

Redefining Revival for a New Generation

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The Purpose of Revival

Many today are asking what is the point and purpose of revival? In light of our present consideration of a new era of mission mobilization in the global Church, this subject is important. Revival in God's Church and mission mobilization of that Church for His purposes in the Great Commission go hand in hand.

The primary objective of every true revival is to heal and restore a broken relationship between God and His people. Revival is needed when God's people forget about Him, stop seeking Him, or worse yet, when they seek Him only to get something for themselves. Revival is needed when we become hardened to the feelings and affections of Jesus, ignoring the promptings of the Holy Spirit. When such things become a recurring problem, God never abandons us.

The Difference Between the Fruit and Root of Revival

Revival is a visitation of God's power and presence that restores our love and worship for Jesus. Yet, sometimes the fruit and effects of revival become

more desired than the presence of Jesus Himself. For example, the Great Awakenings in the 18th and 19th centuries were uniquely characterized by powerful preachers and large evangelistic meetings with thousands of converts. God used these revivals to restore and reawaken a zeal for evangelism and the Great Commission within His Church. However, some believers gradually began to define mass-evangelism and large crowds as the sum total of a genuine revival. Many today still make this mistake. Later, at the beginning of the 20th century, God began to restore the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit. Soon, much like the previous revival generation, people began to mistake the supernatural effects of revival for the actual heart of revival itself.

The Three Phases of Genuine Revival

Isaiah 6:1-8 is a useful template to help define and track the purposes and progress of a biblical revival. All the great evangelical revivals throughout church history have followed a similar path and process.

1) Looking Up to See the King

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim ... And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa. 6:1–3).

Genuine revival usually begins by awakening the Church to the holiness and majesty of God. We may know God as father, friend, and comforter, but when God comes down in our midst, we suddenly become more acquainted with the King upon the throne. Just like the angels in Isaiah 6, we begin to humble ourselves in worship and cry out holy, holy, holy.

2) Looking In to See Our True Condition

So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:5).

Verse 5 describes Isaiah's response to his new, enlarged view of Jesus on the throne, radically changing the way he saw himself and those around him. Many today are consumed by themselves. "Me, myself and I" fills the horizon of their lives, crowding out God's greater purposes. God's manifest presence helps us come face-to-face with our true condition, so we can humble ourselves and turn away from the sin of self-worship. It is this self-examination that opens the floodgates of humility, brokenness, and true repentance during revival.

3) Looking Out to See the Harvest

I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me" (Isa. 6:8).

Revival also turns our focus outward to a lost and dying world. To the same extent our eyes are opened to God's character and the need for more grace, we begin to see and care about the needs of others. This new way of seeing prepares us to respond to God's missionary call—"Who will go for us?" This is the ancient path of the great revivals. True revival sets us free from our own selfish heart, sending us out to love and serve others. As Erwin Lutzer so aptly stated,

"Revival is the mother of missions."¹ Great revivals always produce a zeal for the Great Commission. If not, it's probably not a true revival.

Revival History Confirms this Pattern

This Isaiah 6 process has been confirmed throughout revival history. It is widely believed, in the missions community, that over the last 200+ years of Church history, more people have come to Christ than during all the previous 1,800 years combined. How do we account for such extraordinary spiritual growth? The answer is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The 1st Great Awakening & the Evangelical Revival (1730s to 1790)

We usually refer to this remarkable season of revival as the Great Awakening. This move of God launched a transatlantic revival movement that mobilized God's people on three different continents in united prayer for a fully revived Church and the finishing of the Great Commission. This revival transformed whole nations and influenced the spiritual and social values of an entire generation. It rescued all of Britain from a moral and spiritual collapse, and at the same time, watered the seeds of liberty, human rights, and democracy in the American colonies. Prior to this awakening, there was little zeal for evangelism at home and far less for the foreign field. The Great Awakening rolled away the Church's stony heart and resurrected the Great Commission in a single generation.

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The 2nd Great Awakening (1792 to 1845)

Before long, the 2nd Great Awakening was pushing the American church to restore its apostolic vision to finish the Great Commission. This mighty revival impacted America for over 50 years in one part of the

¹ Lutzer, Dr. Erwin W. September 15, 1991 "Revival: The Mother Of Missions." *Reformation and Revival* <https://www.moodymedia.org/sermons/reformation-and-revival/revival-mother-missions/>

nation or another. It started after the renewed Concert of Prayer movement called God's people into a season of humility, repentance, and monthly rhythms of united prayer. Soon God was pouring out His Spirit on America's largest universities, and then it spread across the Alleghenies and into the western frontier of Kentucky. Methodist camp meetings were soon setting the rural countryside ablaze with the power of the Spirit. America was being awakened from one end to the other. Coinciding with this awakening also came the birth of the Modern Missions Movement through William Carey, Andrew Fuller, and a handful of other English Baptists. Then, in 1812, America sent out its first missionaries; Adoniram Judson, Luther Rice, and others left their families and homes to share the Good News with Asia.

The Great American Revival (1857 to 1859)

On the heels of the 2nd Great Awakening came what some have called America's Greatest Revival. Though it lasted only two to three years, it's conservatively estimated to have brought 500,000–1,000,000 converts to Christ. It wasn't preaching that fueled this awakening as much as it was praying. Daily and hourly prayer meetings were the key and driving force behind this mighty work of God. Some say that within a six-month period, there were anywhere from 10,000 to 30,000 men and women out of a population of 800,000 praying daily at 20 different locations in New York City. Like our previous examples, this awakening realigned the heart of God's people with God's heart for the nations. It raised up a mighty missionary force called the Inland Missionary Movement. These young evangelists cast off their own culture, customs, and language so they could better embrace the unreached for Christ.

These are just a few examples of God's larger revival purposes. I wish we had room to describe the mighty awakenings of the 20th century in Wales, Manchuria, India, Korea, and Azusa Street. All these revivals followed a similar path. Revival comes to call us back to our first love and back to the power and purity of the early Church, and true revival always calls the Church to finish the Great Commission.

Revival, Restoration, and Finishing

My recent visit to Asbury University was very encouraging. What I experienced there was much different from anything I've seen in a long time. No advertising, no promotion of special speakers, no celebrity worship bands, and yet the people stayed. They stayed to worship, they stayed to pray, and they stayed to repent of their sins. It didn't matter who was leading worship or praying—no one seemed to notice because everyone was staying focused on Jesus.



God is saying something through this move of God to the whole Body of Christ, "It's time to *stop*, be *still* and *stay* in His presence until we make things right." God is getting this generation ready to go and finish something big. He's getting them ready through staying and worshipping in His presence.

This recent move of God gives us reason to believe that something more is on the way. This generation has a passion for both the restoration of the Church and the finishing of the Great Commission. Something more is coming, and we need to get ready for it. God's revival train has left the station, and it's moving towards its destination. We're not to the destination yet, so we need to stay where God stays, in the place of brokenness and humility, believing in the power of true revival to mobilize Jesus' Church globally with His own heartbeat for the world.

For thus says the High and Lofty One ... "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble ..." (Isa. 57:15). 