

REVIVE YOUR DEVOTION

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Revival Changes Things

A last days revival is coming. We don't know what it will look like, because revivals are always attuned by God to the culture in which they break out—that is, their emphases are suited to the church's need in that hour and locale.

What we do know is that, by its very nature, revival will change the landscape of the church as we know it, for this has been the case in every recorded revival of the church. Whether God's emphasis was the renewal of prayer, or holiness, or healing, or the baptism of the Spirit—the form of the church was radically changed and the function of the church was tremendously energized.

The results among God's people typically have included deeper love for Jesus, greater reverence for the Scriptures, a fervent experience of the Holy Spirit, a stronger passion to win the lost to the faith, abandoned faith, and sacrificial service.

Among the general population, the results have included irresistible conviction of sin and one's need to be saved, a corresponding conversion through faith in Christ, the illuminating revelation of God's truth, plus deliverance, healings, overflowing joy, and unquenchable hope.

How could things possibly remain the same in an environment like that?!? What kinds of impact could such revival have on your home life? Your workplace? Local government? Our schools? Sunday church services?

The Nature of God's Church

The truest representation of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world is a Pentecostal church—an Acts 2-model church. You may think this is nowhere perfectly revealed (or, certainly not here), but since the church of Acts 2 was a fledgling church, not a mature church, the common imperfections of Pentecostal churches today are, in fact, faithful representations of the Acts 2 model—as long as we are working things out by the wise and powerful leading of the Holy Spirit.

The members of the New Testament churches cheated for money, lied to save face, were covenant breakers, immoral, legalistic, out of order, grasped for power, owned slaves, distorted the truth, resisted proper authority—and that's just a partial list!

A *static*, perfect church does not exist—nor will it ever exist—for the church by its very nature (and God's plan) is fluid, dynamic, and growing, throughout this era. What we will be like when we see Jesus we do not know, but we do know that we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He really is (1 John 3:2). This is the “blessed hope” of the church—of the Christian—today.

This church—the struggling, limping church—is God's “Plan A” for reaching the world with the message of Jesus' saving love. And He has no “Plan B.” The harvest truly is great, but the workers are few. Jesus said that.

Fresh Manna

That's why *God wants* to revive His work in each of us. That's why *we need* to be revived. Yesterday's bread will not satisfy today's needs. We need God's fresh "manna." "Give us *today* our daily bread."

If I do not spend time *today* reading and meditating in the Bible, I will not hear His fresh word to me.

If I do not spend time *today* asking the Lord for what *I* need and what the *church* needs and what *He* wants to do among us and through us, then I will not have fresh assurance of His plan.

If I do not take time *today* to deny myself and submit to the path in which Jesus is leading me, I will not experience fresh victory and peace.

If I do not spend time *today* to praise and thank God for who He is and what He has done for us, I will not have a fresh perspective of His greatness and capacity to love me and all people.

If I do not make time *today* to fellowship with another believer around our mutual faith in Jesus, I will not experience the fullness of courage to press forward.

If I do not make time *today* to help someone or tell someone about the love of Jesus Christ, I will not have fresh joy and the clear sense of significance in my life.

I must involve myself with the Bible, prayer, humility, worship, fellowship, and service.

The first four of these could be summed up under the heading of "devotion to God." The first two of those are the tools of our trade (the Bible and prayer), and the second two are the works of our trade (submission and worship).

These elements of Christian living are not optional—though we have the freedom to choose whether or not to do them. The choice is ours—every day—but these are not optional for life to be truly Christian. And they are not optional for life to be overcoming. And they are not optional for life to be miraculous. And they are not optional for life to be fulfilling. They are the necessary elements of a revived life.

This month, my focus is on the first category: devotion to God. For, if we are not devoted to Him, none of the rest really matters. Let me put it simply:

If you are truly devoted to Jesus Christ, nothing else matters.

If you are not truly devoted to Jesus Christ, nothing else matters.

So, what does it mean to be "truly devoted" to Jesus Christ? Let's look at it today from four angles: (1) revelation, (2) conviction, (3) submission, and (4) adoration.

Revelation

You and I are not on the same level as God. We have not, as some scoffers suggest, created God in our own image (He would be considerably weaker than He is, and untrustworthy, if He were fashioned like us). He is our Creator. We are His creation—the sheep of His pasture and the works of His hands.

Isaiah 55

⁸ *“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.*

⁹ *For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.*

It is characteristic of God that He reveals Himself to us. And this is a great mercy, for He would be utterly inscrutable if He did not. While He is present all the time and in every place, He is invisible to the natural eye, unfathomable to the natural mind, inaudible to the natural ear, and intangible to the natural touch.

1 Corinthians 2

⁹ *That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”*

¹⁰ *But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets. ¹¹ No one can know a person’s thoughts except that person’s own spirit, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit. ¹² And we have received God’s Spirit (not the world’s spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.*

So, God *wants* us to know Him. He made us to know Him. He built-in to the human being the capacity to know Him... *if* the Spirit of God lives in us.

“But people who aren’t spiritual can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means” (1 Corinthians 14:2).

The phrase, “people who aren’t spiritual,” does not refer to people who aren’t religious, or who lack spiritual interests. The original text says, “people without the Spirit,” or, “people who lack the Spirit.” Every human being has been created with the *capacity* to know God and to be filled with God, but by nature, due to sin, that space is *empty*. Contrary to popular New Age teaching, God is *not* in there.

He is willing to come, but you must invite Him. And He will only come if the space—your heart—has been set apart for Him by your faith in the death of Christ. He will not share that space with other so-called gods. He will not share that space with your personal idols. The things you have honored in His place, you must renounce, revering Him alone as your Provider and Guide.

Are you ready to do that today? Are you willing to clear that space for the Living God? Are you willing to put your trust in the Christ who died for you and has risen from the dead for you? Do you want to get that empty place inside you filled? Do you want to find the life you were made for? Make up your mind to do that today. In just a few minutes I’m going to ask you again and tell you how you can do that today.

The bottom line is that the Spirit of God will come to those who prepare the way for Him. And when He does, everything changes! Your spiritual deadness comes to life. Your spiritual dullness becomes sharp. Things that once seemed foolish begin to make sense. Things that were once inscrutable become knowable. Almighty God begins to reveal Himself, and you begin to discover what you were made to do with your life.

How does this revelation come? From the rustling of tree branches? From a wind on the back of your neck? No. Just as it has in the last few moments: through the Scripture.

The pages of the Bible reveal more than ancient history. All of the old stories it contains are divinely selected for their capacity to reveal something more: an unseen, yet present, world of spiritual dimensions. The world where God lives and acts. The world that underlies and oversees our world. The world that preceded us and surpasses us. The world that encompasses all time—past, present, and future—and never fades away.

That is the world of angels and demons, and the battle for the souls of sinners and saints.

The currency of that world is not cash or coin, but mercy and truth, grace and justice. It is a world without sickness, without sighing, without sorrow, without dying. That world is filled with peace beyond what we can understand and overflowing joy forevermore.

How can you know these things? How can you assert such things with authority? From the words of the Bible.

2 Timothy 3

^{16A} *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.* ¹⁷ *God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.*

The words of the Bible are words from God. They were written by men, but inspired and preserved by God. They are translated by men, across many centuries and cultures, and bear much study and reflection, but God uses these words, above all others, through which to communicate His nature and power, His purpose and method, and the means of His great grace.

Read the Word. Read the Word. Read the Word.

You'll never know how much you *don't* know... You'll never know how much you *can* know... until you read the Word of God, the Bible.

Don't read it in bits and chunks. Read it book by book. Start in the New Testament. Start with Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. As you read, look for the person of Jesus, the words of Jesus, the influence of Jesus, the character or likeness of Jesus. You'll even see it reflected in other people in the Bible who knew Him. Meditate on His teachings. Let Him inform you of the nature of the world you cannot see. Its values are different. Its methods are different. Its aim is different. Get the revelation... from the Word of God, the Bible.

Conviction

You can get a lot of head knowledge from just reading the Bible. It is, after all, and without any close competition, the world's greatest book, the most authoritatively authentic ancient script that we have in the world, and the #1 best seller in every generation since its first printing.

However, the greatest feature of the Bible is how it can connect its readers to truth and reality and impact their lives with transforming power. Let me say, clearly, the Bible is not a book of magic, nor is it a magic book.

You will not experience transformation by simply owning a Bible, or displaying a Bible prominently in your home, or even by reading a Bible, if that is *all* you do with it. The power of God's truth must be *released*, or it will remain hidden within the words that fill the pages.

How is the power of truth released? By the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

John 16

⁸ *And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.* ⁹ *The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me.* ¹⁰ *Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more.* ¹¹ *Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged.*

¹² *"There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now.* ¹³ *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.*

The word "conviction" here means to prove wrong, as in a court of law. By extension, it means to arrive at certainty of the facts. Although verse 8 does not assure persuasion (to the point of repentance) of the worldly, verse 13 does imply that result among the faithful. Of course, one may (indeed, must) be convinced of the truth, as well as of wrongdoing. This is what the Holy Spirit does for us.

The Bible is our means of revelation, and the Holy Spirit is our agent of revelation. His method is prayer—meditative, reflective, listening prayer.

James 1

⁵ *If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.* ⁶ *But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind.* ⁷ *Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.* ⁸ *Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.*

If you want to know and become certain of what the Bible means, how one passage connects with another or modifies another—ask God. The same Spirit who inspired its writers can inspire its readers, if we ask.

When you pray, you may ask God for anything that you need, or that others need, or that God wants to do, but *most* of your praying, if you pray in the right way, will be to discover the meaning of God's words, the purposes of His heart, and the plans of His mind.

You cannot do what He expects you to do, if you do not know the meaning of what He has said, and how to apply it in your life. Pray for sight. Pray for light. Pray for understanding. Pray for wisdom. Pray for insight. Pray for faithfulness to carry out what He has told you to do. Pray for courage to stay away from what He has told you to avoid.

If you really want to know God and accomplish His will, you must learn to pray. How do you learn? By practice. Much practice. Persistent practice. Transparency of heart, nobleness of mind, and fluency in prayer come only to those who practice. You may never feel "perfect" as a result of practicing prayer, but you will feel prepared—prepared for any situation that comes your way, even the unexpected. Nothing prepares the soul like prayer. In each of the first three Gospels, Jesus gives this advice:

"Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Mark 14:38).

Many people miss the power of prayer for their lives because they think of prayer as something they themselves generate to communicate with God. I would like to suggest to you today that prayer is less what comes *out* of you, and more of what you admit *into* you, as you spend time in God's presence.

Matthew 6

⁷ *“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. ⁸ Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!*

Because God knows what we need *before* we ask Him, we can be sure that it is not our speaking that persuades Him to help us. Our efforts to offer sound reasons and persuasive arguments cannot obligate God to respond. He answers our prayers for one reason: He is merciful. It is His mercy that has made this way for us to communicate effectively with God. By His mercy, He “bends down to listen” when we call on Him.

If we are smart and respectful, we will “look up to listen” when we pray. That is, we will open our hearts and minds and seek understanding, seek to know God and to grasp His ways, try to recognize His hand in the circumstances of our lives, try to appreciate His intentions in our circumstances, ask for grace to accept what He is doing and cooperate with His Spirit.

Miracles happen when you pray, and mostly they happen to you, within you.

We stand the tallest when we kneel to pray. You may feel weak, awkward, and uncertain as you pray—but if you will persist, you will rise up from prayer with a supernatural strength, and grace, and assurance.

Submission

Kneeling is a humbling posture. Bowing down. Asking. Your flesh would rather be affirming, declaring, and standing. But humility is appropriate, when the thing that is made comes before its Maker.

“O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We all are formed by your hand” (Isaiah 64:8).

With this image, God agrees:

“O Israel... As the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand” (Jeremiah 18:6).

Apostle Paul writes very plainly about this:

“Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (Romans 9:20).

Humbling ourselves—intentionally, on purpose—is the posture that God revives. He rescues the humble, but humiliates the proud (Proverbs 18:27).

James 4

⁶ *As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but favors the humble.”*

⁷ *So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come close to God, and God will come close to you.*

¹⁰ *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.*

God’s revival promise is conditioned on this: *“If my people... will humble themselves”* (2 Chronicles 7:14). Jesus put it this way: *“If anyone desires to be My disciple, let him deny himself [disregard, lose sight of, and forget himself and his own interests] and take up his cross and follow Me [cleave stead-*

fastly to Me, conform wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying, also]”(Matthew 16:24; AMP).

Humble yourself. Put Jesus first. Say “No” to yourself. Do it Jesus’ way.

The simplest expression of this humility—and the most effective means of developing it further—is fasting. Not eating food. Saying “No” to your most basic need and desire. Whether you train a pet or a child, you must be clear and you must be resolute. If you get angry with either one, you will lose your effectiveness. If you want to train your body or your mind, you must also be clear and resolute. Simple, clear steps—baby steps at first—combined with the firm resolution that they will be taken, is the only way to effect positive change.

Fasting one meal is a “baby step” toward spiritual renewal. It’s not about the food (or lack of it); it’s about successfully saying “No” to yourself, denying a basic appetite, and giving that time, that attention, that desire, that energy to God instead.

Fasting for a whole day is a series of small steps. If you're unaccustomed to fasting, or haven't done it in a long time, I suggest you begin a 24-hour fast at sundown, until sundown the next day. To break your fast, eat just a light meal, even though you may want more. Though it is possible to fast for one day without even drinking water, it is best to drink plenty of water. It keeps your body and brain hydrated, and flushes stored toxins from your body. Drinking water is also an excellent way to quell hunger pangs, so you may complete your fast successfully.

There are two desirable effects of these baby steps: (1) you prove to yourself that you *can* fast and not die, and (2) you train your body to “be quiet” and not clamor for food.

The other side of saying “No” to your body, is to say “Yes” to God, which means amplifying your spiritual activity during those physical “down times.” Listen to worship music, read the Bible, pray and worship the Lord Jesus. Instead of feeding your body, feed your spirit. Humble yourself in order to honor the Lord.

Often immediately, but especially over time, the practice of fasting has another powerful effect: it develops a sensitive and submissive spirit toward God. Fasting is certainly not the only way to do that, but it is the most rapid way to do it, and usually the least painful. As you train your body to obey a higher desire, you also train your spirit to obey God’s higher desires.

If, by nature, you are particularly stubborn, I highly recommend fasting; it will defeat the negative side of your stubbornness (against God), without eliminating its positive side (for God). For God does not want you to be spineless; in fact, He wants to put steel in your spine. But He wants you to pull your own weight in His way and under His direction, not away from Him or without Him.

All of this is training you for God’s ultimate design: your full appreciation of Him and His purpose for your creating you in the first place. God’s aim is the *fulfillment* of your life-purpose: that you might be filled with all the fullness of God, to become all that you were meant to be. Being “all that you can be” may be the Army’s slogan, but it is God’s actual intention for you.

Adoration

As you are becoming all that God meant you to be, your appreciation of who He is and His purpose for your life and, indeed, all of the lives around you, will increase, and its increase will cause you to praise Him. It will overflow. It will burst out. His grace will become your delight. His beauty will be seen more and more in the creation and the people around you.

Praise and worship is not something you do because you've been told to, or because it is ritual. Everyone must find their own reason to worship God—*your* reason (and there will be many). You cannot (and will not) worship God just because your parents do, or your friends do. Worship grows naturally out of relationship, because worship is the highest form of love. You worship the One whom you adore.

Psalm 63

³ *Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you!*

⁴ *I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer.*

⁵ *You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy.*

And that is why simply singing—even singing in church—is not worship, unless it expresses devoted adoration. When you sing our songs, think about the words. (Some of the songs you sing around the house you may stop singing, if you ever think seriously about their words! And that's just how easily *worship* songs become routine and meaningless.) Think about what you're singing. Then, sing it like you mean it. Put your heart and mind into it. Put your emotion into it. Let your hands express its meaning. Feel the rhythm in your feet.

When the four living beings around God's throne begin to cry, "Holy! Holy! Holy!" the 24 elders fall down before Him and cast their crowns at His feet, crying, "Worthy are You, Lord, to receive glory, honor, and power!" And the sea of redeemed people lift up their praises like an ocean's roar, joined by thousands and millions of angels, singing, "Worthy is the Lamb!" Can you possibly imagine that scene without a flicker of emotion? Can you imagine it without movement—the motion of endless, undulating, explosive waves of praise, circling the throne again and again and again? Then, how can you stand still, hands in your pocket or your lap while we sing of our great Redeemer's love? Only if you are more conscious of yourself than you are of Him—and *that* is not worship, that is not adoration.

You need to humble yourself, and exalt the Lord!

You see, the other half of humbling oneself is exalting the Lord. If you only humble yourself, but do not go the other mile to exalt the Lord Jesus, it is like tuning a guitar without ever playing it. You have prepared yourself, but not fulfilled yourself. You have readied yourself for action, but never acted. You are a wish that never comes true.

You must *learn* to worship the Lord. If you are willing to give yourself to it, you can improve it constantly. You can become better and better. Your singing ability may not improve significantly, but your heart's ability to adore Him will grow by leaps and bounds. The more you practice, the easier and the better it becomes. Thanks grows into praise, and praise grows into high praise, and high praise grows into adoration, and adoration grows into pouring out, and pouring out grows into bowing down, and bowing down grows into prostration, and prostration grows into awe. Every session is a new opportunity to hear the Spirit's call and share the angels' song and express your joy for your eternal redemption.

Don't just worship God with singing. Worship Him also in silence. Worship Him with rejoicing. Worship Him in submission. Worship Him for the works of His hands. Worship Him with the works of your hands. Worship Him in acts of kindness and compassion. Worship Him when you feel moved. Worship Him when you are numb. Worship Him with your whole heart, your whole mind, and your whole strength.

Means and Results

The Bible, prayer, humility, and worship.

These are both the *means* of reviving your devotion and the *results* of devotional revival. As you give yourself to the Lord in these ways, the Holy Spirit will pour back into you inspiration and satisfaction.

The more you seek to know the Lord, the more He will reveal Himself to you. The more you wait and listen, the more He will work His ways into who you are. The more you humble yourself, the more He will lift you up. The more you love and adore Him, the more of His love and joy He will pour into you.

Be a revived Christian. Start today. You need not wait for an earthshaking event. Take God at His word. Begin to position yourself today. Read the Bible. Practice prayer. Humble yourself through fasting. Give God the worship that is due Him. Revival is here, if you will only embrace it. Jesus said:

John 11

²⁵ *"I am the resurrection and the life..."* ²⁶ *Do you believe this?"*

Not "I was" or "I will be," but "I am." He *is* the Life, and He is *here*. Do you believe this?