

Personal Revival



By Dave Butts

Like a mighty wave rolling across the Church around the world, comes the cry from millions of believers, “Oh God, send a revival!” Like no time in recent history, the Church is becoming aware of its own desperate condition and the even more critical needs of our cultures. It is reassuring to know that for once, the Church is not looking to another program or strategy to try to change the world. We’re recognizing that it is going to take heaven-sent revival. Taking our cue from past revivals, Christians are praying for God to move in significant new ways in the Church. It is these praying Christians who will experience in their own lives the first fruits of revival.

What is it we are praying for when we ask God to send revival? To fully answer that would comprise a book and even then perhaps prove to be inadequate. Christian scholars are continuously debating the nature of revival. But praise God, though we disagree on its nature, there is near unanimity on our desperate need for it. Some of my favorite short definitions of revival are:

- “. . . a movement of the Holy Spirit bringing about a revival of New Testament Christianity in the church of Christ and its related community.” J. Edwin Orr
- “Revival is a community saturated with God.” Duncan Campbell
- “Revival is the Church falling in love with Jesus all over again.” Vance Havner

Perhaps the one that best fits my own understanding is from Stephen Olford, who says, “Revival is ultimately Christ Himself, seen, felt, heard, living, active, moving in and through His Body on earth.” True revival is not man-centered but Christ-centered. It is not about a type of music or special experience, but a fresh revelation of Christ in the midst of His people—people often grown sleepy or slow-moving and desperately in need of a fresh awakening touch from their Savior.

Much has been written on what happens when revival touches a church, community or nation. Foundational to each of those spheres of revival is a fresh touch from Christ upon an individual. J. Edwin Orr speaks of those different spheres this way: “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.”

What would it mean for an individual to experience revival? It is an important question for us to consider. Though we may long for and pray for revival for the whole Church, we certainly want to make sure that revival could come to an individual apart from the corporate aspect. Dare we begin to ask God for revival in our own lives?

I believe there is very clear correlation between what happens when a church experiences revival and when an individual

Christian experiences revival. The heart of revival is when Christ shows up for church. It is when we begin to experience what we already know is true biblically and theologically concerning the presence of Christ. One of the major tenets of our faith is that when believers in Jesus gather, He Himself is present in a very special way in their midst. Jesus said, "for where two or three come together in my Name, there am I with them" (Mt.18:20). We believe His words concerning His presence as we gather. Yet Sunday after Sunday in the majority of our churches, we go through the motions without a real awareness of Jesus actually being there with us. In revival, there is an awakening to His presence. Biblical truths that had perhaps grown stale are suddenly infused with new life. The love and life of Jesus are lived out in fresh new ways as the Church gathers.

This same experience ought to mark the life of the individual Christian as we begin to experience revival personally. Colossians 1:27 says, "Christ in us, the hope of glory." Is there a more astonishing verse in Scripture—that the Son of God has actually come to take up residence within the individual Christian? Yet we often view such a verse as dry biblical truth. It somehow fails to excite or thrill the soul. Even more telling—it fails to change the way we live.

What a difference it would make in our lives if we truly lived out the truth of Christ in us, the hope of glory; walking daily with Jesus—aware of His presence, His love, His strength, and His direction. Rather than asking the question in abstract, "What would Jesus do?" we would often throughout each day directly ask our indwelling Lord, "Jesus, what are you doing?" What a revival of changed life, character, and witness we would see among believers.

The 19th century Quaker author, Hannah Whitall Smith writes,

Dear friend, I make the glad announcement to thee that the Lord is in thy heart. Since the day of thy conversion He has been dwelling there, but thou hast lived on in ignorance of

it. Every moment during all that time might have been passed in the sunshine of His sweet presence, and every step have been taken under His advice. But because thou knew it not, and did not look for Him there, thy life has been lonely and full of failure. But now that I make the announcement to thee, how wilt thou receive it? Art thou glad to have Him? Wilt thou throw wide open every door to welcome Him in? Wilt thou joyfully and thankfully give up the government of thy life into His hands? Wilt thou consult Him about everything, and let Him decide each step for thee, and mark out every path? Wilt thou invite Him into thy innermost chambers, and make Him the sharer in thy most hidden life? Wilt thou say "Yes" to all His longing for union with thee, and with a glad and eager abandonment hand thyself and all that concerns thee over into His hands? If thou wilt, then shall thy soul begin to know something of the joy of union with Christ.

On a practical level, how can we begin to walk in this intimate relationship with Jesus? Years ago I heard Argentine evangelist Juan Carlos Ortiz say, "to walk in the Spirit is to be continually conscious of Christ in you." One of the major goals of my life has been to narrow the gaps of unawareness. It is so easy to get caught up in the activities of daily life—even in service to Jesus, and forget the awesome fact of the indwelling Christ.

Scriptures are so clear that our lives are hidden with Christ, that we are seated with Christ, and that we are to follow him. Paul would go so far as to say, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ living in me"(Gal.2:20). True spiritual awakening begins on a personal basis as we begin to live out daily the truth of God's Word, "Christ in us, the hope of glory!"

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