



*Reformation*  
**REVIVAL**  
*JOURNAL*

REVIVAL:  
A SOLUTION  
OR A PROBLEM?

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*An Urgent Appeal to  
Christian Leaders in America*

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you. . . ."

Ephesians 1:17-18

**AMERICA AND BEYOND**

The primary audience of *An Urgent Appeal* is Christian leadership in America. However, the general principles are equally applicable to revival issues in the church worldwide. The Appeal celebrates significant renewal and revival movements in other parts of the world that illustrate many of the issues explored here. They hold out great hope for God's mercies to yet reawaken the church in America.

**STARTING THE CONVERSATION**

*An Urgent Appeal* is not intended to be a "primer" on revival. Instead, it presents an analysis on revival that attempts to be biblical, simple, and generally self-evident. The goal is to capsule major themes on revival around which consensus and collaboration can be built as the American church stands at a new threshold in the Kingdom purposes of Christ.

Primary objectives of the Appeal include:

- To cultivate and promote increased consensus and collaboration about what the Holy Spirit has said and is saying concerning corporate, biblical revival.

- To establish a starting point for in-depth discussion on biblical revival by leaders of various denominational and ethnic backgrounds.
- To provide common language and a context within which Christian leaders can work together to foster this vision throughout the Body of Christ.
- To help leaders who seek corporate, biblical revival to preempt unnecessary chaos and division among ourselves and our people as God grants our prayers for revival.

Ultimately, it is hoped the Appeal will stimulate collegiality among Christian leaders and will help cultivate a climate conducive to a theologically sound reawakening to Christ within our churches and throughout our nation.

### THE SEASONS OF GOD

"As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you" (Zechariah 9:11-12).

### JUDGMENT AND HOPE

One year passes into another, one century into another, one millennium into another. Great leaders, great movements, great nations come and go. Only a few things remain. Only a few things stand the test of time.

God's truth remains, as His Word will not pass away. When God speaks, it is sealed in Heaven: sure, dependable, alive.

There are clear patterns in Scripture regarding how God speaks. Sometimes He speaks messages of warning. Sometimes He speaks messages of hope. With His Word come seasons . . . epochs of His special activities, across the centuries, in fulfillment of His Word.

For those who do not heed the warnings, there come seasons of judgment. For those who do heed and repent, the

Holy Spirit gives seasons of new beginnings—resurrections, as it were.

Yes, God does judge—both individuals and whole civilizations. Sometimes His judgment is remedial. His discipline is meant to bring a people to their senses, to lead them to turn and to return to Him.

At such crossroads moments, God ultimately confronts His people with their sin. They have grieved Him deeply by embracing the idols of their age. Offended by their betrayal, He turns away. He must uphold the honor of His holy name among the nations. He withdraws the showers of His blessing (Ezekiel 34:26). The rains of His righteousness are withheld (Hosea 10:12). His people find themselves in "waterless pits" (as He terms them in Zechariah 9:11). Yet, the God of everlasting love, the "God of hope" (Romans 15:13) is not far from His covenant people. He continues to call them to pray, to repent, to turn from their idolatry and unbelief, and to once again place their wholehearted trust in Him alone. Then He summons them to hope. To seasons of renewal, restoration, revitalization, reformation . . . revival.

### WATERLESS PITS

#### What Does God See as He Looks at the American church?

Many claim that the church in the U.S. may be the most organized, populous, financially prosperous, visible, and culturally pervasive of any Christian movement in the history of the world. Reports of renewal abound: liturgical, theological, ecumenical, charismatic, lay, youth, missionary. Volunteerism and faith-based ministries remain strong. Stadiums overflow with zealous disciples. There is much for which we can praise God.

But what else does God see in the church? Despite the glitz and glamour, does He also find waterless pits? Is there a sense that in spite of all our measurable activity, the church generally is paralyzed? Are we outwardly prosperous while being inwardly weak and stagnant?

Do the great doctrines of the Bible fail to grip our congre-

gations and move the hearts and minds of our people? Does religious flesh and fleshly religion dominate, marked by self-sufficiency and self-promotion? Have we so domesticated Christ and privatized the Gospel that we have become impotent in our impact on the social and spiritual crises of our nation? Is this why there has been negligible overall church growth nationwide during the past decade? Many church leaders would sadly confess it is so.

Research tells us that there is little difference between the lifestyle of Christians inside the church and our society as a whole. The disintegration in our culture is also found in our churches: Racism. Hypocrisy. Hero worship. Materialism. Busyness. Lack of social conscience. Road rage. Disintegration of the family. Pornography. Abortion. Status quo mediocrity. Self-indulgence in our abundance. Self-satisfied with our kingdom accomplishments. The sad part in all of this is that the living Christ Himself is marginalized; He is not glorified as the Supreme Lord of the church.

### What Does God See as He Looks Across America?

Surely God sees spiritual erosion, moral bankruptcy, and the loss of fixed, transcendent values and absolutes. Mother Theresa concluded that America's "poverty of the spirit" was the greatest poverty she found anywhere. Traditional American religious impulses may be up, but morality and ethical cohesion are down, unchecked by a flourishing neo-paganism that has become the serious pursuit of multitudes of our citizens.

In addition, God sees our 50 million urban poor, where a gap between rich and poor grows wider every year. He knows that half our marriages end in divorce. He grieves that we have lost our sense of the sanctity of life, that we have become increasingly a culture of death. He beholds the incarceration of millions of our citizens. He sees our self-consuming consumerism. All of it: "waterless pits."

Christians today, like Israel before them, find themselves wandering in a desert of their own making because they have too often chosen what was expedient and disobeyed God. Many have become "nominal Christians," possessing a form

of godliness but forfeiting the power of God.

In this condition, we must pause and face a sober and humbling truth: The hope of revival is not offered to the Church Militant but rather to the Church Repentant. There is a danger here. If the church is blind to its true spiritual condition, then revival will simply be viewed as a divine additive, given basically to increase the effectiveness of our ministries instead of restoring the glory of God in His church.

But once we recognize how far we have fallen (Revelation 2:4-5) and again realize our covenant relationship and responsibilities to God, then we will humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, turning from our wicked ways. It is then we learn the ancient yet ever relevant lesson that the road to revival is paved with contrite and broken hearts. With such a people our God is pleased to dwell (Isaiah 57:15). Repentance is the pathway to revival.

### Is There Hope?

In the extended hands of a forgiving God comes the offer of hope (Hosea 14:1-4). Our waterless pits can become pools of living water as the refreshing rains of His Spirit return to pour upon us again (Hosea 6:1-3).

Our God is a God of promises. His promises focus on new beginnings, seasons of renewal, especially for those in waterless pits. The Holy Spirit desires to take us together where we have never gone before, just as He has done with His people so many times in the past.

He is able, for He remains forever the God of revival. Should we not speak of it and prepare for it with full resolve, and without any reserve? Can we not trust Him in this? Since to the whole church the Holy Spirit proclaims, "Christ is in you, the hope of all the glorious things to come" (Colossians 1:27), how can we trust Him for less?

As you look at the landscape, what do you sense? Are we at a threshold? Is it too late? Or is there a season of hope before us? Is it a time to get ready for an extraordinary awakening to Christ—to get ready for biblical revival? Do you sense an urgency?

Nationally respected Christian leaders have expressed hope for a comprehensive work of God's renewing grace among American Christians in this crucial hour. It is an extraordinary hope, a claim that, despite our sin and paralysis, God desires to do something radically new with His people. It is an expectation of an amazing work within Christ's church in our nation that actively engages us in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform our cities and culture, to evangelize our friends, to touch unreached peoples worldwide. Revival!

*An Urgent Appeal* is presented by the National Revival Network of Mission America in the conviction that multiplied Christian leaders across America increasingly desire to pursue consensus and collaboration for corporate revival, and to help their people to do the same.

#### DEFINITIONS OF CORPORATE REVIVAL

"This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people. . . .' The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call . . . Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. . . ." (Acts 2:16, 39; 3:19).

#### THREE SCHOLARS SPEAK

Let's call on three evangelical scholars, with well over 100 years of scholarship and five earned Ph.D.'s between them in the study of biblical and historical revival. They provide us with excellent definitions as a starting point for our considerations.

First, J. Edwin Orr distilled his decades of research into the following definition:

An Evangelical Awakening is a movement of the Holy Spirit bringing about a revival of New Testament Christianity in the church of Christ and in its related community. Such an awakening may change in a significant way an individual; or it may affect a larger group of believers; or it may move a congregation

or the churches in the city or district, or the body of believers throughout a country or continent; or indeed the larger body of believers throughout the world. The outpouring of the Spirit affects the reviving of the church, the awakening of the masses, and the movement of uninstructed peoples toward the Christian faith; the revived Church, by many or by few, is moved to engage in evangelism, in teaching, and in social action.

Theologian J. I. Packer concurs with this perspective when he writes:

Revival, I define, as a work of God by his Spirit through his Word bringing the spiritually dead to living faith in Christ and renewing the inner life of Christians who have grown slack and sleepy. In revival God makes old things new, giving new power to law and gospel and new spiritual awareness to those whose hearts and consciousness have been blind, hard and cold. Revival thus animates or reanimates churches and Christian groups to make a spiritual and moral impact on communities. It comprises an initial reviving, followed by a maintained state of revivedness for as long as the visitation lasts.

Writing as a senior pastor, and former Old Testament professor, Raymond C. Orlund, Jr. provides a vivid description of revival:

When God rends the heavens and comes down on His people, a divine power achieves what human effort at its best fails to do. God's people thirst for the ministry of the Word and receive it with tender meltings of soul. The grip of the enslaving sin is broken. Reconciliation between believers is sought and granted. Spiritual things, rather than material things, capture people's hearts. A defensive, timid church is transformed into a confident army. Believers joyfully suffer for their Lord. They treasure usefulness to God over career advancement. Communion with God is avidly enjoyed. Churches and Christian organizations reform their policies and procedures. People who had always been indifferent to the gospel now inquire anxiously. And this

type of spiritual movement draws in not just the isolated straggler here and there but large numbers of people. A wave of divine grace washes over the church and spills onto the world. That is what happens when God comes.

### BIBLICAL EMPHASES

Revival, by whatever term, appears to be a distinctive and recurring pattern in God's work with His people. Church historian Dr. Richard Lovelace observes that God's predisposition is always toward revival: "The great theme of Scripture is God's recovery of an apostate people." Yale scholar Kenneth Scott Latourette, in his seven-volume work on Christian history, observed that there were "ebbs and flows" of the Christian movement over the past 2,000 years that invariably issued out of seasons of spiritual awakenings.

More importantly, the Bible itself contains revival narratives, revival prayers, revival predictions, and revival principles. Thousands of verses deal with the promises of God for revival, the ways of God in revival, the manifestations of God during revival, the impact of God on His people out of revival, the personal and corporate dimensions of revival, and, ultimately, the centrality of Christ throughout any revival. Although the theme is set forth under both the Old and New Covenants, in the latter there is a much greater range of God's work in revival because it is now secured, mediated, and expanded through the finished work of the ascended Christ.

From one perspective, revival is where all the purposes of God ultimately end up. The last two chapters of the book of Revelation describe what some have called the "Final Revival," of which every other season of revival is a prototype. Every historic revival is, in a sense, an "approximation of the Consummation"—that is, an intermediate expression, or a preliminary but substantial demonstration, of Christ's Kingdom in all of its glory. It is a dress rehearsal, if you will, of the climactic "renewal of all things" that transforms heaven and earth when Jesus returns.

### TERMS AND METAPHORS

That being said, in time and space and history, revival comes according to patterns generally revealed throughout the Scriptures and church history. As a result, a number of terms have emerged to delineate various facets of biblical revival. These include:

- Renewal
- Reformations
- Awakenings
- Visitations
- Effusions of the Spirit
- Outpourings of the Spirit
- Fillings of the Spirit
- Baptisms of the Spirit
- Quickenings
- Revitalizations
- Restorations
- Times of Refreshing
- Christ-awakenings
- Jubilees
- The manifest presence of Christ

Various metaphors have also been used such as:

- Waking up
- Latter rains
- Fire falling
- Turning back captivity
- Deserts blossoming like a rose
- Rivers of renewal
- Winds of renewal
- Beneficent sabotage
- Overthrowing of the status quo

### Spiritual revolution

#### Seasons of springtime and harvest

Whatever the term or metaphor, most would agree that revival is a season when God mercifully turns away His judgments from the church, deserved because of her lukewarmness and disobedience. Instead, God moves to comfort and restore her, to intensify, accelerate, deepen, and extend the work of His Son in and through her.

#### CYCLES OF REVIVAL

Latourette's metaphor describes revival epochs as waves of the sea washing up the shore as the tide comes in. Implied in that picture is the fact that there are episodes of advance and recession throughout the history of God's people—cycles, some call them.

This is not to suggest some kind of arbitrary interpretation that causes previous awakenings to limit or predetermine our expectations of the steps God might take in some future outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We can never put God into some kind of a "revival box."

Yet seasons do unfold, and patterns can be seen. Why have cycles of revival been required through the ages?

Again, our consideration is with corporate revival rather than personal revival. Most agree it is possible for an individual believer to live in continuous renewal, or "revivedness" (Packer), even if the Christian community around him is in spiritual recession.

But regarding corporate revival, there are at least five reasons for the cycles or waves:

1. Spiritual gaps, as a new generation rises up that does not know Christ in the depth and intensity of former ones.
2. Previous blessings, which have, over time, fostered a sense of self-satisfaction and complacency in the body of Christ.

3. Theological neglect, that has permitted imbalances and divergences that diminish or obscure our vision of who Christ really is as well as our theological precision.
4. A new era of expansion, when the re-awakening of the church is related primarily not to God's rescuing her from judgments, but to God's intention to reactivate the church for new advances of the Gospel in our communities, throughout a nation, and among the unreached peoples of the world.
5. God's sovereignty— Sometimes there is no other apparent explanation except that God chooses to do so for the glory of His Son simply because He is God.

#### REVIVAL IS CHRIST!

Preeminently, all true revival is about God bringing glory back to His Son by the power of the Holy Spirit through His church. Between the Ascension and the Consummation, this is one of the most strategic activities of the Holy Spirit. In fact, corporate revival necessitates Trinitarian activity: Father-initiated, Spirit-driven, Son-centered.

Yes, biblical revival is supremely Son-centered—it is utterly Christ-dominated. Some have even called it a "Christ-awakening." We can only think rightly about revival when we think rightly about Christ's place in revival. He is the criterion by which we define it, measure its legitimacy, and vindicate its impact.

This is the heart of the consensus we seek. Further, our collaborations must coalesce around Christ. Any spiritual experience, whether called revival or something else, that diminishes Christ, bypasses Him, or actually leads away from Him, is not of God and holds no hope for any generation.

The first issue before us as Christian leaders, then, is not to define the characteristics of revival. Rather, it is to comprehend more fully the Christ who is at the center of corporate revival.

Fundamentally, revival is an awakening to all that Christ

already is for us. Saint Irenaeus said: "Christ brought us every newness by bringing us Himself." In the same way, in revival God does not make new things. Rather, He makes things new. He does this by reintroducing us to Christ who stands at the epicenter of His renewing purpose among the nations. As said earlier, in revival God accelerates, intensifies, deepens, and extends the newness that Christ secured for us. Revival increases our capacity to express this newness and to minister it to others. In revival God invites the church into more of who Christ is for us, even as we invite Christ into more of who we are for Him.

After all, Scripture's revival promises were secured for us by the cross of Christ. The cross marks the most decisive moment in God's ongoing commitment to "the recovery of a backslidden people." Everything that revival brings has been bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus. In addition, the message of the cross exposes, rebukes, and replaces every false hope on which the church might depend, giving us the greater hope of God's inexhaustible and unconditional renewing grace. The cross acts as a hinge to open the floodgates of God's reviving bounty for any generation of His people.

#### FOUR TESTS

Four Christological tests of the legitimacy of anything calling itself "revival" might be applied:

1. **Existential**— Does it exalt Christ, revealing Him to be the centerpiece for God's people? Does it give evidences of His lordship over peoples, institutions, and the Powers of Darkness? Does the Holy Spirit have greater freedom to manifest the ministries of Christ among His people?
2. **Ethical**— Does it multiply evidences of Christ-likeness throughout congregational life? For some, does it increase a spirit of daily repentance or efforts at racial or denominational reconciliation?
3. **Ecclesiastical**— Does it sharpen and empower the life

and work of a local congregation in such things as worship, teaching the Word, prayer, spiritual gifts, love for one another, and outreach with the Gospel?

4. **Eschatological**— Does it appear to be, in principle, a reflection of the Final Revival; that is, an approximation of the Consummation? Does it reinvigorate the Church to work toward the End by spreading the Gospel in ministries of social reform, compassion to the poor, justice, reconciliation, community transformation, as well as the many facets of global missions?

#### A SUGGESTED PATTERN

In conclusion, whether revival is chronologically near or not, we can be certain the Holy Spirit always keeps it Christologically near. To use another term, revival is about arrival—when, through the Spirit, Christ shows up afresh (as it were) to invade His church, to capture and conquer us anew, to re-energize us with His eternal purposes, and to take us with Him to fulfill them more fully than ever. No wonder the 18th century New England Puritans called corporate revival, quite simply, "the manifest presence of Christ."

As noted above, a general pattern in biblical revival, observable throughout church history, highlights this dominance of Christ in all revival. The pattern might be outlined in this manner:

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Realization:    | Revival desired. A people alerted to seek more of Christ.                      |
| Preparation:    | Revival sought. A people repentant and ready to receive more of Christ.        |
| Manifestation:  | Revival received. A people confronted and changed by more of Christ.           |
| Consecration:   | Revival applied. A people devoted to live more for Christ.                     |
| Revitalization: | Revival absorbed. A people enlivened to express more of Christ in all of life. |

- Penetration: Revival unleashed. A people actively sharing more of Christ by word and by deed.
- Expansion: Revival fulfilled. A people taking more of Christ to the nations.

### SOME WORKING DEFINITIONS

Revival is utterly Christological. Along with the views of Orr, Packer and Ortlund above, other working definitions that capture this might include:

*Revival is the Church falling in love with Jesus all over again.*

—VANCE HAVNER

*Revival is a community saturated with God.*

—DUNCAN CAMPBELL

*A revival means days of heaven upon earth.*

—D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

*Revival is ultimately Christ Himself, seen, felt, heard, living, active, moving in and through His Body on earth.*

—STEPHEN OLFORD

*Revival is God purifying His church.*

—ERWIN LUTZER

*Revival is that strange and sovereign work of God in which He visits His own people, restoring, re-animating, and releasing them into the fullness of His blessings.*

—ROBERT COLEMAN

*Revival is a sudden bestowment of a spirit of worship upon God's people.*

—A. W. TOZER

*A true revival means nothing less than a revolution, casting out the spirit of worldliness and selfishness, and making God and His love triumph in the heart and life.*

—ANDREW MURRAY

*Revival is the reformation of the Church for action.*

—MAX WARREN

*Revival is God revealing Himself to man in awful holiness and irresistible power. It is God's method to counteract spiritual decline and to create spiritual momentum in order that His redemptive purposes might be accomplished on earth.*

—ARTHUR WALLIS

Whatever definitions we create, those who have lived in a season of revival record three consistent, Christ-honoring dimensions: (1) In revival God gives His people a renewed focus on Christ's person. As a result, (2) we experience together in new ways the fulness of Christ's life within the Church. (3) All of this presses us into new involvements in the fulfillment of Christ's mission, both where we live and among the nations.

Whatever definition one may favor, it appears that in the end, revival is Christ!

### AN APOLOGETIC FOR CORPORATE REVIVAL

"The people were waiting expectantly, wondering in their hearts . . . John answered them: 'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire . . . He will gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them" (Luke 3:15-18).

Christian leaders will seek consensus and collaboration on corporate revival to the degree they are thoroughly convinced it is a legitimate, necessary expectation for their generation. Without such confidence, we will be reluctant to invest in something that simply may never happen.

In 1 Peter 3:15 we are told to be ready at all times to give an answer to those who demand reasons for the hope that is in us. Often, however, Christian leaders struggle to maintain confidence about the hope of revival, and thus to lead their people into the same vision. This happens for a number of reasons, including:

- Lack of study on the ways of God in corporate revival.
- Ignorance of the cycles or seasons of revival throughout church history.
- Insipid rationalism that causes us to function, for all practical purposes, as if the supernatural is of little consequence.
- A sense of being overwhelmed by the great needs of the Body of Christ and the mission of Christ in our generation, as we face difficulties and challenges that seem almost insurmountable.
- Personal disappointments from past ministries that make it difficult to trust God for a greater work today in the life of the church at large.
- Weariness in the midst of current personal ministries that inhibit one's ability to reflect on the larger work of God in revival.
- Isolation from other leaders who have this hope and who promote it among their people.

Thankfully, there are multiple reasons to embrace and foster the hope of corporate revival with confidence. For leaders who are growing in their desire to see revival, the following seven-fold apologetic is offered. It is not intended to take the place of the hundreds of biblical promises for revival. This apologetic is supplemental—a unique way to organize the rationale for our hope. It can buttress our consensus and galvanize our labors. At the same time, these seven arguments can double as fresh perspectives on all that corporate biblical revival encompasses.

The seven-fold apologetic includes:

1. The decisive person
2. The divine pattern
3. The dark prospects
4. The disturbing paralysis

5. The dramatic preparations
6. The distinctive praying
7. The determined people

### THE DECISIVE PERSON

The Scriptures promise repeatedly that God intends for His Son to be decisively at the center of everything, both at the end of history and every step along the way. In revival, God dramatically intervenes to restore a vision for, and increased responses to, Christ's rightful role as redeemer King among His people; and to more fully advance His Kingdom, right now, among the nations.

Therefore, because of God's ultimate commitment to His Son "to bring everything out at His feet for disposal" (E. Stanley Jones), we can pray and prepare for corporate revival with confidence that our hope is not in vain.

### THE DIVINE PATTERN

God is faithful and consistent in all His ways. He has been pleased to grant seasons of significant revival both in biblical times and in church history. As Scripture teaches, He is no respecter of persons. What He has done before, in other times and places, He is able and willing to do for our generation. The specifics may vary, but the patterns have been documented. And the promises in both Old and New Testaments are pervasive.

Therefore, because of God's commitment to His own time-honored procedures for glorifying His Son, we can pray and prepare for corporate revival with confidence that God will not disappoint us.

### THE DARK PROSPECTS

God loves the world and longs to see His Son exalted among all earth's peoples. But He knows the world is currently facing extraordinary crises and challenges beyond its own resources. Furthermore, nearly three billion of earth's peoples

are still outside the reach of the Gospel. Revival in the church can uniquely transform the church and make her equal to the desperate needs of our times. It is a supreme hope, held out to us throughout Scripture, for a greater harvest in the world He loves.

Therefore, because of His commitment to the mission of His Son on behalf of the nations, we must pray and prepare for corporate revival.

### THE DISTURBING PARALYSIS

God knows that the desperate condition of the world today is due, in large measure, to the state of the church. He sees our struggles with powerlessness, brokenness, dullness, carnality, and sin. Yet, the Bible clearly teaches that God intends to bring glory to Himself through the church, not apart from it. The church, however, cannot heal her own impotency and paralysis. The shining hope for this to happen today is for God to restore us powerfully as a people, by His grace. This healing of an invalid church is called revival.

Therefore, because of God's commitment to the Body of Christ, we can pray and prepare for revival with confidence that He will not forsake His many promises to grant it.

### THE DRAMATIC PREPARATIONS

The tools God has provided and the doors He has opened for fulfilling the Great Commission today form nothing less than the prelude to corporate revival. God is obviously setting the stage worldwide for a whole new advance of Christ's Kingdom among millions of unbelievers. Since these multiplied preparations of resources and laborers and renewal movements are His sovereign design, He will not fail to fulfill what He has begun.

Therefore, because of God's commitment to bring to completion every good work raised up in and for His Son (Philippians 1:6), we can seek revival according to God's promises.

### THE DISTINCTIVE PRAYING

In unprecedented fashion, God is stirring up His people everywhere to pray biblically, specifically, increasingly, and persistently for local, national, and even worldwide revival. Beyond question, God never calls His people to pray in vain. His Word promises that He will hear, and answer fully, prayers instigated by His Spirit.

Therefore, because of His commitment to respond proactively toward all prayers made according to His will—prayers that come from, through and for His Son—we should prepare eagerly and confidently for the answer: corporate revival.

### THE DETERMINED PEOPLE

God is galvanizing a host of people across our nation (and worldwide), convinced by the undeniable promises of His Word that revival is a dynamic hope for the church and for Christ's Kingdom to advance among the nations. In addition, they are willing to pay any price to prepare the way for God to grant it. Not only are they a chief sign of the "impendingness" of an awakening to Christ, they are actually the first phase of it. They are the Spirit's gift to the church for this strategic hour.

Therefore, because of God's commitment to vindicate ultimately the servants of His Son who pray and prepare for corporate revival, we can rest in confident hope.

This seven-fold apologetic relates not only to a sweeping massive revival, which may be in the offing, it also encourages us to live expectantly about revival right where we live—in our own lives, and churches, and regions.

### THREE KEY CLARIFICATIONS

"Lord, I have heard of Your fame; I stand in awe of Your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our day make them known; in wrath remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2).

In keeping with the title of Jonathan Edwards' 1748 publication on prayer and revival, our Appeal for consensus and collaboration is equally, "An humble attempt to promote explicit agreement and visible union of all of God's people" in

the hope of a corporate awakening to Christ.

Consequently, it is important to face up to some of the critical issues over which the church has deliberated for generations in defining the essence of biblical revival. In this section, the main issues of controversy have been condensed into three "clarifications." In the next section, we will look at eleven "cautions" related to these issues that need to be considered. Discussing them can help foster a common meeting ground for Christian leaders on the issue of revival. The three clarifications are:

Sovereignty and Means

Point and Process

Repentance: A "Gift of Grace" and a "Divine Command"

### SOVEREIGNTY AND MEANS

Most would agree that ultimately no work of Christ is ever accomplished by human means. It is not by might, but by the Spirit of the Lord (Zechariah 4:6). God is sovereign in corporate revival. In the final analysis, human beings cannot predict its timing, precipitate its unfolding, nor preclude its appearance. None of us can extort it from God by human methods or activities, however earnest we may be.

Corporate revival comes from God alone, beyond our resources, ingenuity, or control. No human-designed formula can compel God to grant it. The church cannot plan it, stage it, or organize it. It is not ours to create; it is ours to receive. No church committee or team of revival specialists can engineer it. It may be church-obtained, but it is Christ-attained. This is the distinguishing mark between revival and a human-produced "revivalism."

However, the "Primary Agent" of revival (the Holy Spirit) can and does make providential use of "secondary means." Often He chooses to work in grace through our prayers, Bible studies, worship, fellowship, sacraments, and daily obedience. There may be nothing Christians can do to guarantee corporate revival at any particular moment. But we can always

intensify our preparations for God's gift, in keeping with our faith and hope in His promises.

In other words, biblically speaking, intervention calls for preparation; sovereignty encourages advocacy. God promising to be the producer of revival motivates us with expectation of revival among fellow believers. We might say: "Consecrate yourselves, because tomorrow God will work miracles among you" (Joshua 3:5). Or like Isaiah: "Take no rest, and give God no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in all the earth" (Isaiah 62:7). Or like Jesus: "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom is at hand, repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15).

### POINT AND PROCESS

Corporate revival is both a point in time as well as an ongoing process and experience in the life of the church. Frequently in Scripture, as well as recorded in church history, the motif of dramatic encounter and visitation—the rending of the Heavens, the pouring out of the Spirit—is used to describe the uniqueness of revival as a point in time. (Review other terms and metaphors listed earlier.) In this sense, corporate revival is seen as extra-ordinary; radical; the resurrection of a people exhausted, diseased, and sick with sin.

But the decisive moment of the Spirit's reclamation of a people leads to an ongoing process of increased fruitfulness and impact in the church's life. This may last a generation or more.

In other words, a greater intimacy with Christ leads to a stronger walk of obedience to Him. Poignant, extraordinary displays of grace will bring sustained infusions of grace into ordinary disciplines of the church. The qualitative nature of a church-wide revival has quantitative implications that are normally long-lasting. Authentic inward transformations translate into measurable outward demonstrations of the ministry of Christ through His people.

Without God's quickening intervention (point), all of our efforts at reformation or unity (process) will ultimately turn sour or simply wither away. However, God's visitations

(point) reaffirm sound doctrine, renovate church structure, and encourage the Body of Christ to stand together in the cause of Christ (process). Revival not only supplies what is absent (point) but then multiplies what has been unleashed (process). Reviving (point) results in revivedness (process).

In fact, corporate revival need not simply fill a vacuum. In some cases it serves to quicken, intensify, enlarge, and fulfill the very best elements of current renewing activities of the Holy Spirit already underway. Accordingly, it would then reactivate spiritual gifts, encourage existing community transformations, compel emerging racial reconciliation, motivate further social reformations, and re-ignite ongoing personal evangelism and missionary endeavors.

In either case, as the church is awakened to the person, presence, and power of Jesus Christ, the society around it will be spiritually aroused, possibly resulting in a long-term "general awakening" as we have seen at least three times in our own national journey (i.e., the First, Second, and Third Great Awakenings).

#### REPENTANCE: A "GIFT OF GRACE" AND A "DIVINE COMMAND"

Repentance presupposes grace (Acts 11:18). For individuals deserving of God's judgment because of sin, the possibility for repentance is itself based on God's kindness and patience. Thus, repentance is a gift from God, a means for sinful people to experience restored relationship with God based on the atoning work of Christ.

Yet, repentance is also a divine command to the church (Acts 17:30). Christ commands earnest repentance while He "knocks," rebuking His people for illusions of self-sufficiency and lukewarmness. Although this kind of brokenness is painful, our position in Christ as believers frees us to face our sinful condition and to mourn over the ways we grieve His Spirit. With broken hearts turning from sin, we are enabled to turn to Christ for times of refreshing (Acts 3:19).

#### A SERIES OF CAUTIONS

"Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple . . . but who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears? . . . He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver" (Malachi 3:1-3).

Although the biblical hope of corporate revival foresees extraordinary blessings in Christ (as outlined in this document), there are also serious cautions we must heed, even dangers at certain points. It is best to recognize and clarify them now, to be ready to confront them if and when they surface.

Some of the cautions include:

##### Ignorance

A general misapprehension of how God deals with His people in revival, due to our neglect of biblical and historical study of the topic; or due to our blindness to where and how God is currently granting seasons of renewal and awakening within the Church. This could create a temporary climate of confusion, chaos, and division in fostering the message of revival, or during an awakening itself.

##### Shortsightedness

Limited views of the term revival—such as it being an evangelistic campaign, the restoration of individual backsliders, the refreshing of a local congregation, or a duplication of the outward forms of a previous general awakening. This could lead us to a parochial hope that settles for less than God's best for our generation.

##### Fantasies

Expecting God to do more than He actually has promised regarding corporate revival. This might lead us to seek manifestations of revival that have no clear biblical warrant, or to spread reports on revival that exaggerate what really happened. Our hope must be in harmony with what God has said and not our own wishful notions. Similarly, it is unhealthy to expect current outworkings of corporate revival to mimic the

specific characteristics of some previous revival for another generation. Disappointment is likely.

### **Superficiality**

The temptation to seek revival rather than to seek God; to seek phenomena rather than to seek His presence. The Scriptures and the Spirit always work together. Sound doctrine will always accompany true revival, helping Christians to engage more fully the manifest presence of Christ as the heart of revival. The revival movement cannot be allowed to become primarily testimonial or story-fed, rather than Bible-fed and God-centered.

### **Irresponsibility**

Seeing revival as a panacea, a magic wand encouraging us to excuse ourselves from responsible obedience and follow-through in the day-to-day struggles of the church, whether God grants revival or not. Our seeking revival must be accompanied by daily obedience—whether in love, or worship, or outreach, or ministry to the poor—even as we live in anticipation of more to come. We must do what God has clearly told us to do, even while we pray and prepare for what God has promised He will do.

### **Negativity**

Overlooking all the ways God is blessing now; failing to affirm the positive aspects of current Kingdom advances; lacking gratitude to God for how many efforts of the church in our generation have effectively challenged and transformed the culture. Above all, we must avoid the tendency to depreciate current, normal, regular ministries of the Holy Spirit measurable, to some degree, in any believing Christian congregation.

### **Uniformity**

Failure to appreciate the balance between continuity and diversity. The danger of division rests in our attempts to gain uniformity in a season of revival without reckoning with this fact: the outward shape of a reviving work is often based on

prior conditions within each community experiencing it. These would include: pre-existing needs, the cultural context, ecclesiastical traditions, the age or temperament of those being revived, their previous spiritual experiences, their collective theological grids, and the extent of their current spiritual malaise. Even though there are common themes in every God-given revival—the centrality of Christ, confession of sin, quickening of the Scriptures, increased love, outreach to the lost—still, diversity of experiences must be expected and not be resisted.

### **Immaturity**

Unpreparedness for the exuberance, eagerness, excitement, and fresh expectations that normally come in seasons of revival. As was true with the awakening in New Testament Corinth, extraordinary experiences of God's power and presence run the risk of creating temporary disorder due to immaturity or carnal mismanagement of newly unleashed spiritual gifts. But a far greater danger is that fear of misplaced enthusiasms will drive people to settle for something worse (in the words of J. I. Packer): "the predictability, unexpecting apathy and tidy inertia of a congregation locked in spiritual deadness."

### **Elitism**

Unconsciously justifying attitudes of arrogance or sectarianism on the part of those claiming to be revived. They perceive themselves to be a select group with special favors from God, spiritually superior to those not experiencing the same phenomena, or emotions, or breakthroughs, or reformations. This is another place where consensus and collaboration on revival among Christian leaders before revival comes can preempt a deadly trend. Guarding our unity must always walk hand in hand with the reformation of sound doctrine and the revitalization of spiritual life.

### **Nationalism**

Expecting revival to salvage and rescue a whole nation when, in fact, it is a work of God promised exclusively for the

people of God. Only secondarily does it impact a surrounding community, and only at times does God-given revival spill over to transform a whole culture or nation (sometimes termed a general awakening). Our motivation must not rise from nationalistic passions, therefore, but from our desire for God to get the greatest glory through His church—even if the nation as a whole rejects this gracious hope and undergoes subsequent divine retributions (as happened with Jerusalem in A.D. 70 despite a revived church in its midst).

### Conflict

Entering into the euphoria and wonders of corporate revival without reckoning with increased levels of warfare with the Powers of Darkness or with persecution due to the impact of revival on unbelievers. Awakening often brings seasons of conflict and suffering.

Out of reformation and revival, the church is drawn more fully into the vortex of Christ's mission among the nations. By manifesting more of Christ to and through the church, revival arouses the antiferces—both human and spiritual—against Christ's Kingdom. Revival sends the church actively into battlefields and harvest fields as we confront, contest, and displace the works of darkness. Suffering is therefore unavoidable and must be expected.

In Conclusion: Are these cautions permanent obstacles to consensus and collaboration? Quite the contrary. Actually, sincere discussion by Christian leaders can significantly foster the common ground that will help prepare us to fully embrace together corporate, biblical revival as God grants it.

### RESPONSES TO THE HOPE OF CORPORATE REVIVAL

"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on our eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock . . . He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 3:16-22).

A recent video on revival, *Hope for a New Millennium*, featured fifteen respected leaders speaking to the hope of revival for our nation. It concluded by calling the viewer to "Fear not! Spare not! Prepare for amazing things about to happen, maybe tomorrow—and do so with full resolve and without any reserve. Prepare with total abandonment because you can trust Christ."

It went on to challenge Christians to drive a stake in the ground. It suggests we say: "From this moment on, I sense the urgency. I am ready to embrace the hope that God sets before us. I will act as if I really believe that God will awaken His church afresh to Christ and His Kingdom. I will get ready for corporate revival. And I will call others to join me."

This response means reconstituting our daily walk both with Christ and with fellow Christian leaders so that everything we do is compatible with our hope of renewal. It means getting back to the cross, getting clean before Christ, being broken before God, repenting of everything that entangles us. As leaders, whatever we sense God needs to do to salvage our churches and ministries, we must be willing for Him to do within our own lives first . . . no matter what the cost. We must "consecrate ourselves" (Joshua 3:5). Consensus and collaboration for corporate revival will come no other way.

Fundamentally, this means recommitting ourselves not simply to do more but to seek more. As we look out over the wasteland of our culture and of the American church today, we might be tempted to ask, "Do we have a prayer?" The answer, in one sense, is: "Yes. In fact, all we have is a prayer!" In other words, prayer is the most strategic response any of us can give to our needs for an extraordinary move of God in corporate revival. As Isaiah puts it: "All of you who call on the name of the Lord, take no rest and give God no rest until . . ." (Isaiah 62:6-7). Yet, our prayers must not stand alone.

The breadth of our response to this vision, particularly on a corporate level, might best be expressed a number of ways (including prayer). These are not sequential steps. Rather, they are dimensions of ongoing preparations (and even collaborations) for corporate revival:

**Perceive**— The first phase of every spiritual awakening comes as God's Spirit awakens believers to acknowledge not only that revival is urgently needed but that the promise of revival is for them. Subsequently, such Heaven-given perception quickens the rest of our obedience.

**Prioritize**— Next, we must be willing to say: "A primary hope for my generation is revival in the church. Therefore, out of my commitment to the preeminence of Christ, I will give revival high priority. With a sense of urgency I will pray and labor to that end, in every facet of my role as a Christian leader."

**Purify**— In our own lives, as well as those we lead, repentance must have precedence. Everything that grieves the Holy Spirit—every sin, activity, or relationship that is incompatible with revival; every hindrance or obstacle to revival—must be confessed to God and put away. Holiness should become a shared passion. As long as we fail to repent of that which quenches, resists, or disobeys the Spirit, revival—which is preeminently an extraordinary work of the Spirit—will not be receivable. Repentance has always been a hallmark of a generation that experiences a corporate Christ-awakening. Corporate repentance, therefore, remains an evidence of a church moving toward godliness, preparing together for revival.

**Pray**— The time has come for spiritual leaders to fully embrace the unprecedented prayer movement raised up by God already in many churches and communities across our nation—to strengthen it and become much more active leaders in it. The "Nationwide Call to Prayer to the Church in America" (see Preface) goes on to recommend a four-fold National Prayer Accord that encourages unified revival praying on daily, weekly, quarterly, and annual bases.

**Proclaim**— Since "faith comes by hearing," any biblical revival must be a Word-anchored revival. Therefore, as leaders, we must become "messengers of hope" to the Body of Christ. We must promote the biblical promises for corporate revival (of which there are hundreds of passages); give reports of what God has done in the past and is doing today in revival around the world; and help God's people envision what a

revival in our generation might look like, both inside and outside the church. This message must be a predominant theme wherever and however we minister the Word of God.

**Prepare**— Though biblical revival is preeminently a corporate experience, individually each one of us must be willing and ready to become the starting point for a fresh work of God in His church. Personally and collectively, we need to live out a discipleship that is anticipatory. We should "act as if" we expect God to grant us this work of His Spirit. Our obedience to a significant degree should equip and prepare us for greater manifestations of Christ in the future. This outlook will impact our discipleship programs, our worship, our social endeavors, and our labors toward theological precision, as well as ministry partnerships among spiritual leaders.

**Partner**— We have now come full circle in a document that appeals for "consensus and collaboration." The hope of impending revival requires a new era of spiritual leadership—whether among local pastors, leaders of prayer movements, urban missionaries, denominational leaders, or others. The primary initiative, of course, should come from leaders of local churches in a given community. But there also needs to be—and increasingly are—national networks and coalitions holding forth this high priority, sharing their consensus across traditions, generations, and ethnicities. Currently, such coalitions include Mission America, Christian Community Development Association, America's National Prayer Committee, National Association of Evangelicals, National Revival Network, Denominational Prayer Leaders Network, National Pastors Prayer Initiative, National Network of Youth Ministries, National Association of Local Church Prayer Leaders, National Religious Broadcasters, and others.

#### IN CONCLUSION:

In the end, all the above responses represent different ways to heed Christ's revival call to the church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:20-21). Basically, the Spirit said to them: "Open wide the doors to Christ." As Christian leaders we must earnestly heed this call in our day.

Open wide! To Christ! Together! Freely! In hope! Let's get ready for His manifest presence. Let's welcome God's gracious gift of a fresh Christ-awakening for our generation.

To that end, let us continue, under Christ, to pursue consensus and collaboration. It will take nothing less to bring the church to the threshold of personal, local, regional, and even national revival. And such joint action must be sustained in order to shepherd the church during the seasons of corporate revival that, by God's grace, surely are not far off.