dramatically intervenes to restore a vision for, and increased responses to, Christ's rightful role as redeemer King among His people; and to more fully advance His Kingdom, right now, among the nations.

Therefore, because of God's ultimate commitment to His Son "to bring everything out at His feet for disposal" (E. Stanley Jones), we can pray and prepare for corporate revival with confidence that our hope is not in vain.

### **THE DIVINE PATTERN**

God is faithful and consistent in all His ways. He has been pleased to grant seasons of significant revival both in biblical times and in church history. As Scripture teaches, He is no respecter of persons. What He has done before, in other times and places, He is able and willing to do for our generation. The specifics may vary, but the patterns have been documented. And the promises in both Old and New Testaments are pervasive.

Therefore, because of God's commitment to His own time-honored procedures for glorifying His Son, we can pray and prepare for corporate revival with confidence that God will not disappoint us.

## **THE DARK PROSPECTS**

God loves the world and longs to see His Son exalted among all earth's peoples. But He knows the world is currently facing extraordinary crises and challenges beyond its own resources. Furthermore, nearly three billion of earth's peoples are still outside the reach of the Gospel. Revival in the church can uniquely transform the church and make her equal to the desperate needs of our times. It is a supreme hope, held out to us throughout Scripture, for a greater harvest in the world He loves.

Therefore, because of His commitment to the mission of His Son on behalf of the nations, we must pray and prepare for corporate revival.

## **THE DISTURBING PARALYSIS**

God knows that the desperate condition of the world today is due, in large measure, to the state of the church. He sees our struggles with powerlessness, brokenness, dullness, carnality, and sin. Yet, the Bible clearly teaches that God intends to bring glory to Himself through the church, not apart from it. The church, however, cannot heal her own impotency and paralysis. The shining hope for this to happen today is for God to restore us powerfully as a people, by His grace. This healing of an invalid church is called revival.

Therefore, because of God's commitment to the Body of Christ, we can pray and prepare for revival with confidence that He will not forsake His many promises to grant it.

## **THE DRAMATIC PREPARATIONS**

The tools God has provided and the doors He has opened for fulfilling the Great Commission today form nothing less than the prelude to corporate revival. God is obviously setting the stage worldwide for a whole new advance of Christ's Kingdom among millions of unbelievers. Since these multiplied preparations of resources and laborers and renewal movements are His sovereign design, He will not fail to fulfill what He has begun.

Therefore, because of God's commitment to bring to completion every good work raised up in and for His Son (Philippians 1:6), we can seek revival according to God's promises.

## **THE DISTINCTIVE PRAYING**

In unprecedented fashion, God is stirring up His people everywhere to pray biblically, specifically, increasingly, and persistently for local, national, and even worldwide revival. Beyond question, God never calls His people to pray in vain. His Word promises that He will hear, and answer fully, prayers instigated by His Spirit.

Therefore, because of His commitment to respond proactively toward all prayers made according to His will—prayers that come from, through and for His Son—we should prepare eagerly and confidently for the answer: corporate revival.

## **THE DETERMINED PEOPLE**

God is galvanizing a host of people across our nation (and worldwide), convinced by the undeniable promises of His Word that revival is a dynamic hope for the church and for Christ's Kingdom to advance among the nations. In addition, they are willing to pay any price to prepare the way for God to grant it. Not only are they a chief sign of the "impendingness" of an awakening to Christ, they are actually the first phase of it. They are the Spirit's gift to the church for this strategic hour.

Therefore, because of God's commitment to vindicate ultimately the servants of His Son who pray and prepare for corporate revival, we can rest in confident hope.

This seven-fold apologetic relates not only to a sweeping massive revival, which may be in the offing, it also encourages us to live expectantly about revival right where we live—in our own lives, and churches, and regions.

## **MAKING IT PERSONAL: READER'S REFLECTIONS**

- ◆ Which of the reasons listed (page 19) for why Christian leaders often lose confidence about the hope of revival do you identify with most?
- ◆ Are there specific steps you might take to confront any of these barriers in your life?
- ◆ Of the seven-fold apologetic for revival, which arguments do you personally find most compelling and why?
- ◆ Can you identify anyone in your circle of relationships that you could say is one of the "determined people." If so, what are some ways that you might unite with them to encourage each other to pray and prepare for revival?
- ◆ Where can I/we find common ground with other leaders in the issues covered within this section?
- ◆ Centered on Christ, can I/we find sufficient consensus about the previous section as I/we proceed to explore the next section together?
- ◆ Is there a prayer response that would be appropriate right now before I/we move to the next section? (Spend time praying.)
- ◆ Scripture for meditation: Hosea 6:1-3; Isaiah 57:14-15

# THREE KEY CLARIFICATIONS

*“Lord, I have heard of Your fame; I stand in awe of Your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our day make them known; in wrath remember mercy.”*

*Habakkuk 3:2*

In keeping with the title of Jonathan Edwards’ 1748 publication on prayer and revival, our Appeal for consensus and collaboration is equally, “An humble attempt to promote explicit agreement and visible union of all of God’s people” in the hope of a corporate awakening to Christ.

Consequently, it is important to face up to some of the critical issues over which the church has deliberated for generations in defining the essence of biblical revival. In this section, the main issues of controversy have been condensed into three “clarifications.” In the next section,

we will look at eleven “cautions” related to these issues that need to be considered. Discussing them can help foster a common meeting ground for Christian leaders on the issue of revival. The three clarifications are:

## **Sovereignty and Means**

### **Point and Process**

#### **Repentance: A “Gift of Grace” and a “Divine Command”**

## **SOVEREIGNTY AND MEANS**

Most would agree that ultimately no work of Christ is ever accomplished by human means. It is not by might, but by the Spirit of the Lord (Zechariah 4:6). God is sovereign in corporate revival. In the final analysis, human beings cannot predict its timing, precipitate its unfolding, nor preclude its appearance. None of us can extort it from God by human methods or activities, however earnest we may be.

Corporate revival comes from God alone, beyond our resources, ingenuity, or control. No human-designed formula can compel God to grant it. The church cannot plan it, stage it, or organize it. It is not ours to create; it is ours to receive. No church committee or team of revival specialists can engineer it. It may be church-obtained, but it is Christ-attained. This is the distinguishing mark between revival and a human-produced “revivalism.”

However, the “Primary Agent” of revival (the Holy Spirit) can and does make providential use of “secondary means.” Often He chooses to work in grace through our prayers, Bible studies, worship, fellowship, sacraments, and daily obedience. There may be nothing Christians can do to guarantee corporate revival at any particular moment. But we can always intensify our preparations for God’s gift, in keeping with our faith and hope in His promises.

In other words, biblically speaking, intervention calls for preparation; sovereignty encourages advocacy. God promising to be the producer of revival motivates us with expectation of revival among fellow believers. We might say: “Consecrate yourselves, because tomorrow God will work miracles among you” (Joshua 3:5). Or like Isaiah: “Take no rest, and give God no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in all the earth” (Isaiah 62:7). Or like Jesus: “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom is at hand, repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15).

## POINT AND PROCESS

Corporate revival is both a point in time as well as an ongoing process and experience in the life of the church. Frequently in Scripture, as well as recorded in church history, the motif of dramatic encounter and visitation—the rending of the Heavens, the pouring out of the Spirit—is used to describe the uniqueness of revival as a point in time. (Review other terms and metaphors listed earlier.) In this sense, corporate revival is seen as extra-ordinary; radical; the resurrection of a people exhausted, diseased, and sick with sin.

But the decisive moment of the Spirit’s reclamation of a people leads to an ongoing process of increased fruitfulness and impact in the church’s life. This may last a generation or more.

In other words, a greater intimacy with Christ leads to a stronger walk of obedience to Him. Poignant, extraordinary displays of grace will bring sustained infusions of grace into ordinary disciplines of the church. The qualitative nature of a church-wide revival has quantitative implications that are normally long-lasting. Authentic inward transformations translate into measurable outward demonstrations of the ministry of Christ through His people.

Without God’s quickening intervention (point), all of our efforts at reformation or unity (process) will ultimately turn sour or simply wither away. However, God’s visitations (point) reaffirm sound doctrine, renovate church structure, and encourage the Body of Christ to stand together in the cause of Christ (process). Revival not only supplies what is absent (point) but then multiplies what has been unleashed (process). Reviving (point) results in revivedness (process).

In fact, corporate revival need not simply fill a vacuum. In some cases it serves to quicken, intensify, enlarge, and fulfill the very best elements of current renewing activities of the Holy Spirit already underway. Accordingly, it would then reactivate spiritual gifts, encourage existing community transformations, compel emerging racial reconciliation, motivate further social reformations, and re-ignite ongoing personal evangelism and missionary endeavors.

In either case, as the church is awakened to the person, presence, and power of Jesus Christ, the society around it will be spiritually aroused, possibly resulting in a long-term “general awakening” as we have seen at least three times in our own national journey (i.e., the First, Second, and Third Great Awakenings).

## **REPENTANCE: A “GIFT OF GRACE” AND A “DIVINE COMMAND”**

Repentance presupposes grace (Acts 11:18). For individuals deserving of God’s judgment because of sin, the possibility for repentance is itself based on God’s kindness and patience. Thus, repentance is a gift from God, a means for sinful people to experience restored relationship with God based on the atoning work of Christ.

Yet, repentance is also a divine command to the church (Acts 17:30). Christ commands earnest repentance while He “knocks,” rebuking His people for illusions of self-sufficiency and lukewarmness. Although this kind of brokenness is painful, our position in Christ as believers frees us to face our sinful condition and to mourn over the ways we grieve His Spirit. With broken hearts turning from sin, we are enabled to turn to Christ for times of refreshing (Acts 3:19).

*(Other questions for clarification are incorporated into an Appendix. You may want to glance at it before going on to the “Reader’s Reflections.”)*

### **MAKING IT PERSONAL: READER’S REFLECTIONS**

- ◆ Why is it important for us to embrace both sovereignty and means? What are the pitfalls of neglecting God’s sovereignty? What are the pitfalls of neglecting the means?
- ◆ How does the knowledge that corporate revivals have a starting point encourage you? What are your favorite terms to describe such divine moments? Can you share about one you have experienced or read about?
- ◆ Are there dangers in being too point-centered? Too process-centered?
- ◆ What would it mean for leaders to unite locally in the revival process in a way that prepares us for a wonderfully surprising revival *point*?
- ◆ Are there other questions for clarification that you would like to explore in the Appendix?
- ◆ Where can I/we find common ground with other leaders in the issues covered within this section?
- ◆ Centered on Christ, can I/we find sufficient consensus about the previous section as I/we proceed to explore the next section together?
- ◆ Is there a prayer response that would be appropriate right now before I/we move to the next section? (Spend time praying.)
- ◆ Scripture for meditation: Exodus 14:10-18; Philippians 2:12-13; 2 Timothy 4:2; James 5:7-11; Acts 3:19-20

# A SERIES OF CAUTIONS

*“Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple . . . but who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears? . . . He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.”*

*Malachi 3:1-3*

Although the biblical hope of corporate revival foresees extraordinary blessings in Christ (as outlined in this document), there are also serious cautions we must heed, even dangers at certain points. It is best to recognize and clarify them now, to be ready to confront them if and when they surface.

Some of the cautions include:

## IGNORANCE

A general misapprehension of how God deals with His people in revival, due to our neglect of biblical and historical study of the topic; or due to our blindness to where and how God is currently granting seasons of renewal and awakening within the Church. This could create a temporary climate of confusion, chaos, and division in fostering the message of revival, or during an awakening itself.

## SHORTSIGHTEDNESS

Limited views of the term revival—such as it being an evangelistic campaign, the restoration of individual backsliders, the refreshing of a local congregation, or a duplication of the outward forms of a previous general awakening. This could lead us to a parochial hope that settles for less than God’s best for our generation.

## FANTASIES

Expecting God to do more than He actually has promised regarding corporate revival. This might lead us to seek manifestations of revival that have no clear biblical warrant, or to spread reports on revival that exaggerate what really happened. Our hope must be in harmony with what God has said and not our own wishful notions. Similarly, it is unhealthy to expect current outworkings of corporate revival to mimic the specific characteristics of some previous revival for another generation. Disappointment is likely.

## **SUPERFICIALITY**

The temptation to seek revival rather than to seek God; to seek phenomena rather than to seek His presence. The Scriptures and the Spirit always work together. Sound doctrine will always accompany true revival, helping Christians to engage more fully the manifest presence of Christ as the heart of revival. The revival movement cannot be allowed to become primarily testimonial or story-fed, rather than Bible-fed and God-centered.

## **IRRESPONSIBILITY**

Seeing revival as a panacea, a magic wand encouraging us to excuse ourselves from responsible obedience and follow-through in the day-to-day struggles of the church, whether God grants revival or not. Our seeking revival must be accompanied by daily obedience—whether in love, or worship, or outreach, or ministry to the poor—even as we live in anticipation of more to come. We must do what God has clearly told us to do, even while we pray and prepare for what God has promised He will do.

## **NEGATIVITY**

Overlooking all the ways God is blessing now; failing to affirm the positive aspects of current Kingdom advances; lacking gratitude to God for how many efforts of the church in our generation have effectively challenged and transformed the culture. Above all, we must avoid the tendency to depreciate current, normal, regular ministries of the Holy Spirit measurable, to some degree, in any believing Christian congregation.

## **UNIFORMITY**

Failure to appreciate the balance between continuity and diversity. The danger of division rests in our attempts to gain uniformity in a season of revival without reckoning with this fact: the outward shape of a reviving work is often based on prior conditions within each community experiencing it. These would include: pre-existing needs, the cultural context, ecclesiastical traditions, the age or temperament of those being revived, their previous spiritual experiences, their collective theological grids, and the extent of their current spiritual malaise. Even though there are common themes in every God-given revival—the centrality of Christ, confession of sin, quickening of the Scriptures, increased love, outreach to the lost—still, diversity of experiences must be expected and not be resisted.

## **IMMATURITY**

Unpreparedness for the exuberance, eagerness, excitement, and fresh expectations that normally come in seasons of revival. As was true with the awakening in New Testament Corinth, extraordinary experiences of God's power and presence run the risk of creating temporary disorder due to immaturity or carnal mismanagement of newly unleashed spiritual gifts. But a far greater danger is that fear of misplaced enthusiasms will drive people to settle for something worse (in the words of J. I. Packer): "the predictability, unexpecting apathy and tidy inertia of a congregation locked in spiritual deadness."

## **ELITISM**

Unconsciously justifying attitudes of arrogance or sectarianism on the part of those claiming to be revived. They perceive themselves to be a select group with special favors from God, spiritually superior to those not experiencing the same phenomena, or emotions, or breakthroughs, or reformations. This is another place where consensus and collaboration on revival among Christian leaders before revival comes can preempt a deadly trend. Guarding our unity must always walk hand in hand with the reformation of sound doctrine and the revitalization of spiritual life.

## **NATIONALISM**

Expecting revival to salvage and rescue a whole nation when, in fact, it is a work of God promised exclusively for the people of God. Only secondarily does it impact a surrounding community, and only at times does God-given revival spill over to transform a whole culture or nation (sometimes termed a general awakening). Our motivation must not rise from nationalistic passions, therefore, but from our desire for God to get the greatest glory through His church—even if the nation as a whole rejects this gracious hope and undergoes subsequent divine retributions (as happened with Jerusalem in AD 70 despite a revived church in its midst).

## **CONFLICT**

Entering into the euphoria and wonders of corporate revival without reckoning with increased levels of warfare with the Powers of Darkness or with persecution due to the impact of revival on unbelievers. Awakening often brings seasons of conflict and suffering.

Out of reformation and revival, the church is drawn more fully into the vortex of Christ's mission among the nations. By manifesting more of Christ to and through the church, revival arouses the antiforces—both human and spiritual—against Christ's Kingdom. Revival sends the church actively into battlefields and harvest fields as we confront, contest, and displace the works of darkness. Suffering is therefore unavoidable and must be expected.

**In Conclusion:** Are these cautions permanent obstacles to consensus and collaboration? Quite the contrary. Actually, sincere discussion by Christian leaders can significantly foster the common ground that will help prepare us to fully embrace together corporate, biblical revival as God grants it.

### **MAKING IT PERSONAL: READER'S REFLECTIONS**

- ◆ The introductory paragraph reads, "It is best to recognize and clarify [cautions] to be ready to confront them if and when they surface." What difference could this make? Why?
- ◆ Can you think of any other cautions, either from the Word of God or from your own experiences, that should be brought up?
- ◆ In Malachi 3:1, a work of God is described as beginning "suddenly." What would be your response to a *sudden* move of God next Sunday, let's say, in your worship service? How do you think others in your church would respond?
- ◆ Where can I/we find common ground with other leaders in the issues covered within this section?
- ◆ Centered on Christ, can I/we find sufficient consensus about the previous section as I/we proceed to explore the next section together?
- ◆ Is there a prayer response that would be appropriate right now before I/we move to the next section? (Spend time praying.)
- ◆ Scripture for meditation: Acts 19:1-20; 2 Thessalonians 3:1 with 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

# RESPONSES TO THE HOPE OF CORPORATE REVIVAL

*“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock . . . He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

*Revelation 3:18-22*

A recent video on revival, *Hope for a New Millennium*, featured fifteen respected leaders speaking to the hope of revival for our nation. It concluded by calling the viewer to “Fear not! Spare not! Prepare for amazing things about to happen, maybe tomorrow—and do so with full resolve and without any reserve. Prepare with total abandonment because you can trust Christ.”

It went on to challenge Christians to drive a stake in the ground. It suggests we say: “From this moment on, I sense the urgency. I am ready to embrace the hope that God sets before us. I will act as if I really believe

that God will awaken His church afresh to Christ and His Kingdom. I will get ready for corporate revival. And I will call others to join me.”

This response means reconstituting our daily walk both with Christ and with fellow Christian leaders so that everything we do is *compatible* with our hope of renewal. It means getting back to the cross, getting clean before Christ, being broken before God, repenting of everything that entangles us. As leaders, whatever we sense God needs to do to salvage our churches and ministries, we must be willing for Him to do within our own lives first . . . no matter what the cost. We must “consecrate ourselves” (Joshua 3:5). Consensus and collaboration for corporate revival will come no other way.

Fundamentally, this means recommitting ourselves not simply to do more but to seek more. As we look out over the wasteland of our culture and of the American church today, we might be tempted to ask, “Do we have a prayer?” The answer, in one sense, is: “Yes. In fact, all we have is a prayer!” In other words, prayer is the most strategic response any of us can give to our needs for an extraordinary move of God in corporate revival. As Isaiah puts it: “All of you who call on the name of the Lord, take no rest and give God no rest until . . .” (Isaiah 62:6-7). Yet, our prayers must not stand alone.

The breadth of our response to this vision, particularly on a corporate level, might best be expressed a number of ways (including prayer). These are not sequential steps. Rather, they are dimensions of ongoing preparations (and even collaborations) for corporate revival:

**PERCEIVE** — The first phase of every spiritual awakening comes as God’s Spirit awakens believers to acknowledge not only that revival is urgently needed but that the promise of revival is for them. Subsequently, such Heaven-given perception quickens the rest of our obedience.

**PRIORITIZE** — Next, we must be willing to say: “A primary hope for my generation is revival in the church. Therefore, out of my commitment to the preeminence of Christ, I will give revival high priority. With a sense of urgency I will pray and labor to that end, in every facet of my role as a Christian leader.”

**PURIFY** — In our own lives, as well as those we lead, repentance must have precedence. Everything that grieves the Holy Spirit—every sin, activity, or relationship that is incompatible with revival; every hindrance or obstacle to revival—must be confessed to God and put away. Holiness should become a shared passion. As long as we fail to repent of that which quenches, resists, or disobeys the Spirit, revival—which is preeminently an extraordinary work of the Spirit—will not be receivable. Repentance has always been a hallmark of a generation that experiences a corporate Christ-awakening. Corporate repentance, therefore, remains an evidence of a church moving toward godliness, preparing together for revival.

**PRAY** — The time has come for spiritual leaders to fully embrace the unprecedented prayer movement raised up by God already in many churches and communities across our nation—to strengthen it and become much more active leaders in it. The “Nationwide Call to Prayer to the Church in America” (see Preface) goes on to recommend a four-fold National Prayer Accord that encourages unified revival praying on daily, weekly, quarterly, and annual bases.

**PROCLAIM** — Since “faith comes by hearing,” any biblical revival must be a Word-anchored revival. Therefore, as leaders, we must become “messengers of hope” to the Body of Christ. We must promote the biblical promises for corporate revival (of which there are hundreds of passages); give reports of what God has done in the past and is doing today in revival around the world; and help God’s people envision what a revival in our generation might look like, both inside and outside the church. This message must be a predominant theme wherever and however we minister the Word of God.

**PREPARE** — Though biblical revival is preeminently a corporate experience, individually each one of us must be willing and ready to become the starting point for a fresh work of God in His church. Personally and collectively, we need to live out a discipleship that is *anticipatory*. We should “act as if” we expect God to grant us this work of His Spirit. Our obedience to a significant degree should equip and prepare us for greater manifestations of Christ in the future. This outlook will impact our discipleship programs, our worship, our social endeavors, and our labors toward theological precision, as well as ministry partnerships among spiritual leaders.

**PARTNER** — We have now come full circle in a document that appeals for “consensus and collaboration.” *The hope of impending revival requires a new era of spiritual leadership*—whether among local pastors, leaders of prayer movements, urban missionaries, denominational leaders, or others. The primary initiative, of course, should come from leaders of local churches in a given community. But there also needs to be—and increasingly are—national networks and coalitions holding forth this high priority, sharing their consensus across traditions, generations, and ethnicities. Currently, such coalitions include Mission America, Christian Community Development Association, America’s National Prayer Committee, National Association of Evangelicals, National Revival Network, Denominational Prayer Leaders Network, National Pastors Prayer Initiative, National

Network of Youth Ministries, National Association of Local Church Prayer Leaders, National Religious Broadcasters, and others.

### **In Conclusion:**

In the end, all the above responses represent different ways to heed Christ's revival call to the church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:20-21). Basically, the Spirit said to them: "Open wide the doors to Christ." As Christian leaders we must earnestly heed this call in our day.

Open wide! To Christ! Together! Freely! In hope! Let's get ready for His manifest presence. Let's welcome God's gracious gift of a fresh Christ-awakening for our generation.

To that end, let us continue, under Christ, to pursue consensus and collaboration. It will take nothing less to bring the church to the threshold of personal, local, regional, and even national revival. And such joint action must be sustained in order to shepherd the church during the seasons of corporate revival that, by God's grace, surely are not far off.\*

## **MAKING IT PERSONAL: READER'S REFLECTIONS**

- ◆ Has the case been made for the "hope of corporate revival"? If yes, what is the most persuasive concept or idea for you? If not, what could be done to strengthen the argument so as to reassure you?
- ◆ Have you personally "driven a stake" on your own that has helped the preparation for corporate revival? If so, how have you expressed this? If not, why not? What is your next step?
- ◆ What changes would you need to make in your life and ministry if this hope of corporate revival were to become more dominant in your life and ministry?
- ◆ Of the seven ongoing preparations suggested, which is currently strongest in your life? Which is weakest? How would you answer the same questions for your home church?
- ◆ Where can I/we find common ground with other leaders in the issues covered within this section?
- ◆ Centered on Christ, can I/we find sufficient consensus about the previous section to move forward together? Is there sufficient consensus on the whole Appeal document to lay a foundation for collaboration? If so, where should we begin? Is there a prayer response that would be appropriate right now?
- ◆ Scripture for meditation: 2 Chronicles 30:6-27; Acts 15:4-35; Hebrews 10:23-25

*\*To join your name with others who are committing themselves to be about revival, please go to page 37, prayerfully review the **Declaration of Intent**, and send notice of your intent to the address provided.*

## APPENDIX: SOME QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

*It is important to consider several important questions that flow out of An Urgent Appeal. These are typical of the questions that repeatedly surface when the subject of revival is presented.*

### 1. Is corporate revival really necessary?

If by “necessary” you mean that individual Christians cannot obey God, preach the gospel, pray, and make disciples as our Lord commanded, the answer is a resounding no! A national revival is not necessary for members of the Body of Christ (the church) to be fruitful, beautiful, and Christ-honoring. An individual Christian or a Church may, by God’s grace and power, live in a way that is pleasing, fruitful, and honoring to Him without macro-revivals in our land.

If by “necessary” you mean, “Does much of the Christian church of America stand in desperate need of a new work of God’s Holy Spirit across the church at large?” then the answer is a resounding yes! If we as Christians were truly sold out to God’s kingdom purposes, our families, churches, cities, and nation would be dramatically different. If organizational drift were replaced by a white-hot love for Jesus Christ, the church would begin to resemble the beautiful bride that Christ died to make her.

Revivals are not God’s only means for advancing the kingdom of Christ. But when the church is found wanting, like much of the American church today is, then revival is not only desirable but necessary and indeed urgent.

### 2. If corporate revival does not come, should the church despair?

Not at all. How can those who know and love Christ as their Lord ever despair? We should recognize that judgment may well affect much of what is being done by the church in our time, yet we must still rejoice that “our names are written in the book.” Even sorrow and chastisement can be mixed with joy through the filling of the Spirit. It must be understood that revival is never a panacea for the church. It is, however, a sovereign interruption that brings health and greater blessing to the work of the church.

### 3. If God is the sole author of corporate revival, then what is the point in becoming informed and exercised about this subject?

To say that we do not *cause* God to bless us is not to say that God does not bless us through biblically ordained *means* that must be used to accomplish His sovereign purpose. It is an unshakable truth taught throughout Scripture that we are utterly dependent upon God for all life, both physical and spiritual. However, we are never to passively wait for God to bless us, but rather we ought to pursue His blessings in complete dependence upon Him as the author and giver of every good and perfect gift (cf. James 1:17). Because He is such a great and awesome God, nothing is “too hard for the Lord”(Gen. 18:14). Our times are desperate, the hour is late, judgment clearly hangs over us, but no obstacle is too great for God.

#### **4. Where is the Holy Spirit when there is no revival?**

Jonathan Edwards might well have been the greatest theologian of true revival in church history. He wrote: “Though there be a more constant influence of the Spirit attending His ordinances, yet the way in which the greatest things have been done has been by remarkable effusions, at special seasons of mercy.” Does the present prolonged delay of “remarkable effusions” indicate that the Holy Spirit has ceased to work? Are we at a significant disadvantage when revival tides are out? Our answer has a great bearing on how we live during those times when true revivals are scarce.

We are best served by understanding several basic truths revealed in Scripture about the present ministry of the Holy Spirit. We have the promise of Christ that the Spirit indwells His disciples (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Our Lord refers to the Spirit as “the helper,” a word that emphasizes the Spirit’s direct role in encouraging, helping, and counseling. The Holy Spirit assures believers that they are the children of God (Romans 8:14-16) and that God loves them (Romans 5:5). He also assures them that Jesus indwells their lives with His presence (1 John 4:13) and that God’s power is at work in them (Galatians 3:5). He makes Christ known to believers experientially (1 Corinthians 2:10-12) and assures them of final victory in Christ on the last day (2 Corinthians 5:5; Romans 8:11, 15-17, 23).

Further, believers have peace given by the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17; cf. again John 14:15-19). This “peace” is a divinely given sense of well-being and contentment in all circumstances. The Holy Spirit floods believers’ minds with the truth of God (Ephesians 1:17-18) and convicts them of their need to change and grow in the grace of God (Romans 8:5-9). He also gives believers gifts for spiritual ministry (1 Corinthians 12:4-6; Romans 12:6-8).

The absence of “remarkable effusions” does not mean that any of these ministries of the Holy Spirit are hindered in any way. As important as it is to pray for true revival, believers must never lose sight of this simple fact—God is actively working in every believer and in the church whether or not He grants wide-scale awakening. Believers should give thanks for the Spirit’s powerful present ministry while continuing to ask that God “rend the heavens and come down” (Isaiah 64:1) in a remarkable season of revival.

#### **5. But what part do we actually have in corporate revival?**

Divine freedom never negates human responsibility. We can and must act in obedience to God. The mystery of the seeming tension between divine freedom and human responsibility must not be solved by rational syllogisms and logical inferences. We must obey as if everything depended upon them and pray knowing that the results depend upon God. Therefore, the first place to start in seeking God for revival is by removing all personal hindrances to real revival. Our personal sins grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and our collective sin quenches His work among us (1 Thessalonians 5:19). God is not pleased with our sins, and we must confess them and forsake them. If deadness and lack of real blessing characterize our assemblies, we have need to come to grips with the fact that the reason lies within us (Psalm 32).

We must also pray. We have biblical examples as well as biblical and historical precedent for such prayer. The divine commandment of God to His people is to pray. Both personally and

corporately, believers should plead with God to reveal lukewarmness of their condition (Revelation 3:16).

Who of us can read Revelation 2-3 and not conclude that our Lord is speaking these penetrating words to the contemporary church? Who would not agree that it is we who “have forsaken our first love” (Revelation 2:4) and we who “have a reputation of being alive, but . . . are dead” (Revelation 3:1). The counsel of Jesus to the lukewarm congregation in Revelation 3 is: “I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see” (3:18).

If we would spend time getting a true picture of our need—“wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked” (3:17)—we would run to Christ and ask Him to enter the door of our church afresh (3:20). The picture of Christ outside the church is a haunting image of a present reality.

#### **6. Can I experience *personal* revival even if God is not pleased to send a great revival to multitudes?**

There is no reason whatsoever for any believer to remain in sin or to live a life of frustration and spiritual deadness. At the same time, suggesting that there are formulas that, if followed, will inevitably bring revival is a prescription for massive failure and profound frustration. The believer should always confess sin, seek after God with the whole heart, pray for the empowering of the Holy Spirit, and implicitly trust Christ every day. As we draw near to God, He has promised to draw near to us. However, to put demands upon God regarding how He must bless or use our lives is unbiblical.

#### **7. Does our understanding of the future and of the coming of Christ have anything to do with the urgency of our concern for revival?**

Christians have agreed on the essential elements regarding the biblical doctrine of the end times for two thousand years—for example, that Christ will personally return at the end of this present age, that the resurrection will take place at this coming, that the judgment will follow, and that heaven or hell will be the ultimate destiny of every person who has ever lived.

At the same time, there have also been areas of disagreement regarding some of the details related to the scenario of the end. The three major debated views are known as premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism. There are still Christians who hold each position today, and each interpretation has experienced a period of ascendancy during different eras of church history, especially in America. While it is important to note that no major historic confession of faith or creed of the Christian church has ever made these debated points a test for genuine orthodoxy, it is clear that these views have exercised a major influence upon the church’s interest in revival over the last three centuries.

*Premillennialists* view the Apocalypse in a future sense and believe that the events described in Revelation are yet to happen. However, prophecies of darkening world conditions do not preclude expecting revivals from God. In times like ours, when spiritual declension threatens to slow world evangelism, revival can still be seen in the Premillennialist system as an aid to complete the mandate given to the church to “go into all the world and preach the gospel.”

*Amillennialists* view the present church age as the fulfillment of the millennial period referred to in Revelation 20. They also take a number of the prophecies which futurists limit to Israel and apply them to the church. In this system, revival could simply be seen as a greater manifestation of the Holy Spirit's ongoing Kingdom work.

*Postmillennial* thought differs from the other two major views in that it asserts that Christ's return will follow the period of "millennial blessing." Often this view has been satirized by those who accuse postmillennialists of believing that "things will get better and better until Christ returns." However, postmillennialists hold a strong hope for revival, not because they believe that world conditions will progressively improve, but rather because they believe world conditions do not have a determinative role in what a sovereign God might be pleased to do in revival at any point in human history. The darker the moment the more glorious might be the light of reformation and revival. Thus, this system can easily accommodate the idea of revival and apostasy running side by side until the day of the Lord.

One does not need to adopt any one of the above schools of prophetic interpretation to believe that "hope" for a great revival is actually grounded in Scripture itself. The vast majority of biblical commentators believe that no one view of prophecy necessarily precludes the possibility of real revival, either locally or internationally. Prophetic views need never diminish calls to prayer and hope for revival.

## **8. What is the nature of Spiritual Warfare during corporate revival?**

The invasion of the Holy Spirit into a corporate body of believers in revival is nothing less than an all-out assault of the kingdom of God upon the forces of the kingdom of darkness. These demonic forces may be manifested through various Satanic strongholds, deceptions, and hindrances established in the hearts and minds of God's people through their disobedience, unbelief, and compromised allegiance to Christ.

We are told by John the Apostle that "the Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). This is no less true than when the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7) is poured out upon His people in revival and upon the unregenerate in a spiritual awakening. Therefore, revival is a true power encounter. There is a collision of kingdoms where captives are liberated and new recruits are called forth from death and bondage to serve and give homage to Christ the King (Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:13).

Our prime responsibility during these times of heightened spiritual combat in revival is not to develop an undue focus and fascination with our enemy and his counterfeits, but to thoroughly know the true characteristics and qualities of a genuine work of the Spirit of God. It is here, in the midst of the heightened activity of the Spirit of God, that the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, is our most effective weapon (Ephesians 6:17). In any war there will be wounds and casualties. But, we can reduce the damage in the next great revival battle by preparing ourselves, like the apostle Paul, in the art of kingdom warfare "in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11).

*AN URGENT APPEAL*

# DECLARATION OF INTENT

IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, the central focus in every God-given corporate revival . . .

With the growing conviction **that a general moral and spiritual awakening to Christ is the desperate need of our churches and of our nation as a whole . . .**

Out of an increasing sense of urgency **for Christian leaders and churches in America to find new levels of consensus and collaboration concerning the biblical nature and Hope of corporate revival . . .**

With personal determination **to no longer simply be for corporate revival, but rather to be wholeheartedly about the work of appealing to both God and to my fellow believers for corporate revival . . .**

**And realizing my own perpetual need for a fresh work of Christ in personal revival even as I seek corporate revival . . .**

WITH GREAT HOPE IN GOD, I solemnly join with other churches and leaders **across America** in this **Declaration of Intent . . .**

- ◆ I will PERCEIVE . . . Because God has awakened me to the urgent need and multitude of biblical promises for Christ-centered revival among Christians and churches, I will continue building my vision for this through Scripture, study, prayer, and interaction with believers similarly awakened. *And I will appeal to others to do the same.*
- ◆ I will PRIORITIZE . . . Out of my commitment to the supremacy of Christ in His Church, I will reorder my walk with Him and my ministry for Him, so that I am found to be constantly living for corporate revival in my church, and in our nation. *And I will appeal to others to do the same.*
- ◆ I will PURIFY . . . Because corporate revival is an extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit, I will repent as a way of life, confessing and turning from everything that grieves, quenches, resists, or disobeys the ministry of the Spirit. *And I will appeal to others to do the same.*
- ◆ I will PRAY . . . In concert with the groundswell of prayer for awakening and revival across the Body of Christ in this generation, I will intercede (both alone and with others) for corporate revival as a key dimension of my daily walk with Christ. *And I will appeal to others to do the same.*
- ◆ I will PROCLAIM . . . Since biblical revival must be anchored in God's Word, and because faith for corporate revival comes by hearing the promises and discovering the ways of God in revival, I will let this message of repentance and hope dominate my conversations with and ministry to Christians and churches where God places me. *And I will appeal to others to do the same.*
- ◆ I will PREPARE . . . Since I expect God to ultimately answer our prayers, fulfill His promises, and grant corporate revival to Christians and churches in America, I will start living now, in all areas of discipleship and church activity, in anticipation of and full readiness for the spiritual awakening to Christ for which we wait. *And I will appeal to others to do the same.*
- ◆ I will PARTNER . . . Because the hope of impending corporate revival requires a new era of consensus and collaboration among leaders and churches in America, I will be proactive in encouraging associations, networks, and coalitions (especially at the local community level) among believers committed to the hope of a spiritual awakening to Christ. *And I will appeal to others to do the same.*

To join your name with others who are committing themselves to be about revival, please go to *An Urgent Appeal* web pages: [www.urgentappeal.net](http://www.urgentappeal.net), and click on the icon indicating the *Declaration of Intent*. If you are unable to use the web, please send notice of your intent by writing to:

*An Urgent Appeal*  
c/o Harvest Prayer Ministries  
455 Springhill Drive  
Terre Haute, IN 47802

**For more information, contact: [www.urgentappeal.net](http://www.urgentappeal.net)**



