

REVIVE 2013

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Revival. It's a term so overused and misused that it seems outdated and irrelevant to many. Some think it's just a name for an extended series of evangelistic meetings.

For others, images come to mind of camp meetings, large tents, and great halls, where the faithful and the curious gathered to hear passionate preachers. Some will recall emotional hype, high pressure, and excessive shouting that frightened them or turned them off.

This generation's general higher education and common advanced technologies have rendered such events archaic in the minds of many—a holdover from poorer, more desperate times.

But are we not desperate today—threatened, as we are, by perpetual acts of terror, surrounded by corruption in business and government, pressured by recent and impending financial collapse, and grievously wearied by the reports of religious hypocrisy? Yes, we are desperate, even if we have been somewhat desensitized by the chaos.

And are we not poor—though the richest, most developed nation on earth—poor in common decency, weak in family values, and riddled with greed?

Is this not a time for genuine revival? America is ripe for revival! A real, Heaven-sent, Holy Spirit-filled revival, that awakens and activates the church in these latter days.

This reminds me of something Jesus said in Revelation 3:

¹⁴ *“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s new creation:*

¹⁵ *“I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! ¹⁶ But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth! ¹⁷ You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. ¹⁸ So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. ¹⁹ I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference.*

²⁰ *“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. ²¹ Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.*

²² *“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.”*

"You don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." Could America be found in a similar stupor today? Could Marin? Could our church? Could your own household?

Definitions

The definitions of "revive" are familiar: returning to life or consciousness; restoring vigor or vitality; reawakening faith; renewing commitment; resuming activity; returning to prominence. All of these could apply to a church like ours! Who has no room for more of these?

Enduring Promise

Revival is not the stuff of frantic religions; it is an enduring promise from God to His own people, so we must rediscover its meaning, embrace its hope, and apply its precepts.

Revival is God's idea. Here are some examples from the pages of Scripture.

Ezra 9:9

*We were slaves, but in his unfailing love our God did not abandon us in our slavery. Instead, He caused the kings of Persia to treat us favorably. He revived us **so we could rebuild the Temple of our God and repair its ruins.** He has given us a protective wall in Judah and Jerusalem.*

This will be true of us physically in the next year as we commence our building remodel project, but it is truer spiritually, for God has positioned us to be His Temple of worship, and we are responsible to keep the "building" in good shape. In order to do this, we ourselves need to be revived.

Psalm 80:18

*Revive us **so we can call on your name** once more.*

A return to prayer precedes a general revival, but God's people must be revived or we will ignore the call to pray. Does revival wait until we become serious and diligent in prayer? Could you learn to pray better, more effectively? If so, what are you waiting for?

Psalm 85:6

*Won't you revive us again, **so your people can rejoice** in you?*

God's people are typified by joyous worship. How's your joy? Has your well run dry? Do you wonder how it will ever be restored? Revival is the answer.

Psalm 119:25

*Revive me **by your word.***

Revival is the product of the Word of God in our lives. It cannot be whipped up by exciting music or ecstatic experience. It is the result of reading, studying, believing, and applying God's Word to your everyday life.

Isaiah 57:15

*The high and lofty one who lives in eternity, the Holy One, says this: "I live in the high and holy place with those whose spirits are contrite and humble. I restore the crushed spirit of the **humble** and revive the courage of those with **repentant hearts.**"*

Life's difficulties cannot prevent revival. In fact, they may be the very ground from which revival springs, for our God is able to "work all things together for good." All it takes is a repentant heart, a turning back to God, to elicit restoration and fresh courage.

Hosea 6:1-2

"Come, let us return to the Lord.

He has torn us; now He will heal us.

He has injured us; now He will bandage our wounds.

*² In just a short time He will revive us, He will raise us up, **so that we may live in His presence.***

³ Oh, that we might know the Lord! Let us press on to know Him.

He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring."

Jesus said that He had come to give us "life, and that to the full." That fullness of life is to be found "in His presence," which is the effect of revival—to awaken our spiritual sensibilities, to make His presence tangible and powerful.

These are just a handful of the promises of God concerning the revival of His people. They demonstrate His desire and readiness to revive us when we position ourselves to receive it.

Now let me address three Christian habits that do just that—position us to be revived by the Spirit of God.

Fasting

Ezra 8

*²¹ And there by the Ahava Canal, I gave orders for all of us **to fast and humble ourselves** before our God. We prayed that he would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled.*

*²³ So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, **and he heard our prayer.***

As Ezra prepared to lead the Israelites back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple, he asked them to prepare themselves with fasting. Why was fasting so effective (“He heard our prayer”)?

Ezra’s record identifies fasting with intentional humility. Fasting is “not eating,” whether it’s for a day, or one meal, or a week; it is just not eating. We all like to eat. Most of us like to eat more than is good for us. So, to stop eating fulfills the first step of true Christian discipleship, according to Jesus: “deny yourself.” It is the world’s most common form of self-denial.

Fasting is also associated in the Bible with mourning for sin. It is a clear demonstration of repentance, and can be an effective hammer to break the chains of addiction to sin, when combined with faith in Jesus’ name.

Finally, fasting enables you to concentrate in prayer. Time is freed from food preparation, consumption, and cleanup, so that you may concentrate on praying. The feelings that drive you to eat can be converted into similar longings for the presence of God. Let them drive you to God, instead of the kitchen.

Jesus expected that His followers would fast on a regular basis, as part of their spiritual discipline.

Matthew 6

*¹⁶ “And **when you fast**, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. ¹⁷ But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. ¹⁸ Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.*

Not “if,” but “when.” The early Methodists, under the leadership of the Wesley brothers fasted twice weekly. It was recognized as normal Christianity. May it be so again.

I invite you to join me, perhaps for the first time, to fast on the first and third Fridays of each month of 2013. To attend to the presence of the Lord in prayer and worship, even while you work. I’ll have more help and guidelines to offer in the coming weeks.

Prayer

Fasting will be useless as a spiritual exercise if not joined with prayer. Prayer is our lifeline to God. No prayer; no breath of life.

My favorite passage on this topic is in Acts 4, because it demonstrates the power of united, focused prayer. I believe that individual prayer prepares us for something more, something better: united prayer. United prayer multiplies the impact. Check it out:

Acts 4

²³ As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. ²⁴ When they heard the report, **all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God:** “O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—²⁵ you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying,

‘Why were the nations so angry?

Why did they waste their time with futile plans?

²⁶ The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.’

²⁷ “In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. ²⁸ But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will.

²⁹ And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and **give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word.** ³⁰ Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

³¹ After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

The situation was so dire that they raised their voices together as one body. They based their prayer on a promise from God’s Word. They didn’t pray to be hidden from trouble, but to face trouble boldly and continue their work—preaching God’s Word.

Was it effective? The place shook and they were all filled with the Spirit and boldness—I think it was!

What could God do if we come together to pray—pointedly and passionately? Let’s try it and see!

Scripture

The final piece I will mention is the place of the Word of God in your life. It does not belong on a shelf in your home! It belongs in your heart and mind, where it can teach and inspire and empower.

Matthew 4:4

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Jesus was not guessing; He was acknowledging the timeless truth first spoken by Moses. It takes more than food to make a life. Even without food (when fasting) God's Word sustains life.

Don't leave your soul hungry—make it your resolution to read through the entire Bible in 2013 (maybe even twice!).

Times of Refreshing

Finally, I want to share the words of Peter and John, as they testified of the risen Christ, who would come again.

Acts 3

¹⁷ *“Friends, I realize that what you and your leaders did to Jesus was done in ignorance. ¹⁸ But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah—that he must suffer these things. ¹⁹ Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. ²⁰ **Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord**, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. ²¹ For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets.*

Kenneth Wuest translates it: *“epoch-making periods of spiritual revival and refreshment.”* And it is historically true that general revivals punctuate human history as the gateways into new eras of building up the church.

It is God's plan that such “times of refreshing” would pave the way to the return of Jesus Christ, keeping the church in proper form and effective in her mission.

Don't we need a “time of refreshing”? Don't we need more of “the presence of the Lord”? I submit to you that we are candidates for a revival, if we will recognize our need and position ourselves by the means I have just mentioned.