

Re-Examining Revival in the Church

by Larry R. Sinclair

True revival in the church is a process of restoring spiritual life and power, requiring recognition of one's need for revival and spiritual self-examination.

Scripture: Job 1:8, Isaiah 25:8, Matthew 23:24, 1 Corinthians 15:54, 2 Corinthians 5:4, Ephesians 6:10, Hebrews 11:29, 1 Peter 5:8, Revelation 12:16

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Faith And Obedience"

Description

The preacher discusses the Greek word 'katapino,' which means to swallow up completely or cause sudden destruction. He emphasizes how our enemy seeks to bring spiritual ruin, weaken our faith, and replace it with fear. By relying on God's strength, believers can resist the enemy and claim victory through faith, obedience, and prayer. The sermon warns about Satan's tactics to devour believers and highlights the importance of being alert, submitting to one another, humbling ourselves, casting our cares on the Lord, and being watchful to resist the enemy's attacks.

Transcript

Every Christian knows what revival is, right? All active church members are familiar with and accustomed to the traditional revival. Many evangelical churches have one every year. The special series of services publicized and promoted as "revival" is a staple in most evangelical denominations, although they do seem to be losing popularity in many churches. But is it possible that most faithful Christians do not really understand and appreciate what a true revival is or what it would be? I am convinced that this is, in fact, the case. And worse yet, if the typical Christian did understand and appreciate what true revival would be, he would not want to experience it!

To me and, I believe, to most Christians and active church members, the word "revival" has come to mean a special series of church services, for which a guest preacher is usually invited to preach and in which a visiting singer is sometimes also featured. It is also my experience that "revival" services include a forceful appeal for non-Christians to make a public profession of acceptance of the Christian faith. There is usually a strong evangelistic emphasis involved in what we call "revival" meetings.

Revival services are usually in addition to a church's regular services and are often given considerable special advertisement and promotion. In my own Southern Baptist denomination, an amazing variety of what I call "gimmick promotion" is used in an attempt to increase the attendance at and to stimulate the anticipation for revival services. Often each night of the revival is given a different promotional emphasis,

such as "pack the pew night", "family night" or "old-fashion night" (at which everyone is encouraged to dress informally and any man wearing a tie will get it cut off... doesn't that sound exciting?.)

Now admittedly, not all churches employ such gimmick promotion for revival services. But the concept of revival as described above is fairly typical, I believe. The strong evangelistic theme is almost always prominent, although an effort to reactivate backslidden church members who have stopped attending regular services is also common. But is that the concept of revival accurate? Is that really descriptive of true revival?

My dictionary defines "revival" as the act of reviving or condition of being revived. It defines "revive" as to bring back to life or consciousness. An alternate meaning of "revival" given is a meeting or series of meetings for the purpose of reawakening religious faith. An alternate meaning of "revive" given is to impart or regain health or vigor.(1) By combining pertinent parts of these definitions, we might logically conclude that a correct meaning of revival would be some process (meeting or otherwise) resulting in restoration of life and power. As applied to the church, it would mean a process by which the spiritual life and power of God's people are restored.

Obviously, "revive" (the root word of "revival") consists of two parts: "re", meaning again, and "vive", meaning to live. Accordingly, "revive" literally means to live again. In turn, "revival" literally means a process by which something is made to live again. Therefore, even without reference to a dictionary, any reasonable understanding of the literal meaning of the word "revival" would lead one to conclude that revival in the church would deal with existing deadness within the church membership, rather than conversion of outsiders or non-members. As someone has observed, you cannot revive something that has never been lived (born) in the first place. Accordingly, revival should be understood as referring to a return to spiritual health and vitality after a period of spiritual decline into sin and broken fellowship with God.(2)

Nevertheless, there is a prevailing misconception among the church members as to what revival is supposed to be. Most Christians believe the primary purpose of revival is to convert lost sinners to faith in Christ, with a secondary but subordinate purpose being to entice back to church those members who have stopped regularly attending services. And this widespread misunderstanding is a serious problem. Trying to have revival in a church without even knowing what revival really is virtually assures that genuine revival will not be experienced.

In his process of causing me to re-examine my concept of serious discipleship, God has impressed me that it is crucial for us to realize that true revival involves restoring spiritual life and power within the Christians who make up the membership of any particular church. We must come to realize that the focus of revival should be the lifeless and powerless spiritual condition of Christianity within the church... not the people outside the church who do not even profess to be Christians. Until Christians really come to understand and appreciate the fact that it is ourselves who are spiritually sick and desperately in need of spiritual healing and reviving, we will never experience true revival.

Now please understand that I am in no way minimizing the need for and importance of evangelizing the unsaved. That objective is essential. It is the keynote goal of Christ's great commission to his followers (Matthew 28:19). But with regard to genuine revival, evangelization of the lost always follow the reviving of the saved. The conversion of non-Christians will be the natural and unavoidable consequence of true revival among God's people.

Charles Finney, one of America's most effective evangelists ever, defined revival as "the renewal of the first love of Christians, resulting in the awakening and conversion of sinners to God."⁽³⁾ Finney said that when church members are awakened and reformed spiritually, the salvation of lost persons will follow.

Another great American preacher who recognized the correct relationship between the revival of cold, lifeless Christians and the conversion of non-Christians was R. A. Torrey, the first superintendent of the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. He observed that in times of real revival, Christians are re-energized spiritually and then lost people experience conviction of sin and genuine, life-changing conversion.⁽⁴⁾

The importance of realizing the natural sequence or progression between revival and evangelism cannot be overstated. Our tendency to think that revival primarily involves evangelism is "getting the cart before the horse." And this erroneous thinking is a significant hindrance to experiencing true revival, as will be discussed later.

Let me be clearly understood in my evaluation of the importance and urgency of evangelism. Evangelism is extremely important...anytime, anywhere and anyhow. But so often we try to do evangelism like we do many other ministries of the church...without God.

I am convinced that for the most part, God's plan for evangelism is what I call the "as you go" plan (Matthew 28:19). By that I mean Jesus' commission to his disciples was that as they were going into all the various parts of the world, they should share the gospel with everyone they met along the way and make disciples of them. And as we go to our jobs and various workplaces, God expects us to witness to the lost people around us. As we go to the supermarkets and civic club meetings and social activities and community events, Christ would have us evangelize the non-Christians with whom we come into contact.

I submit that it is naive for us to believe that we will ever be able to get very many lost people (who know and realize and acknowledge that they are lost) to come to church for any purpose, much less to a service which has as its obvious purpose and objective the evangelization of non-Christians. And I believe that Jesus expected that most evangelism would be done outside the walls of the church, temple or synagogue. Where did Jesus himself lead most of his converts to faith in and commitment to himself? Certainly it was not inside the temple or synagogue! It was out in the everyday places of life. That is where he expected his followers to be.... so that, I suggest, is where he expected them to witness about him.

Now it is certainly true that there are many lost people coming to church every week... but most of these are members. It would probably surprise us all if we really knew how many church members, perhaps even active members, have never had a genuine conversion experience. Matthew 7:21-23 and Jesus' parable of the tares should show us that. But these unsaved church members do not realize and acknowledge their lost condition, and they certainly are not consciously seeking spiritual birth.

God's only plan to evangelize the lost world was for Christ's disciples (the church) to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with unbelievers. As someone has said, God has no alternate plan. But the reason that the evangelization of the world progresses so slowly at some times in some places, is that the bride of Christ (the church) has become contaminated by Satan and the world. Most Christians have become inexcusably casual and complacent in our response to Jesus' command (Matthew 28:19; John 20:21) for us to witness to the lost.

If we can ever come to realize that God's urgent desire is for his people (the church) to examine ourselves and realize our own spiritual apathy, complacency, disobedience and rebellion and come to confess this

sinful condition and turn back to him in true brokenness and repentance, God would forgive us and cleanse us and reorient our lives, i.e., truly revive us. Then the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, which we now see so seldom, would unleash in our lives and in our churches. And many, many lost people around us would be so astonished by the manifestation of power of the Holy Spirit and be so attracted by the demonstration of joy and peace and power and purpose in our lives (which they would desire for themselves), they would come under conviction of the Holy Spirit and become seekers of spiritual birth for themselves. This inevitably would result in an evangelism explosion and true spiritual awakening (which has been defined as a large number of people experiencing new birth to spiritual life in a short period of time)(5). This is the sequence or progression which Finney witnessed in the second great awakening and about which Torrey also wrote.

Accordingly, the prevailing misconception of what revival really is presents a severe impediment to true revival. Recognition of one's need for anything (revival, food, medical attention, or whatever) is almost always a prerequisite to having that need met. If Christians who are leaders in our churches and who are regular in our attendance fail to recognize that we are the ones who need reviving, we will never have true revival! If our expectations and objectives regarding revival are focused upon converting the lost and if we are not lost (or do not realize that we are lost), it is not likely that true revival in our spiritual lives will occur.

In fact, the prevailing evangelistic emphasis in what we call revival services is often a specific hindrance to genuine revival of the church. If active Christian church members are so absorbed and preoccupied with trying to get unconcerned and unconvicted lost people to come to revival services that we exhaust our own time and spiritual energy in promoting attendance of such services by unsaved people, our own intensity in that effort may actually insulate our own spirits from the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Our single-mindedness in the evangelistic focus in times of revival meetings tends to prevent, or at the very least lessen, our openness to the possibility that God may be wanting to deal with sin in our lives.

An important factor in this matter is that most "revival" preaching is designed specifically for and expressly aimed at lost people who are so backslidden that they seldom attend church anymore. I would suggest that it is unlikely that faithful and regular attending church members will be convicted of the sin in our lives in response to such preaching. Admittedly, the Holy Spirit of God can sort of "sneak up" on us and convict us at any time and any place. But it would certainly seem that this is less likely to happen when almost all our "revival" methodology is geared toward evangelizing the unsaved and reclaiming those who rarely attend church at all.

Another thing that causes this popular misconception about the proper revival target to impede true revival is our instinctive avoidance of spiritual self-examination. Our human nature will always cause us to prefer to devote our time, attention, and energy toward converting someone else, rather than examining the sin in our own lives. Real, serious spiritual self-examination against the backdrop of God's holiness and the plumb line of His word is almost always disturbing, agitating and downright painful. To allow the Holy Spirit to focus his convicting searchlight upon the dark corners and recesses of our hearts is terribly risky, because it is likely to disrupt the neat little spiritually-insulated bubbles which active church members tend to develop around ourselves. True revival will inevitably necessitate significant changes in our lives, some of which may be quite traumatic. Not many of us want any part of an approach that might lead to that!

Most Christians will do just about anything (including wearing ourselves out in programs of going out and trying to drag "real sinners" into our revival services and praying all night at church for them) in order to avoid honest, serious spiritual self-examination, brokenness, confession and repentance. We are willing to

get involved in all kinds of attendance promotional activities and really hard, time consuming work, because it keeps our consciences preoccupied and prevents us from having time to consider the reality of sin in our own lives and the possibility that it is we who need revival. Besides, concentrating on the evangelistic focus in revival meetings tends to give us a feeling of pride (albeit spiritual pride.) After all, nobody can say anything bad about anything we do in the name of evangelism, right?

In connection with this subject of the hindrance to true revival presented by our evangelistic emphasis, let's consider some possible motives for the evangelistic intensity which characterizes traditional revival meetings. I wonder whether some of this evangelistic emphasis had not derived more from self-centered desire to measure success, than our genuine burden to see lost people converted to faith in Christ. It is human nature for us to want to be able to measure or grade our accomplishments. All of us (including preachers and church leaders) have an instinctive urge to do so. We are performance-oriented people. We mistakenly assume that God is more interested in our performance, than our hearts. So we are constantly trying to bolster our spiritual performance. The better we perform, the better (we erroneously believe) God likes us. And the better we think God likes us, the better we feel about ourselves. So we naturally need to be able to measure our spiritual performance. We want some way to be able to count and compare everything we do in the name of the Lord, so that we can feel good about ourselves.

So in the matter of evaluation of revival efforts, we measure success in terms of the number of "decisions" made during the meeting. The more people who walk the aisle and register some sort of decision, the better we all (evangelist and congregation) feel. The more decisions we record, the more favorably we compare with other churches in our association. The more decisions he produces, the bigger and better the reputation of the evangelist becomes and the more invitations he will receive from other churches and from larger churches.

I'm afraid that a great deal of motivation behind the prevailing evangelistic thrust in our revival meetings is pure and simple pride... the desire to impress others and be thought of favorably by them and the desire to further our own goals and objectives (which may or may not be God's). Could that be the sort of "gain" about which God spoke through Isaiah and Jeremiah?

"Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge... They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain." (Isa 56:10-11)

"From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit." (Jer. 6:13;8:10)

If true revival ever breaks out, there will be plenty of people walking the aisles. In fact, there will probably be many people running across the church auditorium to confess sins to the pastor or some Christian brother or sister and asking forgiveness for those we have wronged. There will probably be many convicted Christians moving quickly down to the altar to fall on our faces in brokenness and humility before the Lord, begging for forgiveness of sin in our lives. But nobody will be in the mood to try to measure those kinds of decisions. Everyone will be so shaken and broken and overwhelmed by the powerful movement of God's Spirit that selfish urge to measure our success will be consumed by the Holy Spirit and cleansed from our hearts and lives. No, there won't be much counting and measuring going on when true revival occurs!

Before we leave this matter of the potential hindrance to true revival which our evangelistic accentuation may present, let me again confirm my support for all evangelistic attempts we can possibly make. I am not

opposed to evangelism in whatever form it may take. After all, heaven rejoices when one sinner is truly converted to faith in Christ (Luke 15:7). But my suggestion is this: if we want to have a series of services or meetings in which we primarily make an evangelistic appeal, let's say so! Let's call it an "evangelistic crusade" or an "evangelism service", rather than a "revival". And let's have as many evangelistic campaigns as possible... but let's also have some meetings and series of services aimed at and concentrating on experiencing true revival! God has strongly impressed me that one of his overriding concerns is the desperate need for true revival within the church. And if we ever get around to really and sincerely addressing this problem, then the equally important concern of converting lost sinners will almost solve itself.

The church's need for true revival is desperate, but our progression into such a severe need for revival has been insidious. We have drifted so slowly and unknowingly into our situation, that we fail to even notice that our spiritual power and influence has been depleted. The church at large has little or no recognition that we are spiritually sick. God's people have always had trouble recognizing their own spiritual illness.

Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: 'I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand...a people loaded with guilt...children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him... why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness -- only wounds and welts and open sores... (Isaiah 1:2-6)

But the truth is that the church is seriously ill... spiritually sick. Would that we could realize this fact as the psalmist did.

"Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly... there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart" (Psalm 38:3-8)

And even when we acknowledge some sin in our lives, we minimize it as not being serious.

"I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, 'what have I done?'... My people do not know the requirements of the Lord... Since they have rejected the word of the Lord, what kind of wisdom do they have?... they dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace..." (Jer. 8:6-7, 9,11)

But God is trying to show us that our sinful condition is, indeed, serious. "For her wound is incurable" (Micah 1:9). And if our condition is not yet terminal, I fear it is as critical as that of the church at Sardis, of whom Christ said, ..."Strengthen what remains and is about to die... (Revelation 3:2)

Even when God's messengers confront us straightforwardly with our sin, we are prone to rationalize that they must be talking about someone else. But God is trying to tell the leaders of the churches, "Don't point your finger at someone else, and try to pass the blame to him! Look, priest, I am pointing my finger at you" (Hos. 4:4, TLB)"

We leaders in the church must come to realize that "it's not my brother or my sister, but it's me, O Lord standing in the need of prayer." Notice the pronouns in Lam. 3:40;

"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: 'We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.'

and in 2 Cor. 13:5,

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves."

The imperceptibility of this process of slipping gradually into our state of spiritual complacency and self-satisfaction has exacerbated the problem. As mentioned before, our failure to recognize our need for spiritual self-examination virtually assures that true revival will not occur.

Having emphasized the need for true revival within the church, let us consider how we would go about trying to cause it to occur. Well, God's formula for true revival has never changed. It's the same as it has always been.... 2 Chronicles 7:14

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

Notice that God's prescription for true revival, just as so many of God's promises of blessings, is framed in terms of "if..then", i.e., if we meet God's conditions and prerequisites, then he will grant us the promised blessing. In the case of true revival, if we will humble ourselves, pray, seek God's face and turn from our sinful ways, then God will hear and forgive and heal (restore us to spiritual life, health and power, the essence of true revival).

Also notice the order of God's prerequisites for true revival. I believe that God intentionally placed the requirement of humbling ourselves first. Of course, recognition of our need for revival has to come even before humbling ourselves; otherwise, we will never get around to applying 2 Chronicles 7:14 to ourselves. But the necessity to humble ourselves is where God's formula for genuine revival begins. And yet while this is the most important condition for real revival, it maybe the most difficult thing for Christians to do.

What does it mean for us to humble ourselves before the Lord? The Hebrew word used in 2 Chronicles 7:14 translated "humble" is kana, literally meaning to bend, as in to bend the knee, and, hence, to humiliate, or to vanquish or to bring down into subjection.(6) The Expository Dictionary of Bible Words say about this humbling,

"God's people are called to humble themselves and so to face the pain of self-examination and confession of sins... Humbled before God, human beings are able to experience the blessings he has for all who will submit completely to him... Kana and its derivatives suggest public humiliation. A person humbled in this way is wounded because a crushing defeat or public humiliation. In uses of this word there is a strong undertone of shame and dishonor...Still the root has a positive sense when used of a person's humbling himself..."(7)

The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon indicated that the word translated "humble" in 2 Chronicles 7:14 means to be subdued.(8) So, when we think of forced submission and crushing defeat and being subdued, what we are dealing with is surrender. The sense of humbling here includes elements of brokenness and humiliation before God and the annihilation of self ego and the surrender of control and security.

Human nature causes us to crave security and control. Everything we are taught in this life centers around learning how we get to the place of having (perceived) security and staying in control of our circumstances and situations. The world calls it "wise financial planning" and "attaining our goals" and "the realization of success", but what it really amounts to is "control". Just about everything most people (including Christians) do in this life is aimed at achieving and maintaining control... so that we do not have to be dependent upon anything or anybody else (including God). But God doesn't want us in control. God wants his people to surrender everything to him... including our desired control over the affairs and circumstances of our lives. Jesus said that we cannot be his disciples unless we surrender everything to him (Luke 14:33), and that includes control.

Perhaps the most crucial thing that God wants and requires us to submit and surrender to him as an essential part of the process of humbling ourselves before him, is control... control in our lives and control in our churches. After all, Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22, Col. 1:18), and Christ is God (John 10:30), and God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5; Deut 4:24). But when it comes to the matter of our surrendering control, we get very uncomfortable and agitated and disconcerted in a hurry.

Now considering the humbling of ourselves as defined and described above, which is God's prime requirement for true revival. Think about public humiliation, crushing defeat, being sent to our knees, shame and dishonor, surrender, brokenness, loss of security, surrendering control. That doesn't sound like fun to me! These descriptions of what is involved in God's requirement of humbling ourselves certainly do not paint a pleasant or comfortable picture. It sure doesn't seem that meeting God's key prerequisite for revival will be very enjoyable! In fact, it sounds as if its going to be painful... not something that very many people would want to experience.

The Bible dictionary cited above notes that there is "pain" involved with self-examination and confession of sin. The process of honesty and soberly evaluating our conduct and attitudes against the plumb line of God's word (Amos 7:7-8) is no pleasant occasion. Remember what God has said about His word: "Is not my word like fire," declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock to pieces?" (Jer. 23:29); "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12)

The intense conviction of the Holy Spirit is extremely uncomfortable. "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment..." (John 16:8). Jonah discovered, and every Christian should know, that you can try to run from the spirit of God but you cannot successfully hide from him.

In his letter to the first century Christians, James made it very clear that the experience of humbling ourselves to God in confession and repentance, so as to bring about the cleansing of sin and cleansing of sin from our lives, will not be a happy, cheerful occasion. "Submit yourselves, then to God... Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:7-10). There should be no doubt in our minds that God's fundamental requirements for true revival of humbling ourselves before him will be a painful, distressing and traumatic experience.

With this understanding of the pain, discomfort, distress, brokenness and humiliation which are inherent in the process of humbling ourselves, and in view if the fact that humbling ourselves, and in view of the fact that humbling ourselves is the first and foremost prerequisite for revival, why would anyone in his right

mind ever want to experience true revival? Not many people would. And not many Christians do! It's a wonder that any church would want to have true revival. And it's no wonder most churches have long ago stopped trying to have genuine revival.

Is it possible that somewhere, somehow, sometime back in the past decades church leaders (including many pastors and evangelists) began to realize that God's requirements for real revival (beginning with the painful and humiliating process of humbling ourselves in brokenness and honest self-examination and confession before a holy and all-knowing God) is just too hard... just too costly... just too risky? Could it be that active, faithful Christians long ago concluded that the process of humbling ourselves before almighty God is just too likely to necessitate all kinds of traumatic changes and too many major adjustments in our lives, to be acceptable to us? It is conceivable that a long time ago it began to dawn on most active church leaders that God's conditions for genuine revival is simply too high a price to pay?

Is it possible that when faithful Christians and church leaders came to these conclusions, they decided that it would be necessary to modify the common understanding of revival? Could our predecessors in church leadership have realized long ago that church members were simply not going to be willing to live with the reality of true revival? And so they had to come up with an idea of how to subtly redirect the focus and target of revival away from active Christians who regularly attend the church and faithfully support its financial requirements. Of course, the modification of the aim and emphasis of revival away from members would have to appear to be improvement. It would need to appear to be progress... and advancement in ministry.

Could it be that as the church leadership pondered their predicament presented by the ramifications of God's prerequisites for true revival and its negative impact upon the desires and preferences of the church membership at large, the enemy was eavesdropping on them and subtly suggested, "Forget about 2 Chron.7:14. It's out of date! It's from the Old Testament. You're a New Testament church. You need to be progressive. You need to increase your evangelistic emphasis in revival. After all, the great commission focuses on evangelism." (We do realize, do we not, that Satan can quote scripture; although he may distort it somewhat, e.g., Matt.4:5-6). And perhaps his suggestion to the church leadership continued, "Forget about humbling yourself before God. That's too painful! Concentrate your revival efforts on the lost. That's who needs God's attention. You need to shift your revival emphasis away from that uncomfortable business of self-examination, confession and repentance. Your church members are never going to be comfortable with that stuff! You need to redirect your revival emphasis to the lost... to trying to bring lost people into the church and evangelism them." (You see, Satan knew that we would never really be able to lure many lost people into our churches, anyway; so he was not worried about his proposal backfiring on him).

Is it possible that this is how we got to where we are in our churches today concerning our understanding of what revival is and how we should "do" revivals? Perhaps it is not. There may be some other logical explanation as to how we arrived at our erroneous concept about revival, but the possibility described above appears fairly plausible.

As stated before, once we have an accurate understanding of what true revival is and what God's requirements are for it, revival becomes much less appealing for most Christians than we had previously thought. Once we have a full appreciation for the fact that painful self-examination is the beginning point of real revival, it becomes obvious that only a few true believers are serious enough about their relationship with God to be willing to deal with the reality of God's process for genuine revival. Only a remnant of God's

children care that much.

So if God put a burden in your heart for true revival in your spiritual life and the life of your church, you need to realize that you will be trying to swim upstream against a strong current of spiritual apathy and self-satisfaction. You are going to be out of step with most Christians and most church members. And you will be thought of as a little radical and over-zealous. You will find that having a burden for genuine revival will isolate you from the mainstream of church leaders. And you will feel very lonely much of the time.

But God has always chosen to work with a few. Only 2 out of 12 of the spies chosen by the Israelites to investigate the promised land were faithful to give a positive report (Num.14:36-38). God reduced Gideon's soldiers from 32,000 to 300 before letting him defeat the Midianites (Judges 7:1-7). Jesus called 12 apostles to begin his kingdom work (Matt.10:-14).

So if you feel all alone in your hunger for true revival, take heart. Your obvious isolation from the majority of Christians may be confirmation of your calling by God. You will not have the support of most church members, but God's confirmation and encouragement will sustain you. You won't have affirmation of men... but you will have God's. And the hope and promise of God within you for the desperately needed refreshing and renewal of our spirits will strengthen you in your spiritual exile. Because you can be assured that God longs to bring revival, true revival, more than your soul desires it.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!
Luke 13:34

All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations-- Isaiah 65:2

There is refreshing and renewal from God available. But it is not something that we can work up ourselves. Only God can bring it.

"The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs... so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it.-- Isaiah 41:17-20

God's promise to his people here may have been referring specifically to a refreshing restoration to the land, but I believe it may reasonably be seen as a promise for spiritual restoration of God's people also.

Will we continue in our dry, barren, lifeless attempt to do church without God, or will we change? Will we persist with church as usual, or will we repent... and meet God's condition for true revival and allow him to refresh and renew and revive us?

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, -- Acts 3:19

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give

drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise. -- Isaiah 43:18-21

Self-Examination Considerations

To whom do you feel "revival" services in your church have usually been aimed or directed for a spiritual response... unsaved people in your community or the active members of your church?

How many "revival" or evangelistic crusade services have you attended or heard of which featured or used some sort of attendance-promoting emphasis other than Jesus Christ? Consider John 6:44,45 and John 12:32. Do we think that such promotional themes or featured personalities will be able to attract and appeal to spiritual needy people more effectively than Jesus? Why would we think that?

How much personal evangelism (one-on-one witnessing about Jesus Christ) do you initiate in your job during the work week? Why do you not do more? Could it be that most of us are acting as if personal evangelism is primarily the responsibility of our pastor and a few members of our church who seem to have the gift of evangelism?

Do we realize that the non-Christian majority of the world is merely behaving consistent with its true spiritual condition and that it is the church (true Christians), which, by failing to be spiritual salt and light to direct the world to Jesus Christ, is really responsible for the moral and spiritual condition of the world today? How would that realization change your life? How should it change the ministry of your church?

Do you believe the members of your church are ready and willing to seriously and soberly re-examine their own spiritual condition against the backdrop of God's holiness and in the light of God's word? Why or why not?

What are some ways in which our church leaders may be unknowingly and unintentionally enabling or assisting church members avoid honest, painful spiritual self-examination and repentance?

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/larry-r-sinclair/re-examining-revival-in-the-church/>

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