

Should We Pray for Revival?

When do you think the following observations were made?

- Ministers today seem more concerned with political power in society than spiritual fervency in the church, while pop culture contributes to the moral decay among the youth.
- While marked by an increasing ethnic diversity and various religious beliefs, the nation's established religious groups -- particularly Protestants -- demonstrate a sterile spirituality. One pastor bemoans the obsession with gambling and rudeness, while churches are attended at convenience.
- College campuses teem with students chasing after the latest philosophies, the more unbiblical the better. The more educated a person you find, the less likely you are to discover a Christian. Meanwhile, churches are filled with people who listen to pastors preach then contradict the sermon by the way they live.

You may think these descriptions came from the blog of some concerned Christian commenting on our time. But the first one comes from Great Britain just before the preaching of John and Charles Wesley, George Whitfield, and others who were used by God to lead a great revival there. The second comes from the American colonies prior to the First Great Awakening. The final came around 1800, with college campuses in the newly formed United States influenced by Voltaire, Rousseau, and others, at the dawn of the Second Great Awakening.

Ours is not the first generation to recognize the spiritual declension among us, or to see the need for God to awaken his church and touch our land. From the saints of the Old Testament to leaders in our time, prayer for revival has marked believers who understand the need for the Spirit surpasses our ability and intelligence.

In my own tradition of the Southern Baptist Convention, I see a growing focus on prayer for revival. New SBC president Ronnie Floyd has already led several gatherings of pastors across the nation to pray for revival. I participated in one in Atlanta with almost 400 people -- mostly pastors -- seeking the Lord. You can be sure that when revival comes, it will not just touch Southern Baptists! Revival

is the work of God, not of a tradition of men. “We can define it as a period of unusual blessing and activity in the life of the Christian Church,” Lloyd-Jones observed. “Revival means awakening, stimulating the life, bringing it to the surface again.”

Five Reasons to Pray for Revival

So should we pray for revival? Let me offer five thoughts on the topic:

1. If we choose to pray for revival instead of obeying God, we should not pray for revival; we should pray a prayer of repentance.

Prayer for revival is not a bandaid cure. If we are not passionate about sharing the gospel, honoring the word, and bringing glory to God, our prayers for revival are meaningless. Note the words of Tozer: “Have you noticed how much praying for revival has been going on of late — and how little revival has resulted? I believe the problem is that we have been trying to substitute praying for obeying, and it simply will not work.”

2. If we see revival as God’s stamp of approval on our status quo Christianity, we may not desire the answer God gives.

Past awakenings brought fundamental changes to music and methods, for instance. Both John Wesley and Whitefield struggled mightily with the idea of preaching in the fields. They were proper Oxford men, after all! But their use of such a “profane” method helped to spur a great revival. In past revivals both gospel proclamation and social ministry converged, whereas today they are too often seen as rivals. Revival separates our preferences from unchanging truth.

3. That being said, we should pray for revival, starting with our own hearts.

I know I am experiencing a fresh touch of God when I stop confessing everyone else’s sins and start with my own. Too many of us are better at expressing our opinions on social media than focusing on what the Spirit is saying to us.

4. We pray for revival because of biblical teaching.

Psalm 85:6 and Habakkuk 3:2, among others, offer us examples of revival prayer. Michael Haykin offers insight on the apostle Paul and [prayer for revival](#). Ray Ortlund also has a fine article on [biblical revival praying](#).

5. We pray for revival because of our study of history.

Here are only a few examples:

It is God's will through his wonderful grace, that the prayers of his saints should be one of the great principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ's kingdom in the world. When God has something very great to accomplish for his church, it is his will that there should precede it the extraordinary prayers of his people; . . . and it is revealed that, when God is about to accomplish great things for his church, he will begin by remarkably pouring out the spirit of grace and supplication. (Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts on Revival*)

Oh! men and brethren, what would this heart feel if I could but believe that there were some among you who would go home and pray for a revival: men whose faith is large enough, and their love fiery enough to lead them from this moment to exercise unceasing intercessions that God would appear among us and do wondrous things here, as in the times of former generations. (Charles Spurgeon)

When did you last hear anyone praying for revival, praying that God might open the windows of heaven and pour out his Spirit? When did you last pray for that yourself? I suggest seriously that we are neglecting this almost entirely. We are guilty of forgetting the authority of the Holy Spirit. . . . When God sends revival he can do more in a single day than in fifty years of all our organization. That is the verdict of sheer history which emerges clearly from the long story of the Church. (Martin Lloyd-Jones)

I continue to dream and pray about a revival of holiness in our day that moves forth in mission and creates authentic community in which each person can be unleashed through the empowerment of the Spirit to fulfill God's creational intentions. (John Wesley)

G. Campbell Morgan famously observed how a sailor has no impact on the wind. But a good sailor knows the wind, and knows how to set the sails when the wind blows. Let us study the history of revival and let us gather in what Edwards called "a humble attempt to promote explicit agreement and visible union of God's people, in extraordinary prayer" so that we will know when the Spirit moves afresh. Then we may set our sails accordingly.