

The Prevailing Prayer Meeting

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer and the use of appropriate means in securing revivals of religion.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 28:20, Luke 11:9-10, John 14:13-14, Acts 1:14, Romans 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 5:16

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "Revival and Evangelism"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the critical role of prayer in fostering revivals of religion, drawing from the example of the early church's prayer meeting in Jerusalem before Pentecost. He argues that genuine revivals are not miraculous but are the result of earnest prayer, preaching, and the use of appropriate means. Finney warns against the misconception that revivals occur without human effort, asserting that prayer must be specific, united, and fervent to invoke God's presence and action. He encourages Christians to actively engage in prayer and evangelism, highlighting historical revivals as evidence of the power of collective prayer and action. Ultimately, Finney calls for unity among believers to promote a wave of salvation across nations.

Transcript

Preached September 4, 1859 - Glasgow, Scotland

A sermon on the importance of prayer as an appropriate and indispensable means of securing and promoting revivals of religion, with important related observations from the great revivals of New York, Albany, Rochester, Boston, etc. This message was re-introduced to the Christian public through the research efforts of Richard A. G. Dupuis. The following version was edited by Jonathan Duttweiler to make it more easily understandable for the modern reader.

On the occasion of the reopening of Blackfriars St. Congregational Chapel, on Sabbath, Sept. 4, the Rev. Professor Finney, president of the Oberlin College, U.S., author of Lectures on Revivals, etc., preached to overflowing and deeply interested audiences in the forenoon and evening. In the forenoon, he discoursed on the The Prevailing Prayer Meeting, spoken of in Acts 1:1-14, viewed in connection with the results which followed on the day of Pentecost, the account of which he read as contained in the second chapter of that book.

I propose to remark this morning on the first portion of the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, relating to the meeting which, in obedience to Christ's injunction, was held in Jerusalem, where the apostles and other followers of Jesus continued with one accord in prayer and supplication till the day of Pentecost, when, in answer to their prayers, as recorded in the second chapter, they were blessed with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

4 And, being assembled together with [them], commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, [saith he], ye have heard of me.

5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James [the son] of Alphaeus, and Simon Zealots, and Judas [the brother] of James.

14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

Remarks

In speaking from these words, I remark, first, that when the gospel was first introduced into the world, it naturally required to be attested by miracles. Those who were sent of God to make the new revelation to

man, both under the Old Testament dispensation and the New, he bore witness to, by giving them the power, in his name, to work miracles. This was necessary, because he claimed to introduce a revelation of God's will to the world, and God thus attested their credentials and character and mission, by giving them the power of working miracles. From this fact, and some others I need not name, there has been a tendency in the church to regard the conversions which followed these miracles as being themselves miraculous. Indeed, revivals of religion have been very commonly spoken of as if they were miraculous things, and this revival on the day of Pentecost has been looked on and spoken of as a miraculous thing altogether.

This idea has prevailed to such an extent that it seems, from what we hear and see, all religious movements and appearances are credited or discredited by many persons in proportion as they seem or seem not to have connection with the use of appropriate means. It is common to hear people, when speaking of a revival of religion, saying, It must be a work of God, for it is not connected with any means as we can see they seem to have no feeling of regard to the connection of means and ends. If, in any case, a religious movement occurs in connection with any means designed to secure such results, and, so far as we can see, naturally calculated to secure such results, certain persons are disposed to discredit this as being merely human invention and something of man.

It is common to hear men of certain views commend certain religious movements to the confidence of the public as being undoubtedly the work of God, because they are altogether out of the relation of means and ends, having no connection with any human agency in producing them. They occur not under any revealed law of human or divine conduct. They are altogether exceptional to the law of order and instrumentality appearing everywhere else in the works and ways of God. Therefore they are of God. This is the wonderful logic and theology of many. In plain English, they are miracles. If reported revivals of religion are connected with human efforts designed to secure such a result, why, then, they are only of man, and not at all of God. In some instances where meetings have been appointed to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it has been expressly said, when such notice was given, that the meetings are not appointed to get up a revival. The fact is, peculiar views of the sovereignty of God, and of man's passivity in regeneration, betray certain persons into the great error of regarding all real revivals as miracles.

To what extent this prevails among you, I know not, but during forty years experience I have constantly had occasion to remark it. Now, let me say, this idea is a great and dangerous mistake. It is as contrary to the Bible as anything can be; for God has there promised the very blessings which we are to receive under the Christian dispensation, and says, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them. This is a truth, and ought to be honestly and fairly acted upon in all religious efforts. It is often taught in scripture that means must be used; the whole introduction of the Christian dispensation, and all the movements connected therewith, clearly bring out this as a necessary condition, and it is marvelous that men who profess to receive the Bible, should dissociate religious movements with appropriate means to secure such results. The Bible never recognizes or countenances such an idea; and furthermore, it is contrary to the order of God's works. Both in the natural and the spiritual world he has connected means and ends; this is the law of his universal kingdom. It is plainly so in the natural world; and if an investigation were made it would be found just as plain in the spiritual world.

I remark, again, that this is an eminently dangerous mistake, because it discourages efforts to convert the world. Suppose, when the apostles were told to go out, and Christ added, Lo, I am with you always, suppose they had taken up the idea that, to attempt to convert the world by any direct effort designed to

produce that effect that to attempt to promote a revival of religion in the world would be to take the work out of the hands of God, to get up some human movement; why, what would have been the consequence? But no, they went forward with their work, knowing Christ was with them; for he said, Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. What did Christ mean by this? He wanted it to be understood by his disciples for their encouragement, that all the divine help they needed was at their hand, and that they might rely upon it. Remember I am with you always, to give effect to the means I send you to use. Suppose they had overlooked this that they had forgotten to go and make efforts to convert the world, and formed such a notion of Gods sovereignty as to resolve on waiting till he converted the world; or, suppose they had gone on and forgotten that they were dependent on Christ's Holy Spirit, and suppose they had adopted the idea that he was not always with them, and everywhere, but only at certain times; what would have been the result, would they have succeeded? Christ said I am with you always and everywhere; they were to go and open their mouths and hold up their hands and hearts to heaven, and he would continue to anoint them, and thus they might succeed in accomplishing the thing they were sent to accomplish. They were to understand that conversion was no miracle. Although miracles were by them to be used as one means of conviction, yet, in converting the world, they were to be wise in adapting means to that end. Further, they are to remember that though conversion is not miracle, it is the faction conditional on the supernatural illumination of the Holy Spirit. The light of nature is sufficient to impose obligation, but as a matter of fact does not secure obedience. So the Bible, or the preached or written Word, can sufficiently enlighten to take away all excuses for sin, but not enough to turn the stubborn will to God. For this reason they needed, and for this reason Christ promised, his presence in the supernatural illumination of his Spirit to give saving effect to their teachings and efforts to convert the world.

But another danger of this mistaken idea is, that it fosters the neglect of appropriate means. If it be true that religious movements which claim to be of God, are to be credited in proportion as they are not connected with, and so far as we can see, not the result of appropriate means, why then use the appropriate means? Why should preachers adapt their preaching, and aim to secure the conversion of their hearers? Why, with that idea they might preach almost anything. If a sermon be preached calculated to convert, people regard the result as human; but if something is preached not designed nor calculated to convert, then they say That is of God there were no appropriate means, it came upon us we know not how. How easy it is to see that this erroneous idea fosters a spirit of neglect a spirit of carelessness, as to whether the means be appropriate or inappropriate, throwing all the responsibility upon Gods sovereignty. There was once an old minister wished me to let a certain young man preach, and when I inquired whether he would preach anything suited to the occasion, as it was in the midst of a revival, Oh, said he, no matter; there is no connection between means and ends in spiritual things he will preach the truth. I shall not ask him to preach, I said, unless I know he can preach what is needed, and not divert the attention of the people from the great object which should be placed before them. I could not think it my duty, in the circumstances, to honor the old gentleman. I do not believe in this disconnection of means and ends. The Holy Spirit, when he converts men, directs them to something calculated to convert them, and anything else distracts their attention, prevents their intelligent action, and prevents their conversion.

This idea to which I have alluded is standing greatly in the way of the conversion of the world; and if the Church would go back to the promise of Christ when he commissioned her for it was not the apostles merely whom he commissioned to go and disciple all nations, saying, Lo, I am with you always if Christians would plan themselves upon that promise, and seek to carry out their Lords command in its true spirit, using the appropriate means for the accomplishment of the object, it would not be long before a different state of things existed in the world.

This leads me to inquire what are the appropriate means? And I remark here, that one of these is special prayer for the object. Not the kind of prayer offered, in which the mind is manifestly not set upon or expecting anything in particular, and when the person praying asks promiscuously for anything or everything from Dan to Beersheba, but special prayer, and the prayer of faith, which has been one of the universal antecedents of a revival of religion since God owned the world. The whole history of the Church all Gods dealings since the world began, and since the Christian era was introduced bring out this fact, that when the Spirit has been poured out upon the Church, special prayer has been made for that object. In the case recorded in the Acts, the brethren, without indulging in vain speculations, and throwing all the blame of the sin of the world on God, met for special prayer with reference to a definite object.

Again, preaching of the word, exhortation, and personal conversation were, and are the appropriate and indispensable means of securing the conversion of souls. We find Peter, in his sermon, exhorting the people to save themselves from this untoward generation. This is what he did, and what did his hearers do? They received his word. There must be special prayer, preaching and conversation, and means employed to secure the desired end; and what they in those days expected, are you not to expect? What did Christ mean by the parable of the feast, when the servants were ordered to God into the highways, and the streets, and lanes, and compel them to come in? He plainly intended to enjoin it upon the whole Church to go to this work of personal visitation and effort to bring sinners to Gods house, and to Christ. To lay aside their indolence and their fear of man, and to go to the unconverted wherever they can be found, and urge them with all possible importunity, to attend to the gospel call. Compel them to come in. We must no longer yield obedience to that devils call of propriety and politeness that forbids us to personally address others on the question of salvation. Blessed be God, the churches in America and in this country, I trust, are better understanding the application of this parable, and of the Masters instructions, than for some generations past. We find that to merely build churches in their neighborhood is not enough. We must literally go to them and use a kind of moral compulsion to get them to the house of God, and when this can not be secured we must preach to them where we can.

But these means are always used where there is really a revival of religion. I will now make a few remarks on the antecedents and accompaniments of this particular revival the means used in this case. Here we have a prayer meeting a prevailing prayer meeting, which secured the object, the desired result.

First, there was special prayer for a particular object. Christ had told them to wait at Jerusalem till the Holy Spirit was poured out, which should take place not many days hence. Here was special prayer for a definite object, and that object the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. This is the way to pray, if you expect the Holy Ghost to be poured out. Come together with a definite object, and let that object be sought in earnest prayer. O what mistakes are made on this point! Not long since, I attended a meeting held to pray for a revival of religion. I expected to hear some brother called on to pray for the outpouring of the Spirit. One man prayed and prayed for a quarter of an hour, but he never so much as once asked for the outpouring of the Spirit; and while he prayed for almost everything else, he failed to ask the very thing which we had come together for. People sometimes meet together for prayer, and ask for everything in the world except the very thing which they have come to present to God.

Let us look at another feature of this prayer meeting. I said they a definite object, and that object the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. They manifestly were greatly in earnest they greatly desired this object their hearts were deeply set on it; they wrestled for the blessing; and there was an energy and power about there prayer.

This was a union prayer meeting; all the disciples seem to have been present. They were all united and determined; their hearts were not alienated; there was union in prayer; all were united in one object. There was no person to remonstrate against their petition being granted; all were desirous to have this object accomplished.

Again, there was faith or expectation. It was manifest that they expected the blessing. They laid hold upon God, and expected the blessing. Why should they not? Ay, why should they not? For Christ had told them Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. But how can we pray in that way? Have we any such ground for expectation? They had a ground, because they had the Savior's express promise; but have we any such promise? The apostles had a great many prayer meetings after that one; what do you suppose they did? Did they stumble at the thought that they had no further promise, and feel in the dark as to whether or not the influence of the Spirit would continue to be poured out? No; for he who promised that they should receive the Spirit not many days hence, said also Go and disciple all nations, and Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the World. The meaning of this promise was everywhere you go, remember that I am with you; there lay hold on my strength, there believe on me, and I will manifest my presence. Is that not a fair interpretation? And has not the Church, therefore, always the promise of Christ to be with them in all their efforts to build up his kingdom, and to evangelize the world? So I understood it, ever since I was converted; I have acted on this principle for nearly forty years, and never in once instance have I seen it to fail. When the people of God have laid hold of this principle, he has poured out a blessing in many instances, till there was not room enough to receive, and it has overflowed towns and cities. Let anyone take the Bible, and do as a lawyer would in dealing with any legal question see what that means. I have seen the Scriptures quoted at times in such a manner, in support of certain opinions, that I have thought if a lawyer, in seeking to establish any point, were to quote so loosely and with such manifest latitude, he would be laughed out of a court of justice. After I was converted, I used to think it would be well if people would take the Scriptures and search them as a lawyer would, inquiring, what is the meaning of this? Take this passage, Go and disciple all nations, and, Lo, I am with you always. What is the meaning of that promise? Carry that before a judge in a court of law. Ask the judge what that means? Here is a command to do a certain thing, with the addition immediately following, And lo, I am with you always. What does that mean? Why did he say that? Take that, as a lawyer would and lay it before a court, and I engage that any court in Scotland would declare the meaning to be as though Christ had said You may always expect me, if you believe, to second your efforts; you may always expect the Holy Spirit to be poured out on you, and give effect to your honest efforts.

But this leads me to another point. Expectation, I have said, was characteristic of this prayer meeting of the disciples, and I have said we have just now as good reason to have expectation and faith as they had.

Again, observe, they gave up their time. Ah, some of you are business men. What is to become of my business? say some, when a daily prayer meeting is proposed. I don't know how I can afford to attend a daily prayer meeting! But the people who attended this meeting gave up their business; indeed, they had no business but Christ's, and that was about a great matter. There were women present at that meeting, and I suppose they had children. Some women could not find time to attend such meetings. It would be out of the question with some to have a daily prayer meeting out of the question to have such a thing as a revival and out of the question to use the appropriate means. These people cheerfully give up their time, and this was a great matter. God emptied out their worldly mindedness. It was the work of all, the business of all and wherefore cannot we put forward such efforts at any rate?

Again, there was mutual agreement with them. They were all present at the meeting; none stayed away and remonstrated again it. Suppose a notice should be given in the public prints that the people of Glasgow were requested to come together to invite the Queen to visit their city. Well, suppose there should be present only some half-dozen men who could not stay but a few minutes or perhaps a dozen, or twenty, or more, and that the great mass of the people paid no attention whatever to the matter. When this made known to the Queen, she would say The people of Glasgow don't want me. They were publicly invited to come to the meeting yet only some fifteen or twenty attended, and waited but a few minutes, during which they transacted some formal business and made out a petition. I cannot go, for the great mass of the people remonstrate against it. Well, there is a prayer meeting. Public notice is given. Let us seek the Lord Jesus to visit us with the powerful operations of his Spirit. How many attend? only a few; the great mass of the people are not present. When the Lord sees this, he may say, the people object to it they do not want me to come. But in this case the whole of the disciples were present about 120. They were all agreed on the one great point, and all united in the petition. Let this be done in any place, and I engage you will get an answer, as certain as God is true. Only hold a prayer meeting like this one, and you are sure to get an answer.

In this meeting there was an agreement in regard to what they wanted, and when they wanted it, and they were willing to make any sacrifice which might be necessary, even to their own lives, which were on the altar, given up to promote the work. This was plainly the spirit of the meeting.

But another characteristic of it was mutual confidence. They did not say, There is Peter, I cannot hear him pray, I have not much confidence in him; or, There is John, I have not much confidence in him, I do not like to hear him pray. A good while ago, I attended a prayer meeting, when one said to me, Do you hear such a one pray? I guess no one wants to hear him pray. This spirit of distrust and want of brotherly confidence was not at the meeting to which our attention is now called. Such a feeling as this is the ruin of prayer meetings. When a person gets up to pray, some one says, Perhaps he is a good man, but I don't like to hear him pray. Oh, it is death to a prayer meeting, when there is want of confidence! They must come together as little children. This disposition to be captious, was not at the disciples meeting. One prayed and another prayed. Their state of mind was one of great simplicity, and strong love and confidence in each other. Let this always characterize a prayer meeting, and it is sure to prevail.

But another characteristic of this prayer meeting was perseverance. They held on, ah, most important peculiarity this! They held on from day to day, held on and carried out the condition that they were to hold fast, and give God no rest till he accomplished what they had assembled to ask him for. This is not like a great many prayer meetings, where the people can take so little time in the exercises. The fact is, they have no earnestness.

In this meeting there was no particular order established, no strait-jacket put on it, so that Mr. So-and-so was asked, Will you read a chapter? and another, Will you pray? and so on. Some are ever objecting to whatever they are unaccustomed to. We are not accustomed to that, say some. But probably you are not aware how much they deceive themselves when they only do things they are accustomed to do. In that prayer meeting, I presume, nobody was taking the lead of it, so much as to keep it in a strait-jacket. They held their hearts and hands up, waiting for Gods grace, till down came the blessing. By this I do not mean to encourage any fanatical departure from a proper form of worship. I was once invited to a prayer meeting, certain persons had appointed to pray. The Rev. Mr. So-and-so to do one thing, Bishop So-and-so another. I said it would amount to nothing. Why, they replied, they are going to keep it up. You will see, I again observed, that it will amount to nothing. There is too much formality. Instead of giving

themselves up to the spirit of prayer, and letting anybody pray, all is conducted in such a strait, formal manner that it will amount to nothing. This meeting was continued for several weeks, I believe, and it was then given up, and it will always be so where there is this formality.

Another peculiarity in this meeting of the disciples was that there was, no doubt, great fervency in their prayer. That is the last one I will mention here. There was effectual fervent prayer. All the circumstances show there was divine earnestness in it, great earnestness and great wrestling in their petitions.

This leads me to notice some mistakes that are made. One of these is that this revival (on the day of Pentecost) was itself a miracle. We should always distinguish between a miracle as a sign and attestation on the part of God that these men, the apostles, were his servants and that what they said was his word, and the revival that occurred as a consequence. Why, this miracle was only among the necessary means of promoting a revival, simply because it was not then established in the world that what those men said was Gods Word. It must be first established that these men were authorized messengers sent from God to publish his will. This was the reason why the miracle was wrought. The miracle was thus only part of the antecedents or accompaniments of the revival. Here, for instance, was the Spirit of God poured out, accompanied with the gift of tongues, which was a miracle, showing that the apostles were authorized messengers of God, and that what they said was from God. But what of the conversions which followed? What did they consist in? Were they miracles? The simple account is, that the men received the word of Peter. He preached a sermon calculated to promote such a result as was promote. They were pricked in their hearts. He told them what to do and they did it, under the teaching of the Spirit. The revival was not a miracle, and we should lay aside the idea that this or any other revival was a miracle.

Another mistake is that such revivals are no longer to be expected. I do not mean revivals accompanied with the gift of tongues, because the apostle said these should cease, but why should not similar revivals be expected now, so far as the conversion of souls is concerned?

I have known Christian men to give themselves up to prayer with singleness of heart, and the Spirit has been poured out with a power to remove everything before it, producing a movement which has spread over a whole town or district of country, and resulted in the conversion of great multitudes of people. In fact, the antecedents, accompaniments, and results of revivals are always substantially the same as in the case before us, excepting that in this case there was miraculous interposition for the purpose I have named. Let me tell you an incident that happened in the state of New York, near the line of Massachusetts. Some ladies had come over to New York, and were much struck with the progress of the revival movement there, particularly with some instances of remarkable conversions that had occurred in the case of individuals after special prayer made by Christians. They asked me a good many questions, and among other things, wanted to know if I really thought it of any use for them to pray for a revival in their place. I related some facts to encourage them and told them to go home and agree, together with other ladies of their acquaintance, to observe a closet concert of prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They went home, and engaged some half dozen of them for that purpose, at sunrise, at midday, and at sunset. Three times a day they prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on their place. Mark they had a definite object in their prayer. They had no minister, but when the Sabbath came round the people assembled to hear a sermon read, and the conviction that the Holy Spirit was there that day was irresistible. At the close of the service no fewer than seventy individuals, who had been awakened, came together to be instructed by the deacons in regard to what they should do about the salvation of their souls, and a great revival followed. One of the deacons said he did not believe that the Holy Spirit's presence was more certainly manifest on the day of Pentecost than on that occasion. This is only one

instance among many. I recollect a meeting of your people where they made this proposition: We agree to observe a closet concert prayer for one week, and when we come together again at our next meeting we will see what further is to be done. We gave ourselves up to a closet concert of prayer, and met at a throne of grace three times a day morning, noon, and evening. On visiting the young people, I soon found a wonderful spirit of prayer among them. This was not long after my own conversion. Before the week was out the town was moved: numerous meetings sprang up, so many person were inquiring the way of salvation, and Christians were aroused on every side. I could stand here till night and relate similar facts, the object of mentioning which is to show that we may all expect the outpouring of the Spirit now as then, and substantially the same way.

We have reason to expect the conversion of multitudes; only use the appropriate means. Pray for the object, labor for the object, give ourselves with singleness of heart to promote the object, and I am convinced God will hear you; rely upon it, you shall see the result.

Another mistake which often develops itself, is that of taking one of two extremes either laboring a great deal and losing sight of the indispensable need of special prayer; or, the opposite of this, having much prayer but no other labor. Let the church plead for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, let them expect it as on the day of Pentecost. Why should we not have it and expect it? Let this be understood and indispensable condition of a revival. Let men unite and come together for prayer, let them also pray by themselves, and for this definite object, with the expectation that the blessing will come, and meantime adopt all other appropriate means for the promotion of the same end.

Waiting for the Holy Spirit without special believing prayer is one great error as if the sovereignty of God withheld the blessing. Waiting in a state of inactivity is a mistake, and so also on the other side, is attempting to go forth without the Holy Spirit. Christ said to his disciples, God forth, but he told them to wait in Jerusalem till they would be endued with power from on high. But how did they wait? They did not wait on the sovereignty of God without doing anything, but they waited in the agonizings of prayer with perpetual supplications.

There are certain persons who seem inclined to discredit the present great revival in America and other places, except in so far as they can disconnect it with the use of the appropriate means. It is important that I should say something on this subject. I have seen, with sorrow, in books and periodicals, that a certain class of men seem disposed to represent this great revival as a thing which had come without the appropriate means being used.

Certain old school men who have been ignorant of the real antecedents of this great movement in the U.S., are evidently anxious to make out a case in accordance with their peculiar views of God's sovereignty. Strange to say, the author of the book entitled *The Power of Prayer*, labors to make the impression that the daily prayer meetings were not for the purpose of promoting a revival, but were the result of a revival already existing, and which had come miraculously upon them, know one knew how.

Yet in his own account of the daily prayer meetings in New York City for example, so far is it from true that they originated in a revival already existing in the city, that the opposite was the fact. A few brethren seeing the depression of business men resulting from the great commercial revulsion, thought it a favorable time to gain their attention to religion. They agreed to try the experiment of a daily prayer meeting for business men. The place and hour were agreed upon.

At the hour, but one had arrived. He waited half-an-hour and four or five more came. They prayed for a revival. They conversed with and invited others. The meetings increased, and the great movement gradually developed itself as the appropriate means were used. This writer seems to have been entirely ignorant of the fact that for many months special prayer for the great commercial cities, and for the business men, had gone up like a cloud of incense from numerous daily prayer meetings that had been numerous attended, and accompanied with powerful revivals in many parts of the State of New York, and in Boston and its vicinity.

These men will fail to make out a case of revival commencing without the use of appropriate means, and one therefore that shall justify their peculiar views. The fact is, as we shall see, this great work of God has not been the sudden springing of a mine of miracles upon the church, but the development and steady growth through the use of special prayer and the appropriate means, up to a point when it force and an account of its phenomena into the daily papers. This, as was most natural under the law of means and ends, produced a rapid and far-spread outburst that took multitudes by surprise, among them the class of men I have mentioned.

Especially do the persons alluded to seem desirous to disconnect this great movement with any labor of evangelists. I am certain, however, that in this they will fail to make out their case wherever history shall speak truthfully upon this point. It is true that the revival in its gradual spread and development, under the intense and successful efforts of a number of evangelists and pastors, reached a point when it forced itself upon universal notice through the daily press.

This gave the facts, no longer to be ignored, to the world. The rapid development from this point far outran not only the labors of the evangelists, but of pastors also. At this point the sacramental host the membership, male and female, rallied, and with the public press made an onset that spread the work like fire on the prairies. But these men being ignorant of the progress of the daily prayer meetings, and the leadings of the Spirit of prayer, with the constant spreading and increase of revival influence for several years previous to the point alluded to, are carried to the delusion, that this great work of God was altogether a miraculous affair, not at all connected with or resulting from the use of the appropriate means.

This is calculated to prevent the Church from carrying on the work. Now, I have been in the midst of these revivals for many years. I can speak as a personal witness, and I find I am informed in regard to many of those things, respecting which these brethren are not informed. I will not accuse them of any design to misrepresent in anything they say, but they are not well informed. Previous to the great revival which took place on the continent of America, before the middle of last century, certain men there had correspondence with a number of praying men on your side of the water. President Edwards wrote, setting forth the state of religion in New England, and requesting a union of prayer between the brethren there and those in Scotland. They entered into a solemn covenant to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, and they had not prayed long before the Holy Ghost was poured out, and Whitfield and others were sent into the field to promote the work as preachers. That revival, as history informs us, resulted in the conversion of thirty thousand person in the United States.

The phenomenon developed in the revival during the eighteenth century in this country had, as I have read, many peculiarities of the present awakening in Ireland such as crying out, falling down and other manifestations. Lady Huntingdon on one occasion wrote to Whitfield respecting these cases of crying out and falling down at the meetings, and advised him not remove them from the meeting, as had been done. When this was done, it seemed to bring a damper on the meeting. She wrote, and said, You are making a

mistake. Don't be wiser than God. Let them cry out, it will do a great deal more good than your preaching. She advised to let them remain. That revival had very many of the characteristics of the present movement, and its antecedent was a great spirit of prayer, on both sides of the Atlantic, for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. In the United States, to say nothing of the revivals that occurred all along locally for a great many years, from 1821 along to 1830, and 1835, particularly up to 1830, revivals were scattered here and there. On to 1830 and 1831, for some years a wonderful spirit of prayer was seen to prevail among Christians. Daily prayer meetings were held, ministers and laymen uniting together, and Christians of both sexes observed certain hours for closet concert prayer. This continued to increase, as I can bear witness, and I did what I could to promote it, till, in 1830, it burst out with a mighty power in the city of Rochester, and overflowed in every direction until it reached many places east and west, till Dr. Beecher remarked to me, This is the greatest revival of religion that has been since the world began. 100,000 were converted this year in the United States. Taking the whole of that time, or perhaps from 1830 to 1835, there could not have been fewer than 200,000 that were converted.

Some of you have heard those revivals of religion discredited, and efforts have been made in this country to represent them as spurious. There is no greater mistake. I have been three times in great revivals in the city of Rochester, and have seen men from there recently. In 1830, 1842, and again three or four years ago, the revivals in Rochester spread themselves and overflowed till they have reached a vast extent of territory, and if there be any Christians in the world, I am sure they are to be found as the fruits of those revivals in the United States.

I have been over the field of these revivals often, and can truly say that I do not believe that any revivals have ever been more pure and more lasting in their results than those. The pastors and members of those churches, will tell you so, and we have seen these results for a great many years, and no man can call them in doubt, any more than he can call the Bible in doubt. Observe, in all these cases the appropriate means were used, and, bating the question of miracles, the means were the same as those used by the apostles.

Between 1830 and 1842 revivals occurred all along, more or less, every year. In 1842 a revival again took place in Rochester, overflowing as it had done before, and continued to extend. In 1843 it had spread from New York to Ohio. In March, 1843, I went over the country in that direction, and found the revival influence at work in every town at which I stopped. In all these places the awakening partook of substantially the same character, the same means were used believing prayer for a definite object was offered, and daily prayer meetings were held.

This revival was of wide extent. I have seen no estimate of the number of hopeful conversions in and about 1842 and 1843, but the number must have been large. In the single city of Albany, I have been informed by a minister who was then laboring there, there were over 3000 conversions. This revival was only the development of an awakening that had, the year before (that is in 1842), been very powerful in Boston, Providence, Rochester and many other places where evangelists had appropriate means.

It has been supposed that this present movement originate in prayer meetings established for business men in the city of New York. This is a great mistake. A spirit of revival had been growing for sever years in many parts of the United States. The people of God saw the tide rising and the cloud gathering, and they said to each other they should soon see a general movement. In Rochester, Christians of all denominations Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians united in the work, and daily prayer meetings and preaching were held in the different churches in succession, the meetings moving round

from church to church in a circle.

So much interest began to be manifested in these meetings, that information regarding them could not longer be withheld by the secular press. The facts lay too prominently on the face of society to be ignored by the secular press. They had ignored it in great measure, but a man who is a skeptic himself as I am informed, yet editor of a paper of great importance in Rochester, having a Roman Catholic reporter, sent him to take notes of the sermons every night, and they were published next morning.

He also attended the prayer meetings in the morning, I believe, and reported them. The public demanded this it must be done the papers must not ignore it they must give the intelligence to the public. As soon as this was done, it aroused the masses in every town. The daily press reported the sermons, and that brought the movement into public notice. From that the revival spread in every direction. Daily prayer meetings were commenced, which resulted in a great many others, and the awakening gave promise of becoming general.

The next winter the work commenced in Boston, and became powerful. In Boston the work continued, and, I may say, increased for two successive winters. I speak from personal knowledge, as I was present. Meantime the revival of religion in the state of New York seemed to be growing in many places. In Brooklyn, just across the ferry from New York City, a daily prayer meeting for the revival of God's work had been held for several months. In central and western New York a minister had given himself to the work of establishing daily prayer meetings.

In 1856, in connection with the great revival in Rochester, N. Y., a little book had been published on a daily public worship as an appointment with God. This book was circulated, and stirred up the churches in many places to hold daily meetings for prayer and conference. Evangelists, east and west, were assisting faithful pastors in preaching and holding daily prayer meetings with constant and growing success, and a mighty spirit of prayer for business men for such men, who were neglecting their souls spontaneously burst out.

Thus it increased until 1858, when the commercial crisis occurred, previous to which New York had seemed to be on such a wave of prosperity as to be the death of revival effort. Business men were confounded, and rich families were being reduced to poverty. At this time a few individuals agreed to see if they could not get up a prayer meeting for business men, in a business part of the city, particularly near the Exchange. This was done, and done like business men. They took pains to give public notice.

They used the appropriate means, and it was remarked almost immediately after, Now God is answering prayer, this business crisis will bring about a revival. A great many of us felt as if the commercial breakdown were the beginning of the whole movement in the great commercial city. The results probably some of you know. In gather the statistics, from week to week, from different parts of the United States, it has been estimated that the conversions numbered at least 50,000 a week. And it has been stated that over the United States, the number who have been converted cannot be less than 500,000. The revival is still spreading though it has abated in the large cities.

A great many overlook the fact that all these blessings from God have been progressive. The movement has been swelling and swelling till it has forced itself on the attention of the public. Every great revival wave has exceeded the former ones in power, because the number of efficient laborers has constantly increased. The great majority of the evangelical ministers in the northern States where the revival has most occurred, are themselves converts of the revivals that have blessed and preserved our country. The

churches are filled with converts of former revivals who know how to work and pray for their promotion. The Churches believe in the reality and blessed results of revivals. They have learned more and more now, and pray and labor in faith for their promotion, and, as their numbers and efforts have increased, the revival influence has extended until this great wave has covered the broad country. The majority of the press used to ignore it, but the facts which manifested themselves were so wonderful that they could not be denied, and their publication was a means of greatly increasing the effect. The editors of these papers, in many instances, are not Christian men, but the public would have the facts, and they have had them. It ought to be said that the editor and proprietor of the New York Tribune has done much that has extended this work. He employed a special and an able Christian editor to collect and arrange the revival intelligence, and that paper was instrumental in doing much to extend the work. All honor to Mr. Greely for the honorable course he pursued. I sent several copies of his paper to his country, papers made up altogether with revival intelligence, and have good reason to know that they were the means of exciting prayer, and a desire for a revival on this side of the Atlantic.

If the revivals in America prove anything, it is the exact opposite of what those to whom allusion has been made would make out. Each great revival has called out and employed more and more of the laity of the church. Hence the appropriate means being more and more extended, each great revival preceded its predecessor. The present revival has employed the membership of the churches greatly beyond anything that has been done since the days of the apostles. The readers of my lectures on revivals know that I have all along insisted upon this, and that several of those lectures are devoted to this point, namely, the necessity and the consequences of the whole membership taking personally hold of the work of revival. The present work exceeds all the former, just because the means have been greatly multiplied. God has prepared the American church and ministry for the work, and by repeated and multiplied local revivals taught them how to work, and now, instead of working miraculously without well directed means, it is a fact on the face of the whole movement that the revival is now extended beyond all precedent, because the appointed means are thus extended. In all the great revivals in America, and so far as I can learn, in all great revivals everywhere, God has called into the field, and much used and greatly blessed the labors of evangelists. In the days of Edwards, the Wesleys, Whitfield and many others were then called and used on this side of the Atlantic. Whitfield and John Wesley were called to America, and with them were associated William and Gilbert Tenant, and others, who, through pastors, traveled to many places and labored in revivals. In that revival the Lord used laymen to a considerable extent. This was greatly objected to by many of the leading ministers. So great was the opposition to the employment of evangelists and the lay element of the church, that there was a dearth of revival influence followed for many years. No evangelist was employed, the lay element of the church lay dormant, and were not allowed to interfere with what was supposed to be the exclusive work of the ministry.

The next great revival commenced and was carried forward under the labors of Mr. Nettleton, in connection with some excellent pastors in New England. He, however, did but little to bring other evangelists or the lay element into the field. Hence his labors were scarcely extended or felt beyond his immediate influence. He labored successfully, but he labored almost alone, not daring or caring to arouse the whole church to action. His labor was, therefore, of necessity confined to a comparatively narrow field, and the results were, of course, to the same extent limited. Of late years a far different course has been employed among the various denominations. These have assisted the pastors, and have labored to bring out the lay element of the church. They have labored hard and successfully to bring to pass the state of things at present attracting the attention and exciting the astonishment of the world. The pastors and churches with whom they have labored can bear witness to their zeal and industry and enormous labor,

with their blessed results. Those pastors have also laid out all their own strength in those revivals as a general thing, and have encouraged the members of their churches to take hold of the work, male and female, each in his and her sphere. The present revival is characterized far above all precedent by the individual activity and labor of the female members of the churches. If the business men have had their daily meetings, so have the women. If the men have visited and conversed with individuals, so have the women. God has greatly used and greatly honored the instrumentality of women, and is still doing so. The ladies' meetings are now regarded as a most important branch of the great movement in many places.

I must say, in conclusion, that all these revivals, every one of them at least for the forty years now past, have been connected with means. Their antecedents have been, in every case, substantially the same, their accompaniments have been substantially the same, their type has been substantially the same, and the results, I trust, will be, under God, substantially the same. One thing which has been brought out and greatly blessed is the lay element of the Church, and more so perhaps in this revival than in any other.

Lay men and women also have had their prayer meetings, and these have increased in number to such an extent as to fill the churches. In Boston, I have seen the vestries crowded to suffocation with ladies' prayer meetings, and these ladies, comprising some of the most educated and talented to be found perhaps in the United States. Persons of all denominations, forgetting their differences, gave themselves to the work. They all preached the same thing, the simple Gospel. They held out substantially the same truth: Christ died to save souls; you may be saved; you are a sinner and need to be saved; now, will you come to Christ and submit yourself to God?

This was about the amount of instruction. I recollect when prayer meetings for business men were established in Boston, I was the guest of the man who established them. When it was proposed to put up a notice calling such a meeting, he said, Will they attend? Yes, they will. What! Our business men? Try it. A notice was put up, and a place secured, a certain vestry. When the time of the meeting came, the man was astonished to find not only the room filled, but all the avenues to it.

O, business men would say, I never thought to see the like of this. There were two rooms, one above the other, in this vestry. Soon both of them were filled. From the highest to the lowest, God shook every class of society. While I was in Boston on one occasion, a gentleman stated that he had come from the capital of Nebraska, and he had found prayer meetings established throughout all the vast extent of country over which he had traveled. Think of that. A region of 2000 miles, along which the hands and hearts of the people were lifted up to God in prayer!

From north to south, till you come within the slave territory, a great and mighty cry went up to God that he would come down and take the people in hand, and convert the souls; and he heard, and everybody stood confounded. The movement has come to Ireland, to Scotland, and to this city, and like a great wave I expect to see it go over Scotland, break upon the continent, and shake it. Pray for it. Let the waters of eternal life roll, and let Christians all loving and confiding in one another, give their hearts unitedly to the work.

I beseech Christians in Great Britain of all denominations to lay aside all sectarian prejudices and narrowness, and united their hearts and hands in the promotion of this work. Do not, my brethren, grieve and quench the Holy Spirit by setting at naught your brethren, because they do not in every particular agree in their views with you. Be tolerant. Be loving, united, faithful, active, prayerful, and persevering, and a wave of salvation will cover the land.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/the-prevailing-prayer-meeting/>

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