

We All Want Revival

Introduction

As Christians, we all want to be spiritually vibrant. We all want to be wholly devoted to God and feel thrill and comfort of walking closely with Christ. We all want to be able to consistently put to death our pride and selfishness. We all want to be used by God to do great things to advance His kingdom on earth. Getting these spiritual blessings that we all want is what I am calling REVIVAL.

Professor Robert Coleman writes: “Revival is that sovereign work of God in which He visits His own people, restoring and releasing them into the fullness of His blessing.”

I think Coleman is absolutely right. But if it is a sovereign work of God, do we just passively wait until he “revives” us?

The famous preacher G. Campbell Morgan writes: “Revival cannot be organized, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again.”

What happens when we catch that “heavenly wind”?

The famous South African preacher Andrew Murray writes: “A true revival means nothing less than a revolution, casting out the spirit of worldliness, making God's love triumph in the heart.”

Do you want that? Do you long for that?

I have been reading about this subject for some time in a variety of different books. They don't all use the word revival but they all refer to this concept- spiritual renewal- and what has struck me is that they all seem to say that it has the same general characteristics.

I have tried to boil down what these authors say about revival and I have come up with four things that always characterize real revival:

1. Repentance
2. Urgency
3. Belief
4. Prayer

I want to spend the rest of our time looking closely at each of these four things.

1. REPENTANCE

When I say that we need repentance I am including two things beyond the most basic meaning of repentance which is turning from your sin. **First**, I am including conviction of sin and **second** I am including ongoing willingness to be broken.

a. What is conviction of sin?

The famous Scottish preacher Robert Murray Mccheyne writes: “It is a just sense of the dreadfulness of sin. It is not a mere knowledge that we have many sins, and that God's anger is revealed against them all; but it is a heartfeeling that we are under sin. Again: it is not a feeling of the loathsomeness of sin—that is felt only by the children of God; but it is a feeling of the dreadfulness of sin—of the dishonour it does to God, and of the wrath to which it exposes the soul. Oh, brethren! conviction of sin is no slight natural work upon the heart. There is a great difference between knowing that vinegar is sour, and actually tasting and feeling that it is sour. There is a great difference between knowing that fire will burn us, and actually feeling the pain of being burned. Just in the same way, there is all the difference in the world between knowing the dreadfulness of your sins and feeling the dreadfulness of your sins. It is all in vain that you read your Bibles and hear us preach, unless the Spirit use the words to give sense and feeling to your dead hearts...It is the Spirit that convicts of sin.” So conviction is the heartfeeling of what you understand is true about your sin. It is tasting the bitterness of your sin.

b. What do you mean by an “ongoing willingness to be broken over your sin?”

James actually speaks of this as something that we are commanded to do and that it is a way of drawing near to God- James 4:8-10 “8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

Also, look at Isaiah 57:15

15 For this is what the high and lofty One says—
he who lives forever, whose name is holy:
"I live in a high and holy place,
but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit,

to revive the spirit of the lowly
and to revive the heart of the contrite.

When I say “willingness to be broken over your sin” I mean that you actually regularly desire to see your sin and go through the pain of facing it and repenting because you desire to be near God ALL THE TIME. If you desire this, pray. Here is a prayer you are sure to get an answer to: “search me O God...show me my sin. Search my heart and reveal to me my sin so that I can repent and live wholly for You.”

Meditation Question: Are you... willing, desiring, longing... to be broken over your sin?

What if we see our sin but we don't FEEL our sin?

First, in order to feel at a heart level we must think and reflect. We are an unfeeling generation because we are a generation of entertainment junkies that think and reflect very little. So stop running around and turn off the media and really reflect. Imagine if you were unfaithful to your spouse (and in the Scriptures God speaks of his people as his wife or as his children) and you didn't get before her weeping and begging for forgiveness because you didn't FEEL repentant! Don't fake it. Reflect on your own wicked heart that you could sin against the great and holy God who gave His own Son to redeem dust like you and you don't even feel truly broken over your unfaithfulness.

Second, have a proper view of God as personal. God is a person. He is personally offended and grieved by our sin. One of the ways God reveals his relationship to us is that of a husband and when we sin it is like we are cheating on Him. Look at Jeremiah 3:1-3 as God talks to his people Israel:

“If a man divorces his wife
and she goes from him
and becomes another man's wife,
will he return to her?
Would not that land be greatly polluted?
You have played the whore with many lovers;
and would you return to me?
declares the Lord.
2 Lift up your eyes to the bare heights, and see!
Where have you not been ravished?
By the waysides you have sat awaiting lovers
like an Arab in the wilderness.

You have polluted the land
with your vile whoredom.

3 Therefore the showers have been withheld,
and the spring rain has not come;
yet you have the forehead of a whore;
you refuse to be ashamed.

Do you see how personally God is taking their sin. He is a faithful loving husband who has been betrayed. That is what we do to God when we sin. Meditate on this. Do you have sin- “respectable sin”- that you are not giving up? Let this marriage relationship with God bring us to our knees in constant brokenness over our sin and repentance.

2. URGENCY

a. URGENT NEED FOR THE CROSS

When I speak about urgency, I am first and foremost referring to our need to have a heartfelt urgency concerning Christ’s work on the cross. By saying that we need to have a sense of urgency, I am not saying that we need a new understanding but rather having a new place in your heart priority for the cross. Let me try to explain the difference between understanding the cross and having a heartfelt urgency about the cross.

It was not too long ago that I taught my kids how to ride a bike. I taught them about how to get the peddle in just the right position so that you could push it down with your right foot to get going. They listened with great interest because they wanted to be able to get going. Then as I told them about the brakes and how you peddle backward to stop, they understood what I said but the information was not important. They had no need for it. Then we went on a bike ride around the block that at one point has a slight decline leading to a street with cars. The kids peddled with glee and loved the feeling of coasting along on their bikes. Then they came to the decline and they loved feeling of speeding along. But suddenly they saw the street and their eyes became as big as saucers as they tried to remember that less than interesting bit of information about the brakes and of course they tried to stop by dragging their feet on the ground. They then came back to me and wanted me to show them again how the brakes worked and were quite interested. What was the reason for the “new vision” they had about the brakes on their bikes? NEED. They saw their need. That is why conviction of sin must precede a new vision of the cross of Jesus. We must feel the need for the cross to satisfy the HOLY WRATH that God has for those of us who sin against him. Jonathan Edwards paints the picture well: “The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood” (Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God).

b. URGENT NEED FOR CLEANSING

I want to stress that the urgency of receiving the cleansing work of Christ is NOT something that only happens at salvation. Whenever we find ourselves in sin and we repent, “AS CHRISTIANS”, we must still run to the cross with this same NEED. “COVER ME WITH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST OR I WILL BE JUDGED BY AN ANGRY GOD!” We must have this constant awareness that if we drift into sin and we dabble with sin, we are not guaranteed the ability to repent tomorrow. We have an urgent need to be cleansed of our sin as believers today! When we don’t have this kind of urgency, we get caught up in the world and we are warned about this in by Christ in Luke 21:34 "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”

c. URGENT NEED FOR A DYING WORLD

If we are seeing our own situations as desperate and urgent and Christ as the solution, we cannot help but look out at this dying world around us and feel that their plight is urgent and we will share the good news. I was recently sitting next to a woman on a plane. We exchanged greetings and then I quickly turned to reading my book. Then the two voices began to argue inside me.

“Just read your book!” “No! You need to talk to her to tell her about Jesus!” “You don’t know her and this flight is only an hour. Plus, she will think that you are a kook!” “So what! She need to know about Christ, she is in danger and she is robbing him of glory...you will never have another chance to see her again and she will go to hell. Her blood will be on your hands if you say nothing!”

So, I spoke up...I engaged her in conversation and eventually I asked her if she had a religious background. She opened right up and we talked extensively about how sinful people can get right with God. But the only reason I got started on that was because I believed in my soul that her situation is urgent.

Something similar happened on the way back. I was sitting by another woman on the plane. Conversation was natural and I steered the conversation to the things of God. She told me she was a committed Catholic. I asked her many probing questions about how she thought a holy God would accept a sinful person like her and me. She seemed satisfied with her answers even though they were far short of the gospel. The conversation shut down and I thought to myself... “Well, you tried. Now just read and leave her alone.” So I picked up my book and began to read. But the other voice kept screaming at me, “Do something. Pray! Think of something!” So I put down my book...rather angry at being disturbed...and I

took out my notebook and wrote her a letter, which included a short bible and very basic bible study on how to know God. I felt stupid when I gave this letter to this complete stranger...But she accepted it with apparent delight and said that she would dust off her bible and do the study.

By telling you these stories I am not trying to tell you I am a great evangelist. I am NOT. I am actually frequently at a loss for words and cowardly. By sharing these stories I am trying to show you how my belief that the world has URGENT NEED for Christ leads to evangelism. So, cultivate this sense of urgency.

3. BELIEF

a. You must BELIEVE in the promise that Christ's work has made you a son of God.

Once again, just like when I spoke about conviction of sin, belief that Christ's work has made you a much loved son of God is not simply understanding but something that you treasure and changes the way that you view life.

I once heard a story of a pastor who was counseling a thirteen year old girl. She was a Christian but she was really depressed. The pastor explained to the girl that she should be full of joy because Jesus died for her and therefore she was completely forgiven of her sin and God loved her as his own daughter. She replied, "I know that and I believe that but what good is that if all the boys think I am ugly?"

Stop and think about this for a moment. Her struggle is our struggle. We know about the gospel says that we are much loved sons of the God of the universe because he poured out his wrath on His own son to redeem us from his wrath, but we think it is not really important and does not really relate to the present struggle- the thing we really want or the thing we are really worried about. We know it but we don't BELIEVE it.

b. We must BELIEVE that there is power in the blood of Christ to cleanse us and restore us.

The blood of Jesus refers to the violent sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross. For personal revival we must have a FRESH BELIEF that the spilling of His blood on the cross accomplished something that changes everything. With this FRESH BELIEF we now feel "in our bones" that God loves us and is not accusing us. A typical problem we run into when we are NOT believing in the power of Christ's blood goes something like this:

You fall into a sin that you have asked God to take away. It is habitual. You are ashamed of it and you feel powerless. You know that Christ died to reconcile you to God, but here you are, stuck in sin. You feel guilty. You begin to wonder if you are even a Christian.

Now, let's see how belief in the power of the blood of Christ applies to this.

First, have you repented or are you simply feeling bad about your sin? When we are dealing with sin, we must repent...that is we must see ourselves as guilty as guilty people rather than simply sad people.

Second, when we run to Him repenting we must also run to him believing that Christ's blood really takes away our guilt. The death of Christ actually satisfied the wrath of God for you. Did you lie, cheat, steal, commit adultery, even murder? God poured out ALL of His wrath on Christ and there is no sin so awful that the blood of Christ cannot completely cleanse. He took the insults we deserve and he took our shame.

But the blood of Christ does more than cleanse us of our sin so that we are no longer guilty and no longer ashamed. His sacrificial death broke the power of sin. The more that I see that I am a much loved Son because of the cross rather than a judged orphan, I will have power say "NO" to sin and yes to my God. As I exercise my faith in the power of Christ's blood to break satan's mastery over me, I can turn away from sin and live for my Lord.

c. Finally, we must BELIEVE that God has power to work in our weakness and delights to do so.

In my life, when it looks like the odds are against me in some situation because I am not strong enough or smart enough, I move toward hopelessness rather than prayer. But this is precisely where the battle with satan and the battle for belief in God is at its greatest. If I believe what the Scriptures say, then when I am weakest is precisely when I am most helpless and weak is precisely when I should pray most fervently and expect God to intervene. Teaching and examples are numerous in Scripture but perhaps the most colorful example is that of Gideon in Judges 7:1-8

Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

2 The Lord said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' 3 Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.'" Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.

4 And the Lord said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go." 5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." 6 And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. 7 And the Lord said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home." 8 So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley."

Look at 7:22, Gideon and his 300 men never really even had to fight. "When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army." God wants us to despair of our own strength and robustly believe in His so that when He acts to deliver us, that there is no mistake who gets the glory...God ALONE.

Meditation Question: When you are in a tight spot and feel helpless, do you tend to cry out to God believing that He can and will ACT on your behalf, or do you tend toward unbelief?

4. PRAYER

J. Edwin Orr, church historian, summarized in one sentence his 60 years of study on prayer and spiritual awakening when he wrote: "Whenever God is ready to do something new with His people, He always sets them to praying."

How is your prayer life? Are you constantly speaking with God and crying out to him or has your prayer life grown cold?

a. God hears the prayers of His children and he RESPONDS to our prayers!

Let me repeat that. GOD RESPONDS TO OUR PRAYERS. I know that it is basic but I have noticed in conversation with several people, and I have seen in my own life, that many of us view God as an impersonal being. We don't cry out to God in prayer and wrestle with God because "He will just do what He has planned anyway." This is an Islamic fatalistic view of God and not the view of

the One True God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. God answers prayer! In a way that we don't understand, God hears our prayers and changes his plans!

Look at Amos 7:1-6

This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout, and behold, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. 2 When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said, "O Lord God, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" 3 The Lord relented concerning this: "It shall not be," said the Lord.

4 This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, the Lord God was calling for a judgment by fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. 5

Then I said, "O Lord God, please cease! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!"

6 The Lord relented concerning this: "This also shall not be," said the Lord God.

This is God answering Amos' prayer for mercy and changing his plans. You may be tempted to ask: "But how does this fit in with God's sovereignty?" That is a good question. But right now, Shhh. Quiet that question in your soul and simply acknowledge from the clear testimony of Scripture that God is sovereign and God answers prayer. For now, just say with the Psalmist: "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me" (Psalm 131). Then pray and expect God to answer your prayers as He said he would.

b. Fight to pray!

Spend time. Discipline yourself to meet with God and fight with Him. Stop watching television, put down your favorite hobby, put away your books and pray. There is no substitute for time spent on your knees talking, wrestling and begging God.

In the Korean revivals in the early 20th century it was very common for people to regularly attend 4:30am prayer meetings or to pray all night. These were not boring prayer meetings with no urgency. These were life and death meetings. At these meeting the people wrestled with God, they repented, they talked with God with loud cries and tears just like Jesus: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence."

Express your emotions to God, even argue with Him. "Why have you forgotten me God?" cries the Psalmist. Beg God to give you opportunities to share your faith, to heal you, to change your circumstances for His glory. Plead with him to save your kids or to make your wife or husband more holy. Argue with God. Recently, after repenting to God of my selfishness and my lack of love for people and even for God, I prayed, "Oh God, wake this church up! Make us willing to give up all we own and even die for you. How are we going to

make a difference in this world if you don't change us and make us love you and live radically for you? This is what you said you want for your people. I can't change us so you have to!" This may sound crazy to you...even rude... but listen to Moses:

"12 Moses said to the Lord, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' 13 Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." 14 And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." 15 And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. 16 For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

17 And the Lord said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." 18 Moses said, "Please show me your glory." 19 And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." (Exodus 33:12-19)

Moses speaks to God out of desperation and from his heart. God responds favorably.

Conclusion

I read a quote earlier by Andrew Murray that I want to read again "Andrew Murray writes: "A true revival means nothing less than a revolution, casting out the spirit of worldliness, making God's love triumph in the heart." I want this for me and I want this for you. Let's pray, let's storm the gates of heaven and not rest until God gives us this revolution.