

How to Study Revival

by E.A. Johnston

To see revival in our day, we must understand revival as a sovereign work of God, study historical revivals, recognize false fire, and pray daily for God to send revival.

Duration: 20:13

Scripture: Judges 20:37, Psalm 103:7, Isaiah 44:3, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Revival"

Description

The video is a sermon on the topic of revival and how God has moved in former times among His people. The speaker emphasizes the importance of studying historical revivals to avoid pitfalls and recognize false fire and opposition from the evil one. Revival is described as a work of grace that transforms lives, communities, and brings salvation to many. The speaker encourages listeners to be like the prophet Isaiah, recognizing their own sinfulness and longing for God's presence in revival.

Transcript

Vance Havner used to say, everybody's holding revivals, it's about time somebody let loose of one. Well, our message today, friends, is on how to study revival. I will share with you a process I've used through the years and I hope that it's helpful to you.

For the subject of revival and how God has moved in former times among his people is something we should be very familiar with, especially if we long to see revival in our day. The subject of revival has been my focus for several decades. My PhD dissertation was on the revival of religion under Wesleyan Whitfield in Great Britain.

I have written six books on the subject of historical revivals and I have taped an entire series of sermon messages on revival stories on men like Whitfield and Wesley, Evan Roberts and Duncan Campbell, Charles Finney and Sam Jones, men like Jonathan Edwards and Azahel Middleton for the purpose of encouraging the study and prayer for revival. But more importantly, I weep every day over the lack of revival in our time and I'm broken hearted over the sleepy ministers today who do not see the urgency or the need for revival in your day and mine. I will share my heartbreak with you on how few today just don't see any need for revival, let alone pray for it.

Let me share this story with you. I was standing in line in my cap and gown at my seminary to receive my degree and next to me in line was a pastor from the south. I asked him, how often do you get together and

pray with the local pastors in your community for revival? He looked at me strangely and replied, we don't pray for revival, we don't need revival in our churches, we are on the grow.

You see friends, as long as we are filling our ever-expanding sanctuaries with bodies, it matters little if God sends revival. For to many folks today, church growth is all that matters. Heaven help us, what that pastor failed to grasp about the need for revival is that if we don't see a heaven-sent revival in our day, there won't be a country here to worship in.

Sin-laden America is doomed without a God-sent revival. It's either ruin or revival for America today friends and we desperately need God to move in the day of His power once again. America has seen in past times glorious moves of grace and several spiritual awakenings and we need to carefully study them to learn how to pray in our day for God to send revival to us once more.

Therefore I present you this message today on how to study revival. For to be an effective student of revival is to be knowledgeable about how God has moved in former times so we'll be able to recognize Him when He stirs the tops of the mulberry trees in our day. A pastor once introduced me as an expert in revival.

I am no expert. I prefer to use the word student. I'm a student of revival.

This is what I think of experts. Two men were standing outside a taxidermy shop and they were looking in the store window at a bird perched on a little tree. The one expert commented, look at that bird there in that tree.

Why that man in there knows nothing about the art of taxidermy. I've never seen a bird look so artificial in my life and the other expert replied and agreed. He said, I agree that man knows nothing about taxidermy.

Why I've never seen a bird perch on a tree so awkwardly before. That bird looks so artificial. Just then the bird flew down and flew away.

Well that's experts for you but we must not worry about becoming experts on the subject of revival but we must be very concerned about becoming serious students on the topic of revival. For to be ignorant here is hurtful. Most seminaries don't teach revival and if they do it's just a cursory class and your average pastor has only read one or two books on revival if that many.

So I hope the information I give you today is helpful to you. I pray that it stirs your own heart to lay hold of God each day in prayer for our nation and for God to send revival to our country and churches once again. The very first thing is the word revival which in your day and mine has come to mean nothing more than a series of evangelistic meetings with loud music, loud praying and loud preaching.

This is not revival. A true revival is something God does for us. Evangelism is something we do for God.

A true revival of religion often breaks upon us suddenly without warning like a thunderclap out of a clear sky. We need to know the difference between evangelism and true revival. My capsule definition of revival is this.

Revival is the felt reality of the awful presence of the Almighty where the awful solemnity of a holy God is so manifest that you cannot fight it but bend beneath his overpowering presence. A true move of grace breaks up all false foundations, makes hypocrisy run for the doors, turns lives upside down and inside out,

and transforms homes and communities in a remarkable and permanent way. To see God show up in revival is to be like the prophet Isaiah.

You are undone. You realize you are a man of unclean lips. To be in the presence of God like that is a terrible thing.

It startles sinners and unnerved saints because you recognize how far away from God you really have been and you feel ashamed for your lack. Revival bends you. Revival breaks you.

Revival strips you. But joyfully, revival renews the believer and regenerates the lost sinner. During times of revival, great numbers of individuals are brought out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and life.

More good is accomplished in one month of an outpouring of grace in the salvation of the lost than steady years of evangelism. It is a wonder to behold God's dealings with men as thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power. In seasons of refreshing as the plentiful effusions of grace fall upon mankind, many are born again, all to the glory of God.

When the revival ends, as they each do, much good remains. Spiritual transformation is lasting in the life of the individual and New Testament vitality is once again restored to the church. Revived people earnestly labor to win souls daily and exude a Christ-like character from lives of holiness under the Lord.

Communities which have seen a powerful outpouring of grace are completely transformed. Sin runs through the door and the wickedness of the community which once stood boldly and defiantly now shrinks in shame and retreats to the shadows. In a true outpouring of grace, it's not uncommon for the most infamous characters in a community to be gloriously saved.

Their testimony brings in others like a flood. At times, God will raise up a figurehead for revival like a Duncan Campbell or an Evan Roberts. Other times, God will use the nobodies to accomplish His purposes.

But either way, when God shows up in revival, secular employments become unimportant and eternity becomes a primary subject of conversation in the workplace and on the street corner. For when God appears in revival, all man can say is, this is the Lord's and it's marvelous in our eyes. One must study historical revival to avoid pitfalls that others have fallen into during times of refreshing, and one must be able to recognize false fire and opposition from the evil one who will violently oppose any true work of grace.

Therefore, it is vitally important to be familiar with how God has moved in former times to be able to recognize when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself, for then shall the Lord go out before thee to smite the host of the Philistines. We must be familiar with the ways and acts of the Almighty. You can look at that in Psalm 103 7, so that we won't find ourselves on the wrong side of revival when it comes and fight against it like other men have done in former times.

In George Whitfield's day, his fiercest opponents were men in ministry like George Lavington of England and Alexander Gordon of Charleston, South Carolina. These men became enemies of the revival and greatly hindered the work of grace in their day. Therefore, we must be careful not to do the same.

Even friends of revival can become deceived and do great harm to the revival through their injurious actions. James Davenport became a tragic figure of the Great Awakening because of his unchecked outrageous behavior which harmed rather than helped the move of God at that time in New England. There are many warnings to us today in the pages of historic revivals.

If we will only take the time to study them, we must be able to recognize false fire and condemn it when it appears. Much nonsense has often been termed revival when it's nothing more than human emotion out of control and subject to the wiles of the devil. Even George Whitfield, who was accused of being an enthusiast, knew how to deal wisely with false fire when it appeared.

In one such instance, Whitfield had just finished preaching in a New England meeting house where the pastor was none other than Solomon Williams, grandson of the famous Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, Massachusetts. It was Whitfield's last occasion to preach to that congregation, and a large number of persons from outside the parish had assembled to hear the Grand Itinerant preach this last time. After the service, while Whitfield and Pastor Williams left the meeting house, a bedlam took place inside the church.

The two leaders were summoned back by a godly deacon. Whitfield stood at the head of the wild assembly, gaining the attention of the boisterous mob by violently stomping his foot on the wooden floor and shouting, What means all this tumult and disorder? The noisy crowd declared that they were so filled with the Holy Spirit that they could not forbear their demonstrations of joy. To this, the saintly evangelist replied, My dear children, you were like little partridges just hatched from the egg.

You run about with eggshells covering your eyes, and you cannot see and know where you are going. With that remark, the disorder ceased, and the people went quietly home. We must be wise like a Whitfield when God shows up in revival and be able to discern the true from the false.

When people start barking like a dog and roaring like a lion and shake all over like they got the heebie-jeebies, it's a blinking warning sign that God has left the building and has left the people to their own fleshly devices. We must carefully study men whom God has used in times of past revivals, men like Jonathan Edwards and Azahel Nettleton, Duncan Campbell and Evan Roberts. It is only from a study of how God has moved in former times can we apply that knowledge to our experience today.

Therefore, the study of historical revival is vastly important and urgent in our day. If we truly hunger to see God move in a work of grace in your day and mine. So, to begin, I recommend that you get a broad perspective on historical revivals.

First, break them down into categories by their names, with their dates, location, and the human instruments of revival. For instance, the Great Awakening, which began in 1740 under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts in New England, and was advanced by the British evangelist George Whitefield. As you study the Great Awakening, you will learn that Whitefield and Edwards were only two of many preachers who were used of God to spread the revival.

Others like Gilbert Tennant, Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, Jonathan Parsons, and a score of others. The revival of religion in Great Britain under John Wesley and George Whitefield, beginning in 1735. God also raised up leaders of the revival in Wales like Hal Harris and John Sennick and a host of others.

The next category would be Second Great Awakening, beginning in 1794 and lasting through the 1840s. Azel Nettleton and Charles Finney were the main leaders of the revival. But there again, there were dozens of other men whom God raised up and used during this revival.

Men like Lyman Beecher, Bennett Tyler, Edward Griffin, Heman Humphreys, Edward Payson, and many, many others. Then there was the businessman's revival of New York City, 1857 to 1858, which became a national prayer revival throughout America. Jeremiah Lanphier was the main human instrument that God used.

Then there was 1859 revival of Ireland, the Scottish revival of 1859 under mainly lay preachers. You have the Welsh revival of 1904 to 1905. Evan Roberts was the main figurehead, but many, many others like Seth Joshua and lay preachers were raised up all throughout Wales.

Then there was the Lewis revival of 1949 to 1952 off the coast of Scotland in the Hebrides. Duncan Campbell was the primary human instrument in that revival, but there were many behind the scenes who were the praying saints that really brought that revival to the island before Duncan Campbell even showed up. Well, these are just a few of the samples that will get you started.

You then can perform deeper research under each heading. For instance, in the revival of religion in Great Britain in the 18th century, besides John Wesley and George Whitefield, there were overlooked men whom God used, such as Charles Wesley, who preached often in the open air and suffered much persecution. Many don't even know that about Charles Wesley.

And in Scotland, there was the mighty Cambuslang revival, which began under the preaching of a simple man, William McCulloch, and when George Whitefield showed up at McCulloch's invitation, there were 20,000 people gathered beneath McCulloch's church down on the preaching brace, many crying out at 2 a.m., what must I do to be saved? You can then study the Canadian revivals and Cambuslang revivals like Wheaton, Asbury, and Prairie Bible Institute. You can study the revival in China before World War II under the preaching of John Song. Study the revival under Jonathan Goforth in China, the African revival under Reese Howells, the Hawaiian revivals under Titus Cohn.

On and on will be your study as you proceed into this fathomless subject. But I will promise you this, friends, once you begin your journey of the study of historical revival, you will be hooked. Your heart will be stirred within you and you will hunger for God to do again what he has done in former times and to do it in our day.

Well, allow me to recommend some books on revival which should aid you in your research. This is only a partial list just to get you started. I highly recommend *The Great Awakening* by Joseph Tracy.

Please read *Asahel Milton* by Bennett Tyler. Get a copy of George Whitefield's journals. Read the diary of David Brainerd.

Get the wonderful book by author Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival*. Book the one book you absolutely must get, and it's hard to get, so get a copy. It was written by my dear friend Richard Owen Roberts.

It's the *Anointed Bibliography of Revival Literature*, and that book will point you in the right direction and be of a great help. Be deeply familiar with the passages of scripture, like Isaiah chapter 64, which begins, Oh, that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence. And meditate on Psalm 80, which declares, Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to

shine, and we shall be saved.

O Lord God of hosts, how long will thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? And from the text in Isaiah 44.3, which states, For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessings upon thine offspring. Pastor, ask the leaders of your church to meet with you each week, to bend the knee, and pray for revival.

Start prayer groups where you seek the face of God, for him to send revival to our nation and churches. But whatever you do, friends, pray, pray, pray. I hope this message today has been helpful to you.

It's only a little start, but we cannot produce revival, but we can send ourselves to catch the revival wind when God blows. It is my prayer that the God of revival will stir your own heart for you to pray to him on a daily basis, that God will be pleased to show mercy and send revival once again to our thirsty land today. May God bless you, friends, as you pursue him and lay hold of him in desperate prayer, pleading with him to blow revival winds across our land today.

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