

Indispensable Factors in Revival

by Jonathan Goforth

Jonathan Goforth emphasizes that revival is attainable through prayer, faith, and the full surrender to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Zechariah 4:6, Acts 4:31, Philippians 2:9, Hebrews 4:12, James 5:16

Topics: "Revival Prayer", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Jonathan Goforth emphasizes the accessibility of God's revival to any group of wholehearted Christians who carry out His will, regardless of location. He highlights the vital role of prayer in igniting spiritual awakenings, citing historical examples like Luther, the Moravians, and the Wesleyan movement. Goforth stresses the necessity of a back-to-the-Bible movement, honoring the Word of God as the sharp sword that has been instrumental in past revivals. He challenges Christian leaders to dismantle ecclesiastical idols and prioritize exalting Jesus Christ above all else to usher in a true Holy Spirit revival.

Transcript

A MISSIONARY once remarked apologetically to me: "I have always longed for revival; but my station is so outoftheway that it is impossible for me to obtain the services of an evangelist." As if the Spirit of God is necessarily limited in His workings to a select few! We wish to state most emphatically as our conviction that God's revival may be had when we will and where we will. That peer of evangelists, Mr. C. G. Finney, believed that any body of Christian people, provided they wholeheartedly and unreservedly carried out God's will, could have revival. Mr. D. L. Moody was continually urging that Pentecost was merely a specimen day. Most certainly it is not to be misunderstood from these pages that the Orient is peculiarly suited to revival. We have seen audiences in the homelands moved in exactly the same way as in China. True, it usually takes longer. But, whether it takes a day or whether it takes a fortnight, the principle is clear that any group of seeking Christians may receive the full blessing of Pentecost.

Our reading of the Word of God makes it inconceivable to us that the Holy Spirit should be willing, even for a day, to delay His work. We may be sure that, where there is a lack of the fulness of God, it is ever due to man's lack of faith and obedience. If God the Holy Spirit is not glorifying Jesus Christ in the world today, as at Pentecost, it is we who are to blame. After all, what is revival but simply the Spirit of God fully controlling in the surrendered life? It must always be possible, then, when man yields. The sin of unyieldedness, alone, can keep us from revival.

But are we ready to receive Him? Do we value the Giver and the gift sufficiently? Are we ready to pay the price of Holy Ghost revival? Take prayer for example. The history of revival shows plainly that all movements of the Spirit have started in prayer. Yet is it not right there that many of us wilt and falter at the cost? The Bible does not tell us very much of what went on in that Upper Room in Jerusalem between our Lord's ascension and the Day of Pentecost. But we may be reasonably certain that that little band of disciples begrudged every minute that was spent off their knees. There was so much to be got rid of, so many hindering things to be laid away, so much gold to be refined, so much dross to be consumed. The Day of Pentecost told best what had passed in that Upper Room. We know, too, that all subsequent outpourings of the Spirit were linked with prayer. "And when they prayed," Luke tells us, "the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spake the Word of God with boldness" (Acts iv. 31).

The mighty spiritual upheavals in Reformation times, came largely as the result of prayer. It is said of Luther that he could get anything from God he asked for. Mary Queen of Scots had a greater dread of the prayers of John Knox than of all the armies of England. That glorious movement of the Spirit which fused the discordant elements among the Moravians at Herrnhut in 1727, and transformed them into what has been the mightiest evangelizing force in the world for the past two centuries, was born in prayer. "Was there ever in the whole of Church history," writes Bishop Hasse, "such an astonishing prayermeeting as that which, beginning (at Herrnhut) in 1727, went on one hundred years? It is something absolutely unique. It was known as the 'Hourly Intercession,' and it meant that by relays of brethren and sisters prayer without ceasing was made to God for all the works and wants of His Church. Prayer of that kind always leads to action. In this case it kindled a burning desire to make Christ's salvation known to the heathen. It led to the beginning of modern foreign missions. From that one small village community more than one hundred missionaries went out in twentyfive years. We will look in vain elsewhere for anything to match it in anything like the same extent." But is there any reason, may we ask, why the Moravian movement should not be matched today? It is not likely that the Eternal Spirit has grown weary. Surely we may count on it that the blessing is waiting for us, if we will only get down on our knees and ask for it.

Perhaps the most striking phase of the Wesleyan movement was the emphasis which its leaders laid on prayer. Their regular practice was to pray from four to five in the morning and from five to six in the evening. Great figures like William Bramwell, however, would spend half the night in prayer besides, and afterwards go through a district like a flame of fire. If only the millions of Methodists today would but esteem prayer as did their great forefathers, what might not happen!

Finney depended more upon the prayers of fathers Nash and Clary to bring down Holy Ghost revival than upon his own resistless logic. So accustomed are we today to the Laodicean condition of the Church that the all-pervading influence of prayer in Finney's time amazes us. Imagine forty ministers and missionaries being thrust into the Lord's harvest field as the result of prayer during one revival in a Rochester High School! By 1857, Finney was seeing fifty thousand a week turning to God. In many cities there was no building large enough to hold the prayermeetings. It was at that time that the Fulton Street prayermeeting started in a side room in a church, and in a few weeks had taxed the capacity of the entire building to the utmost, and had even overflowed to neighbouring churches.

In 1858, Mr. Spurgeon called his great congregation together and said: "The Spirit of God is saving multitudes now in the United States. Since God is no respecter of persons we will pray until He sends similar showers of blessing upon our land." The mighty revival of 1859 was the answer. Mr. Moody, it is said, would not accept an invitation to conduct a mission unless he were given positive assurance that the

way would be prepared by prayer. In the south of Wales, shortly before the great revival there in the early years of the present century, three hundred extra prayer groups were formed. Wales, in fact, became almost like one great prayer meeting. What was the result? Within two months seventy thousand turned to the Lord.

At Calcutta, in 1902, two lady missionaries of the Khassia Hills Mission listened to an address on prayer by the late Dr. Torrey. They were so moved by it that when they went back to their people their one theme was prayer. The result was that, by the Spring of 1905, the Khassians were praying everywhere. Revival, of course, was inevitable. Within a few months, over eight thousand additions were made to the Church in that one section of India.

In an early chapter we pointed out how that it was intense, believing prayer that had so much to do with the revival which, in 1907, brought fifty thousand Koreans to Christ. We are convinced, too, that all movements of the Spirit in China which have come within our own experience, may be traced to prayer. After one particularly moving series of meetings a missionary remarked to me: "Since the Lord did so much with our small amount of praying, what might He not have done if we had prayed as we ought?" "What is the secret of revival?" a great evangelist was once asked. "There is no secret," he replied. "Revival always comes in answer to prayer."

We wish to affirm, too, that we can entertain no hope of a mighty, globe encircling Holy Spirit revival without there being first a back to the Bible movement. The Author of the Bible is being greatly dishonored these days by the doubt cast upon His Word. It must, indeed, be a cause of intense grief to Him that the Book which alone testifies of the Lord Jesus should be so lightly esteemed by man. Unless the Bible is to us in very truth the Word of God, our prayers can be naught but sheer mockery. There never has been a revival except where there have been Christian men and women thoroughly believing in and wholeheartedly pleading the promises of God.

The Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is the only weapon which has ever been mightily used in revival. Where it has been given for what it claims to be, the Word of God has always been like a sharp, two edged sword, like fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces. When Luther got the Scriptures translated into German, that country was lost to Rome. Moody did not possess the learning of the schools, but he did know his Bible; and it is certain that the world never has known, and doubtful if it ever will know, his equal as an apostle of souls.

During my student days in Toronto my one weapon, in the jails and slums, was the Bible. In China I have often given from thirty five to forty addresses in a week, practically all of them being simply Bible rehearsals. In fact, I think I can safely say that, during the forty one years that I have been on the foreign field, I have never once addressed a Chinese audience without an open Bible in my hand, from which I could say, "Thus saith the Lord!" I have always taken it for granted that the simple preaching of the Word would bring men to Christ. It has never failed me yet. My Chinese pastor, one of the most consecrated men I have ever met, was saved from a life of shame and vice by the first Gospel address which he ever heard me give.

My deepest regret, on reaching threescore years and ten, is that I have not devoted more time to the study of the Bible. Still, in less than nineteen years I have gone through the New Testament in Chinese fifty five times. That prince of Bible teachers, Dr. Campbell Morgan, has declared that he would not attempt to teach any book in the Bible unless he had first read it over at least fifty times. Some years ago, I understand, a

gentleman attended the English Keswick and was so fired with a zeal for the Bible that in three years he read it through twelve times. One would imagine, of course, that he belonged to the leisured class. On the contrary, however, he began his day's work at the Motherwell steel plant at 5:30 a. m.

The Bible was not so neglected a Book when the great revivals of 1857-59 swept over the United States and Great Britain. Neither was it so neglected in Moody's time. During the late Manchu dynasty, scholars were expected to know the classics of their sages off by heart. How do the scholars of so-called Christian lands measure up to that standard as regards the "World's Great Classic"? It is nothing short of pathetic how so many, who come professedly to represent the Lord Jesus Christ in China, know so little of His Word. Thirty years ago the missionary ideal was to know the Bible so well that one would not have to carry around a concordance. Is the indifference to the Bible today on the part of so many missionaries due to the fact, perhaps, that they have discovered some better means with which to meet the needs of a sin sick world?

Finally, the call to revival must be a call to exalt Jesus Christ in our hearts as King of kings and Lord of lords. He is like an Everest peak, rising from the level plain. There must be room only for Him, if we would have Him dwell with us at all. Every idol must be smashed; every darling Isaac laid on the altar; every urge of self denied. Then, and then only, can we expect the larger fields to open before us. It is said of Mahmoud, the great Moslem warrior that, in his trail of conquest through Northern India, it was his practice to destroy all idols which fell into his hands. He came at last to the city of Guggerratt, where there was an idol which was held in unusually high esteem by the people. The chief notables of the city came to the general and pleaded with him that he would spare to them this one idol. He might do as he wished with the others, they said, but if he took this god from them, too, they might just as well die. They pleaded with such intensity that, for a moment, the heart of the conqueror was touched. It seemed more than heartless to bereave these poor people of what was apparently life and death to them. Then he remembered his vow to spare not one idol. The will of Allah was plain. He had a sledge hammer brought to him, and with it he dealt the idol one terrific blow. To his amazement there poured from the rent in the image a stream of jewels and precious stones. The people had hidden their treasures in the image, hoping to move the conqueror to spare it. Consider what his loss would have been if he had stayed his hand at the sacrifice of that one last idol.

Was there ever such an incomparable opportunity for Christian leaders to get rid of their ecclesiastical idols and bring themselves into heart contact with the unsearchable riches of Christ as at the Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910? There has been no Church gathering in modern times around which such expectations have centered. Missionary leaders had come from all parts of the world. It was the confident hope of many that a new era in missions had dawned. The subject for the last day was - "The Home Base." It provoked visions of endless possibilities. The home churches, empowered by a mighty Holy Ghost Revival, would send out men fitted as were Paul and Barnabas. With their enormous resources in men and means the world would be evangelized in a generation.

Alas! it was only a dream. Never have I experienced such keen pain and disappointment as I did that day. Of the many who addressed that great missionary gathering, not more than three emphasized God the Holy Spirit as the one essential factor in world evangelization. Listening to the addresses that day, one could not but conclude that the giving of the Gospel to lost mankind was largely a matter of better organization, better equipment, more men and women. Symptoms, indeed, were not lacking that a few more sparks might have precipitated an explosion. But no, the dethronement of the idol of ecclesiastical self-sufficiency was apparently too great a price to pay.

But, brethren, the Spirit of God is with us still. Pentecost is yet within our grasp. If revival is being withheld from us it is because some idol remains still enthroned; because we still insist in placing our reliance in human schemes; because we still refuse to face the unchangeable truth that "it is not by might, but BY MY SPIRIT."

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