

# **ROAR**

## **The Deafening Thunder of Spiritual Awakening**

**Alvin L. Reid**

**[www.alvinreid.com](http://www.alvinreid.com)**

**[www.twitter.com/alvinreid](https://www.twitter.com/alvinreid)**

**Professor of Evangelism and Student Ministry**

**Bailey Smith Chair of Evangelism**

**Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary**

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**Print books by Alvin L. Reid**

***Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional.* Broadman & Holman, 2009.**

***Join the Movement.* Kregel, 2007.**

***Radically Unchurched.* Kregel, 2002.**

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**(with Mark Liederbach) *The Convergent Church: Missional Worshipers in an Emerging Culture.* Kregel, 2009.**

**(with Malcolm McDow) *Firefall.* Pleasant Word, 2001.**

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## **CONTENTS**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. What Is Revival and/or an Awakening?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Movements of God Described</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3. Historical Awakenings</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>4. Revival in Your Life, Your Home, Your Church, and Your Community</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>5. Practical Guides and Resources</b>	<b>48</b>

## Introduction

"The noise was like the roar of Niagara. The vast sea of human beings seemed to be agitated as if by a storm. I counted seven ministers, all preaching at one time, some on stumps, others in wagons . . . . Some of the people were singing, others praying, some crying for mercy in the most piteous accents, while others were shouting most vociferously." James Finley at Cane Ridge<sup>1</sup>

Read the following and see if you can guess when each description occurred:

1. One man observed: "The ministers in our day for the most part are barren in their faith, more concerned with political power in society than spiritual fervency in the church. The church seems more interested in her institutions than the people in need in the culture. The nation thrives financially while social conditions overall fail to see improvement. Prisons are overcrowded. The theatre and popular books contribute to the moral decay."
2. The people of the land are marked by an increasing ethnic diversity and with that a growing variety of religious beliefs and practices. But among major groups, especially Protestants, spiritual life has become quite sterile, with churches filled with unregenerate members. One pastor describes his region as a time characterized by "horse-racing, gambling, and rudeness of various kinds," adding, "[Church] is attended at convenience, and religion consists of the mere formal pursuit of the routine of duty."
3. 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, while a new form of atheism captures the imagination of many. The churches are filled with people who listen to pastors preach, then contradict the sermon by the way they live. One prominent preacher proposes the giving out of shirts in churches with sayings like “The Bible is a Myth,” or “I Do Not Believe What My Church Teaches.” He encourages pastors in such churches to shake the dust off their feet and go plant a new church.

Sounds like many churches in the West in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Actually, the first quote comes from Great Britain around 1700, just before God used John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, and others to lead a great spiritual movement that changed the culture there faster than Starbucks changed the way we enjoy a cup of Java. The second comes from the American colonies around 1720. The pastor, a Dutch Reformed fellow named Theodore Frelinghuysen, ticked off more than a few lazy church members from his gospel-centered ministry in New Jersey in the late 1720s. Soon, men like the brilliant Jonathan Edwards and others would be God’s human instruments in the First Great Awakening, which transformed the American colonies. The final example came around 1800, with college campuses in the young United States influenced by Voltaire, Rousseau, and other skeptics in the early days of the Second Great Awakening.

I have good news and I have bad news. The bad news is that in many ways the Church in America today faces serious trouble. Even worse, too many church leaders are in denial over this fact. Recent statistics note the decline of the evangelical church in the south, while historically thriving traditions like the Southern Baptist Convention have taken a turn for the worse in terms of growth and vibrancy. The good news: in the past when God’s people have seen spiritual declension, God has intervened with mighty spiritual movements we called “revival.” And, the good news is that in many places God is already moving; in church planting movements, in new networks of ministry, and in many places around the globe, in a renewed focus on the gospel in many churches, God is here and He is not silent.

We cannot assume just because we are losing the ground in our impact in culture, and in the numbers we reach for Christ compared to the population growth, that God will move in revival of historic proportions. God's ways are not our ways, and we cannot say from our viewpoint whether the best thing for us is either a renewal or His judgment. But we can take hope in the fact that God still actively works in His Church and His plan to use believers to accomplish His purposes.

What if churches began to reproduce like rabbits across the states like they did following the First Great Awakening? What if the unashamed preaching of justification by faith marked the pulpits again as they have in every awakening? What if the new music forms and a renewed missional passion was suddenly born not in a denominational office or out of a think tank or a dark room, but in the midst of what could only be described as a work of God, often outside a church building in the culture? What if the God Who made you suddenly rocked your personal world with a passion for nothing less than giving everything your life touches—your time, talent, and treasure, ALL of you—to His great movement?

If you long to see God move and are not afraid of God's Word (which doesn't change) and the work of the Spirit of God in you (Who will definitely make you change some things), then the following may be of help to you. What I hope to do in the pages that follow is to give a brief look at what a movement of revival/awakening is, and offer a personal challenge to you to be a part of His activity in our world today. I will try to give biblical insights and historical examples of how God works to bring His people back to Him, and then to change culture as a result. My ultimate hope is that you will be challenged to take an inventory of your life, your family, and your church, to see if God might be stirring a fresh wind in your heart.

## **Chapter One**

### **What Is a Revival or an Awakening?**

A coal miner and ministry student named Evan Roberts (1878-1951) hungered for a movement of God from his youth. He became a leader in the Welsh Revival of 1904-05. When God began to stir his heart he commented: "I felt ablaze with a desire to go through the length and breadth of Wales to tell of my Savior; and had that been possible, I was willing to pay God for doing so."

Immediately Roberts began to go to various towns to speak of his changed life. He felt impressed to speak to his home congregation. On October 31 he took a train home. He was allowed to speak only following the regular Monday night prayer service. Seventeen people remained to hear Roberts. The next day he spoke at a nearby town. On November 2 in nearby Moriah, Roberts began to speak about four key tenets for revival:

1. You must put away any unconfessed sin.
2. You must put away any doubtful habit.
3. You must obey the Holy Spirit promptly.
4. You must confess Christ publicly.

These became known as the "Four Points." Within one week much of the community had been changed. Meetings lasted until four in the morning.

Prayer is the foundation of revival, and testimony is its fuel. For the next several months, Roberts and others traveled across Wales giving testimony to the power of God. Thousands came to hear him. Chapels were filled across the land. Services would break forth in singing, in

prayer, in testimony. In fact, some called the awakening a singing revival because of the prominence of song in the services.

Report of the newspaper Western Mail 10 November 1904:

A remarkable religious revival is now taking place in Loughor. For some days a young man named Evan Roberts . . . has been causing great surprise at Moriah Chapel. The place has been besieged by dense crowds of people unable to obtain admission. Such excitement has prevailed that the road on which the chapel is situated has been lined with people from end to end. . . . Many who have disbelieved Christianity for years are returning to the fold of their younger days. One night, so great was the enthusiasm invoked by the young evangelist that, after his sermon which lasted two hours, the vast congregation remained praying and singing until two-thirty in the morning. Shopkeepers are closing early in order to get a place in the chapel.

Local newspapers published the results. In two months seventy thousand were converted, eighty-five thousand in five months, and more than one hundred thousand in six months. Social impact was similarly reported. Judges were presented with white gloves signifying no cases to be tried. Alcoholism was halved. Crime and debauchery was so reduced that in the common coal mines the beasts of burden noticed the change. In fact, esteemed G. Campbell Morgan recalled a conversation with a mine manager about profanity. The manager told him the profane miners were so dramatically saved their horses no longer recognized them. They stopped beating the horses and cursing them. If a horse can tell when God moves, people can as well!

### **Understanding Spiritual Awakening**

Several years ago my former professor Malcolm McDow and I wrote the book *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History Through Revivals*.<sup>2</sup> In that book we define revival as “God’s invasion into the lives of one or more of His people in order to awaken them spiritually for Kingdom ministry.”

In its essence, revival has nothing to do with the unchurched. It begins in God's people. But it always leads to effective gospel impact. In fact, some of the most passionate evangelists and some of the more effective means of reaching people have been born out of awakenings. A revival or an awakening simply refers to a movement of God among His people, restoring them to their first love.

The term "revival" has become almost a meaningless term in the modern, conventional church, referring to an institutionalized, four day attractational evangelistic meeting with a focus on reaching unbelievers, and having almost nothing to do with believers getting right with God. I certainly believe in gatherings for evangelistic purposes, but calling those meetings "revival" simply misuses the term. An "awakening" or "revival" (I use the terms synonymously) will help reclaim biblical teaching that God works among His people first, and the impact of His work changes lives far beyond the local church.

<p><i>Revival</i> refers to God's work among His people. True revival always leads to effective, passionate gospel-centered change.</p>
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Some use the terms "revival" and "awakening" as distinct terms. They distinguish between a revival movement, which is a work of God among the saved, and an awakening, when sinners come to salvation. I prefer to use the terms as synonyms, primarily because that is the way the terms are used in Scripture.

Revival refers not a series of meetings, but a fresh encounter with God.

In my years of teaching, writing, and studying awakenings, I found three overlooked features of true revival. First, the movements of revival historically witnessed a high involvement of young adults. Jonathan Edwards in fact said the First Great Awakening was primarily a youth movement. Primary accounts of spiritual awakenings speak much of the role of young people. Further, many leaders were young by today's standards. George Whitefield was in his early 20s when he began to preach to large crowds as he thundered the gospel. Jonathan

Edwards saw the earliest revival fire in his pastorate at age 31. Charles Spurgeon already preached to thousands in London by age 22. Evan Roberts, Samuel Mills, D.L. Moody, and many other men greatly used by God began to see His hand at work by age 20. Today there are more young people in the United States than ever in our history, which frightens some, but encourages me.

Second, spiritual awakenings consistently witnessed the impact of small groups, from the *collegie pietatus* in the rise of the movement called Pietism in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the small group societies, bands, and classes of John Wesley, and the Haystack gathering of young collegians. Jonathan Edwards observed one of the early factors of the awakening in his town to be small group gatherings of young people. The growth of small groups in churches today is not insignificant.

Third, and this one may surprise you, preachers in revival movements did not preach “How to Have Revival” sermons. They preached the gospel. Not felt needs messages with a little gospel overview at the end; no, they preached the gospel in its greatness, making much of depravity, and much of grace. In some eras they preached for 2 hours a sermon, but the focus overwhelmingly in these times of renewal was the gospel, whether the preacher was John Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, or D.L. Moody.

A series on justification by faith spurred revival in Edwards’ day. The preaching of the gospel in the face of religious institution has ignited many a movement, from the field preaching of Whitefield in the 1740s to the spontaneous witnessing of born again hippies in the 1970s. And as the gospel becomes again the center of the church, God pours out His Spirit in manifest blessing. Around the U.S. just now there are men, many of them young, who preached the gospel with power from Seattle to Dallas, from Birmingham to Raleigh-Durham. A renewed passion for gospel preaching brings me hope for our day.

As you think and pray about spiritual awakening in our time, think about young people and challenge them to be radically devoted to Jesus. Cut out a little bit of game time and call students to place Jesus in the center of all their lives. Look to see if you observe small groups hungry for the Word of God. And ask yourself if the gospel is central in your church, your family, and your life.

## **Biblical Understanding of Revival**

If you do a word study of terms related to revival, note the following.

### **Old Testament Terms**

*Chalaph (Isaiah 40:31)*. This term means “to change,” and is a military term with the idea of a person surrounded by hostile troops before someone intervenes. Malcolm McDow writes, “The word conveys the idea that the believer dwells in abject conditions until rescued by God from those conditions.”<sup>3</sup>

*Chayah (Psalm 85:6)*. Meaning “life” or “live,” McDow notes: “When applied to revival, God provides a deeper spiritual quality of life, and awakening is the result of that experience.”<sup>4</sup> This Psalm demonstrates the cry of a believer who longs to have all the life God has given us through a relationship with Him.

*Chadhash (Psalm 40:3)*. This term translates closely to the Latin term from which we get our word revival, meaning “renewal of life.” The word refers to newness—a new beginning, a new song, a new perspective on life. The Psalmist refers to a new song, making it no surprise that awakenings bring new songs.

### **New Testament Terms**

*Anakainos (Romans 12:2)*. When Paul tells us to “renew our minds” he is using this term. Revival is the process whereby God takes our focus, our worldview, and brings it back to a more biblical focus.

*Egeiro (Romans 13:11)*. This word literally means to awaken. Spiritual awakening comes when God awakens His children to the urgency of the hour. Romans 13:11f gives a beautiful description of revival. We need to be awakened!

### **Selected Passages**

The Bible is replete with narratives of God’s renewing, reforming, and reviving work. From Moses at Sinai to Elijah at Carmel, from the thundering message of repentance by John the Baptist to the Spirit’s arrival at Pentecost, God’s fresh work abounds in Scripture. The following chart gives only some of the times of biblical revival in Scripture.

<b>Selected Prominent Revivals in the Bible</b>	
<b>Sinai with Moses</b>	<b>Exodus 32-34</b>
<b>Elijah at Carmel</b>	<b>II Kings 18</b>
<b>Asa</b>	<b>II Chronicles 15</b>
<b>Josiah</b>	<b>II Chronicles 34</b>
<b>Isaiah (personal)</b>	<b>Isaiah 6</b>
<b>Jonah</b>	<b>Jonah</b>
<b>Nehemiah</b>	<b>Nehemiah 8-11</b>
<b>Ezra</b>	<b>Ezra (see 3, 6, 9-10)</b>
<b>John the Baptist</b>	<b>Matthew 3</b>
<b>Pentecost</b>	<b>Acts 2</b>

Further, certain passages in Scripture help to show God’s work in revival. Three examples related to aspects of revival include these:

*Personal Revival* Psalm 51; Romans 13:11-14

*Church Revival*—Revelation 2

*National Revival*—II Chronicles 7:14

While all these help, I would submit the best way to help see a fresh touch from God starts with the gospel. The more we ratchet our focus on the wonder of God in creating this world, the devastating effects of the fall, the amazing grace seen in Christ's substitution on the cross and the glorious resurrection, and the hope of restoration in the future, the more we will see a hunger for God to move. Jesus noted in Luke 24:44-48 that all Scripture points to the gospel. We see the same in I Cor 15, where Paul says the gospel is that Christ died *according to the Scriptures*, was buried, and raised *according to the Scriptures*. In other words, Jesus Christ and His work to bring us the good news we call the gospel is the center of creation, of Scripture, of history, and of salvation. The more that reality becomes the center of our lives, the more hungry we will be to see God's Spirit work in us.

*The more we ratchet our focus on the wonder of God in creating this world, the devastating effects of the fall, the amazing grace seen in Christ's substitution on the cross and the glorious resurrection, and the hope of restoration in the future, the more we will see a hunger for God to move.*

**For Further Thought:**

--Do you focus more on completing projects or developing yourself and others to become more like Christ?

--When you pray, do you expect God to move?

--If God moved in power, would you eagerly join that movement no matter the cost?

--What is the one thing that keeps you from pursuing God with all your life?

## **Chapter Two**

### **Revival Movements Described**

Movements of spiritual awakening/revival do not constitute the only kind of movements we see in the Bible or in history. The book of Acts could be more accurately described as an unprecedented movement of church planting and evangelism. We read today of church planting movements or movements of remarkable gospel progress in places like China. Movements of God remind us of our need of Him and of His involvement in the affairs of men. But there are those times when God shakes His church to awaken believers to be more about the things that matter most to our great God.

Revival movements can be described by using the analogy of a war. While no one would dispute that Operation Desert Storm was a war in the early 1990s, certainly no one would argue that it rivaled World War II in scope and impact. Both involved battles, taking of territory, and treaties at the end. But World War II had a far greater impact. In the same way, an awakening may touch a smaller region, like a church or a college campus, or it may impact a larger area.

When an awakening comes it affects all of church life and the surrounding community. The most profound changes in music in churches have come in times of revival. The most lasting mission organizations and social ministries, and many educational institutions were born in times of revival. And, the most effective evangelistic strategies have come from seasons of revival.

### **Classifying Revival**

Revival movements can also be classified by the groups they touch. Whether narrow in extent or broad, however, those touched by God are never the same.

## Personal Revival

God moves to change people and culture because God moves in the lives of people--people like you or me. Revival, like salvation, does not change groups; it changes individuals. I like to say that I know I am experiencing revival personally when I stop confessing everyone else's sins! If all politics are local, all things spiritual are ultimately personal. Personal revival takes place within the life of the Christian. Through personal neglect, the believer redirects priorities from the things of God onto personal preferences and becomes desensitized to spiritual realities. Although the person can be very active in the church, or even a preacher in the pulpit, the Christian may lack joy and excitement. Living the Christian life is performed more out of duty and with drudgery than out of humility and with gladness. In these circumstances, the Holy Spirit begins to work the process of conviction in the life of the Christian. As a believer begins to respond spiritually, the recognition of the need of revival progresses to desperation for it, a renunciation of sin, and submission to God. The Holy Spirit becomes a fresh wind blowing across the soul arousing the child of God from spiritual slumber to a fresh passion.

On Revival Prayer:

God does not answer prayer; He answers *desperate* prayer.

Leonard Ravenhill

I have been in several churches where God moved in mighty power. I have had the honor of being in services that lasted for hours, with remarkable brokenness and powerful conversions. I have seen people set free from pornography, eating disorders, and deeply broken relationships. The remarkable thing I have observed in these churches is this: the first people to get right with God, and typically those upon whom God moves most mightily, are the key spiritual leaders of the church, not those on the fringes.

Look at God’s Word as well. Whenever God moved among His people He always touched a person – a Joseph, a Moses, a Samuel, a David, an Esther, a Jeremiah, a Mary, a Paul. If you are a leader in your church or ministry, can you say you are more passionate for souls, more hungry for God, than you have ever been?

Before reading any further—does God need to do a fresh work in your life? If so, read on carefully, asking God to speak specifically to you.

### **Institutional Revival**

This can include a church or an academic community—a college or seminary. While institutionalism or an obsession with institutions is bad, institutions in themselves are not. God gave us institutions—the home, the church, and the state. When one or a few Christians experience awakening and share testimonies, the revival expands to become corporate within the institutional family. One of the crucial, primary principles of revival is that it never starts with the masses. It always starts with one or a few ignited by the Holy Spirit.

Often God awakens a small group of believers meeting separately, which leads to affecting an institution. The Asbury College Revival of 1970 spread from that institution to many others. Its genesis came with a few students who participated in what they called the “great experiment,” where they committed to read the Bible and pray daily for an hour, and then meet weekly to share what they learned. As these students personally met God in a fresh way, it soon spread to the campus as a whole. When the revival erupted in chapel on February 3, 1970, that chapel service continued for 185 hours! Students left Asbury to travel across the country giving testimony to the work of God on their campus, and other campuses and churches felt God’s movement as well.

### **Regional Revival**

Ordinarily, when revival ignites within the local church, it spreads to the surrounding community including other churches in the area, crosses denominational lines, and produces results of cooperation and

fellowship with churches of different persuasions. The geographical region may be confined to the city, or it may be more widespread. This happened with Jonathan Edwards and the area around Northampton, Massachusetts, before the Great Awakening ignited.

### **Specialized Revival**

The specialized revival ordinarily focuses upon a particular age group, usually youth, more than all segments of society. The Jesus Movement of the 1960s and 1970s is considered a specialized awakening, in that it mostly affected youth. I came to Christ during that time, and have met many since who came to Christ as youth and now are Christian leaders.

### **National Revival**

The national awakening is the ultimate spiritual movement within a country. In this renewal, the entire nation is impacted by God's invasion into the lives of His people. A revival of this magnitude will have impact to some degree in basically five areas: new church directions, economic adjustments, social reform, political corrections, and educational alterations. This does not mean the whole country is in revival, but that its impact can be seen in places throughout the land.

### **Global Revival**

In this type of movement, places across the entire world are impacted by the invasion of the Holy Spirit within the lives of God's people. Every continent and many nations to some degree are the beneficiaries. A revival is classified as global when sufficient numbers of countries that are strategically located geographically around the world experience renewal. The period of 1901-1910 is considered by some to be a global revival. From the Far East to India, to parts of Africa, Australia, Europe, and South America, and in many parts of North America reports of the unusual work of God traveled far and wide.

## Revival Means *Change*

Why do we need revival? Because God's people continually get off track—theologically, relationally, practically, or in all of these ways. Throughout God's Word you observe His people straying from His divine plan, followed often by times of renewal. From Moses at Sinai to Elijah at Carmel, from the judges to the prophets, from the patriarchs to the recent past we see times when God intervened to awaken His people.

Therefore, when we think of a time of revival or awakening we normally think of a time when believers get right with God, confessing and forsaking sin, making restitution, restoring broken relationships, and leading us to fresh obedience in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. And all of this is true. But if this is all we think of when we consider a fresh touch from God, we miss much of what the Lord composes when He orchestrates an awakening.

Certainly revival means a change of sinful behavior. But it means a change of *perspective* as well. We live in a day when many have turned following Jesus into sin management. This produces a form of Christianity centered on behavior modification, which is only part of the Christian life. Others equate Christianity with a means to gain security, ignoring the biblical call to sacrifice, even to the point of death.

When revival comes, we hate sin more deeply, but we also love sinners more passionately.
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During the Second Great Awakening in the United States circuit riding preachers served the Lord at great risk. Half of these brave preachers on the frontier died before their 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday. If your notion of revival simply means nicer worship services, friendlier people, and better family values, you may miss it when it comes. Revival brings costly sacrifice, courageous leadership, and radical changes. Revival brings a renewal of gospel-centeredness.

Might it be that we spend too much time developing programs and not enough time discipling people to become men and women of prayer and passion for Christ? Could our focus on immediate results hinder the deeper, lasting work of the Holy Spirit?

I have taught and written about revival movements all my adult life. Interacting with leaders and students, and speaking at conferences focused on spiritual awakening. In my view we have too often failed to note the role of the gospel, not only for the lost but also its work in the saved. When revival comes, the focus on institutionalism and preserving what we have shifts to advancing a movement focused on the gospel.

Revival will change your perspective from seeing Christianity as an institution to maintain to understanding it more biblically as a movement to advance. Read the book of Acts and you will see a movement of God spreading across the Roman Empire. That is what awakenings do. An awakening takes the focus off a church building on Sundays and moves it to missional living for Jesus daily. In awakenings, preachers often preached every day, not just on Sundays. But more importantly, in awakenings believers “preached” through life and words. As a young preacher John Wesley wrote in his journal how he was not sure one could be converted except in a church building. Now *that* is institutionalism! But then his passion for the gospel upset the apple cart of religion and he found himself on the streets, unwelcomed to preach in church buildings. He began to preach in the fields, and a movement was born that changed the course of England historically.

Average believer’s view of Christianity: “Christ is in my life.”

Awakened believer’s view: “Christ is my life.”

Institutionalism breeds a mentality that settles for Christianity defined by the minimum. It teaches to do just enough to get by spiritually. “As long as I am active at my local church and fulfill my

duties there, I am fine,” is the sentiment. Those involved in a movement of God never settle for “just enough.” Movements of revival in the past have birthed some of the most significant social organizations from mission agencies to Bible societies, from hospitals to universities. Some of these movements have changed entire nations.

One of the unfortunate byproducts of institutional Christianity is the obsession with corporate worship to the neglect of daily living the mission. But spiritual awakenings change corporate worship as well. The most significant changes in music in corporate worship historically have come during times of revival. The Pietists introduced more subjective, emotive songs as well as new instruments (a Pietist introduced that edgy instrument, the organ, to the New World, in fact). Charles Wesley wrote thousands of hymns, singing the gospel to a largely illiterate population. In a gospel-illiterate culture today we may need to learn how to sing the gospel to a younger generation with ipods loaded up with playlists but largely devoid of truth. Luther wrote “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” in the context of the Reformation. The great hymn “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus” was composed by a man named Duffield as he sat in a huge prayer meeting in a movement of revival in the 1850s.

The Jesus Movement in the early 1970s did more than change some hippie freaks into Jesus Freaks; it brought a revolution in corporate worship. Much of what has galvanized our view of vibrant, corporate worship was hammered on the altar of awakening.

Perhaps God is beginning to stir His church. Increasing numbers of believers are sick and tired of being sick and tired. The same can be said of many in the ministry who so long to see God move.

What if God moved in power today? What if people in your church, and in your mirror (!) became radically, fanatically focused on living as missionaries in their homes before their neighbors while others went to the nations with the same passion? Revival movements always bring a white-hot focus on the gospel. Believers become consumed with gospel-centered lives. Society often changes dramatically. You cannot

understand the abolition of slavery in the west, a passion for excellence in education, or a heart for showing mercy in the cities without seeing the work of God in revival. Examples:

-John Wesley's influence on William Wilberforce to end slavery in England

-The rise of modern international missions movements led by men like William Carey in England and Samuel Mills (while a college student!) in America

-Urban ministries like the YMCA and the Salvation Army

**For Further Thought:**

--Who are the believers you know whom you would say genuinely seek revival in their personal revival?

--Have you ever seen a movement of revival in your own life, or in your local church or area?

--What would be the impact of a national revival on the U.S. today?

## **Chapter Three**

### **Historical Awakenings**

One of the most effective ways to encourage believers to seek God for a fresh movement of His Spirit is by telling the stories of His work in the past. As a youngster I grew up believing God was the God revealed in the Scriptures. I believed Genesis 1:1, so I could believe the miracles, and all the biblical accounts. I also believed Jesus would eventually return. But somehow I developed the mindset that from the time Jesus walked on the earth until He returns, we just do the best we can. Then I studied the awakenings in history. Reading the way God moved in the past made me believe He could use the likes of me today.

Then I went to teach at a university. The first time I spoke to their Christian organization I talked to them about how God has used college students in previous awakenings. The response amazed me. Never had I seen such hunger like I saw in those students. That experience reminded me of a time when I studied with Dr. Roy Fish for a year in a PhD seminar on the Great Awakenings. A friend asked me why we never taught our people in our churches about these great movements of God. We came to class every week to study these revivals, and left inspired to change the world like the preachers we studied did. The following is only a summary of a few of the many times God has moved in history. If these encourage, challenge, and convict you, perhaps you can share these with others. And, perhaps you will be inspired to read more.

#### **The Evangelical Awakening in Great Britain (1700s)**

John Wesley (1703-1791) was the fifteenth of nineteen children born to Samuel and Susannah Wesley. His father was an Anglican minister. Susannah Wesley was a remarkable woman. She taught each of her children personally. Although thirteen of her nineteen children

died at a young age (infant mortality was high then), two of those who reached adulthood (Charles and John) became great champions for God. Susannah's Puritan background was seen in her approach to rearing her children. Family life included a disciplined schedule, with morning and evening devotions and regular times for meditation and self-examination before God. Her own spiritual journal likely influenced young John. She devoted time to each child to discuss spiritual matters.

The brothers became associated with others including young George Whitefield while at Oxford University. These young men practiced strict discipline in their spiritual endeavors, including visiting prisoners, aiding the poor, and observing specific study topics.

In derision they were called the "Methodists" for their practices. The small group was soon dubbed the "Holy Club." John Wesley's work with the Holy Club began in 1729, while his conversion was not until 1738. Originally they began by meeting three or four nights weekly to read the Classics, and on Sunday read and discussed books on Divinity. The group observed the Eucharist on Sunday, fasted on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and were committed to the Anglican Church. Young George Whitefield would also join the group at the invitation of Charles Wesley.

Awakenings often had their birth in seemingly insignificant small groups of individuals with a passion for God.

John Wesley's conversion came on May 24, 1738. He had already been on a lengthy mission excursion to the American colonies in Georgia, in which he failed miserably. He was in attendance at a meeting on Aldersgate Street when someone read Luther's prologue to his commentary on Romans. Wesley recounted: "About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust Christ, Christ alone, for salvation."

Charles, who would write over 6,000 hymns, had already come to Christ. These brothers, with Whitefield and others, would be the human

instruments in the Evangelical Awakening in England. Whitefield would become a powerful preacher in England and America.

George Whitefield from his early twenties became one of the most remarkable preachers in history. Here are selected quotes from Whitefield:

--*On a burden for lost people*: You blame me for weeping, but how can I help it when you will not weep for yourselves, though your immortal souls are on the verge of destruction!

--*On Preaching*: I did not come to tickle your ears; no, but I came to touch your hearts.

--*On Personal Witnessing*: God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them.

--*On scholarship*: The only way to be a true scholar is to be striving to be a true saint.

--*On facing difficulty*: O may God put me into one furnace after another, that my soul may be transparent; that I may see God as He is.

--*On a disciplined life*: There is not a thing on the face of the earth that I abhor so much as idleness or idle people.

Taken from *Christian History* Vol. XII no. 2, 6, 28.

Howell Harris, who became a revival leader in Wales, had begun the practice of preaching in the open air. A layman, Harris followed his powerful conversion with preaching at first to people in homes. Soon he began preaching at any public event he attended. The blessing of God marked his preaching. He called it "exhorting," because he was unordained, but gospel preaching it was! Whitefield met Harris and was influenced by him.

In 1737, while still in his early twenties, Whitefield preached to packed churches in England while others were turned away by the hundreds and even thousands. The growing spiritual hunger could not be satisfied by services in the church buildings alone.

At first the Wesleys and Whitefield were invited to many churches to preach. However, their message of justification by faith received less than enthusiastic responses by many clergymen, and invitations soon declined. As Wesley saw that the Anglican churches would not be his chief sphere of witness he adapted by going to the various religious societies of the day. Whitefield shifted his attention to field preaching, a practice John Wesley would soon adopt. Whitefield first preached out of doors near Bristol. Jealousy among other ministers led to closed doors in the churches in that city. So, he went to a notorious area of the city called Kingswood and preached in the open air. Kingswood was a rough, four-thousand-acre district at the edge of Bristol where coal miners lived. The miners did not mix with the other laboring classes. People shuddered at their presence, referring to the miners as "heathen" and "savages." "Why go to America to preach to the Indians?" some queried Whitefield. "Go to Kingswood, to the Colliers."

For six weeks Whitefield preached at Kingswood, and thousands were gripped by the Holy Spirit. Whitefield struggled at first with the concept. On February 17, 1739, he began the practice out of concern for the outcasts of society, the colliers (coal miners), as noted in his Journal:

My bowels have long since yearned toward the poor colliers, who are very numerous, and as sheep having no shepherd. After dinner, therefore, I went upon a mount, and spake to as many people as came unto me. They were upwards of two hundred. Blessed be God that I have now broken the ice! I believe I was never more acceptable to my Master than when I was standing to teach those hearers in the open fields. Some may censure me; but if I thus pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

Often Whitefield preached outside so early in the morning his hearers had to bring lanterns. His critics referred to such preaching as "that mad Trick."

John Wesley soon followed Whitefield in the practice, though not without a struggle over the practice himself. Whitefield invited John to preach for him in March. After some hesitancy Wesley preached his first field sermon on March 31, 1739. Field preaching went against Wesley's background and personality. In a biography focusing on Wesley's evangelism, Wood stated that only God's grace could convince Wesley to do such a task, adding that "for every age God has a program of evangelism. This was His way of reaching the masses in the eighteenth century." Through field preaching these men reached many people that could be reached in no other way. While many criticized such a strange method, Wesley said it should be judged by its fruits. Awakenings push believers to new approaches to ministry. Often those approaches are considered radical by more conventional ministers. Guided by Scripture, these young leaders and their "whatever it takes to reach the masses" approach honored the Gospel and reached multitudes.

Soon John Wesley focused his ministry on those not touched by the established church: the colliers, the tanners, the left-outs of society. He became persecuted by the owners of taverns on one side, due to the loss of business his ministry caused, and by the Anglican clergy on the other, because of his message.

We must be careful not to seek a movement of God that is confined to the church building. Some of the most stirring movements of God in history came outside church buildings!

Whitefield burned with a passion for God. In late 1741 Whitefield returned to Bristol and preached across England, speaking to thousands with God's power upon him. He developed a routine when in Britain to preach at his Moorfield's center in London during the winter, and to traverse other parts of England in the warmer months. The thousands who flocked to hear him preach were for the most part favorable to him.

He was not without his enemies, however. On one occasion while preaching in Moorfields in 1742, Whitefield made this telling statement: "I was honoured with having a few stones, dirt, rotten eggs, and pieces of dead cats thrown at me." Still, Whitefield preached for three hours, and over three hundred and fifty were awakened to the truth of the Gospel. Do we share such a conviction for God's truth?

John Wesley was driven by the conviction that as long as he had breath this side of eternity he would spend his life sharing the Gospel. He covered nearly 250,000 miles, mostly on horseback. He preached over 40,000 sermons and wrote approximately 250 books and tracts. He used his saddle as a library chair, riding upon horseback so much that he has been dubbed the Evangelical Centaur.

In his field preaching Wesley sought the most opportune place to preach in each town he visited. He used town squares, the market place, castles, hillsides, anyplace that would help the message to be heard. He generally stood on a chair or a table. In later years Wesley was able to preach indoors more often as well. He preached in town halls, workhouses, hospitals, prisons, asylums, and in whatever church that invited him--Anglican, Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist, and Quaker. His organizational acumen is legendary, as he conserved the results of the awakening by organizing converts and seekers into various small groups. His approach helped both in strengthening young believers and in developing leadership for the growing Methodist movement.<sup>5</sup>

What was the impact of this movement of God? First, the Evangelical Awakening made a remarkable **evangelistic impact**. Untold multitudes were converted. In times of awakening new or renewed evangelistic methods are discovered. *Field preaching* opened the Gospel to the masses. Although opposed by many, this became a critical tool for Whitefield, the Wesleys and others. Opposition followed the leaders even as it followed Paul. Wesley's field preaching was attacked continuously. He accepted opposition as a part of effective evangelism. At times he was physically attacked and almost killed. Wesley constantly appealed to those converted as evidence to the

veracity of his work. Multitudes were won to Christ through preaching and personal evangelism. *Printed literature* served as excellent kindling for the revival flames. Sermons, tracts, and revival reports aided the spread of the awakening. John Wesley has been called the Father of the Religious Paperback due to the thousands of letters, sermons and tracts he published. His *Journals* are a personal compendium without peer. He published *A Christian Library* consisting of spiritual reading from the Church Fathers through the Puritans and Pietists. *Lay preachers* also spread the Word of God. Many of the converts became lay preachers who carried on the work.

Second, **music** was instrument in the awakening. Hymnbooks existed earlier, but with Charles Wesley the hymnbook became a tool of evangelism. Charles penned over 6,000 hymns, while John wrote many himself. Even Whitefield penned a number of them. The impact of the new songs was to introduce to congregations an enthusiastic type of hymn singing quite foreign to the sober singing of the metrical psalms. It also revealed the spiritual possibilities of the hymn.

The impact of their songs is hard to overestimate. To a largely illiterate population the hymns taught doctrine and, due to their application-oriented messages, Christian experience. Thus the music became a means to further the awakening. At this same time Isaac Watts began composing hymns. His hymns, including "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," and "We're Marching to Zion," set a new standard for English church songs, thus his title the Father of English Hymnody.

In the Great Awakening thousands of nominal Christians were caught up in evangelistic fervor that shattered old forms and traditions and opened new channels of spiritual growth for entire congregations.

A third area of impact was **missionary expansion**. These men were committed to evangelizing the world. Whitefield made seven excursions to the New World.

Finally, all awakenings have a positive impact to some extent on **society**. Wesley and his Methodist followers were open in their

opposition to the slave trade. Wesley corresponded with William Wilberforce, the man responsible more than any other for the abolition of slave trading by the British in 1807. Wilberforce had been led to Christ by converted slave trader John Newton.

The Wesleys and Whitefield had visited the prisons regularly while in the Holy Club at Oxford. Prison reformer John Howard was encouraged by John Wesley in his efforts to bring about a change in the dreadful prisons in England and around Europe.

John Wesley set up schools to educate children, focusing on evangelism. One of the effects of this awakening was its impact on Robert Raikes and the Sunday School movement: "Without doubt," said Taylor, "This was one of the major streams of evangelical power to flow from the great revival."

### **The First Great Awakening in America**

The colonies had become well established by the end of the 1600s and early 1700s. However, although many came to America for religious freedom, by this time spiritual deadness marked most communities.

Dutch Reformed pastor Theodore Jackobus Frelinghuysen (1691-1747) in New Jersey experienced the first sparks of the Great Awakening's fire in the year 1726. Such is the testimony of George Whitefield, who in 1739 called Frelinghuysen "a worthy old soldier of Jesus Christ, . . . and the beginner of the great work which I trust the Lord is carrying on in these parts."

A German born son of a Dutch Reformed pastor, Frelinghuysen came to the colonies in 1720 to serve as pastor of four Dutch Reformed churches in the Raritan Valley of New Jersey. He was influenced by Dutch Calvinism and by Pietism.

Frelinghuysen came to the New World with a burning passion for revival in the Dutch Reformed Church. Frelinghuysen determined to bring a fresh vigor to the faith through evangelistic preaching, church

discipline (especially related to observing the Lord's Supper), and zealous visitation. He preached that an obvious conversion experience was necessary. His preaching on the necessity of conversion, particularly when aimed at church members, brought both a spirit of revival with many converts resulting and controversy among some members and other Dutch Reformed ministers. In 1725 a group of Dutch Reformed ministers led by Domine Boel published the *Complaints*, seventeen charges charging him with doctrinal error and improper practice. They particularly criticized his itinerant ministry. In response Frelinghuysen preached three messages with great effect. Following this Frelinghuysen confronted Boel with these words:

Is this not the doctrine of the Reformed Church? I care not what ignorant, carnal men say behind my back. They are greatly deceived if they imagine they will thus put me to shame, for I would rather die a thousand deaths than not preach the truth.

Are you willing to stand for truth and proclaim it even when others attack you? What are the convictions in your life you would never surrender?

Despite opposition, revival flourished. It reached its climax in 1726 and was especially effective among the youth of the four churches served by Frelinghuysen. The spirit of revival spread to many Presbyterians. The Dutch Reformed Church eventually split into prorevival and antirevival groups. The revival in New Jersey is a fitting reminder that revival is like a fire: some draw near to it for its warmth, while others fear the pain it can bring. The fire of the Spirit exposes all sin, with a result that one will come to God's light for purging and refining, or run from God to hide in the darkness.

The key impetus to the revival among Presbyterians was the Tennent family. The Scotch-Irish family came to America in 1716 and eventually settled in Pennsylvania. William, Sr. (1673-1746), was concerned about the dead orthodoxy in the churches. He built a log cabin with the expressed purpose of facilitating the spiritual

development of his sons. He trained Gilbert (1703-1764), the oldest, and eventually his three remaining sons along with about fifteen others. His curriculum was critical in the future development of leaders in the awakening. Subjects included languages, logic, and theology. Most importantly, however, he instilled in each student a passion for evangelism, for a devotional life, and for the Word of God. William, Sr. had an ability to draw the most promising young men to his Log College, as his detractors deemed it. Many of these became revival leaders themselves.

The influence of William, Sr., has for too long been underestimated in the telling of the awakening's story. Through the students in his Log College and the many other log schools arising from his originality, his impact spread far beyond his personal ministry. The contemporary movement toward mentoring in ministry training in our day could learn from the work of the elder Tennent. George Whitefield commented on the school on one of his visits:

The place wherein the young men study now is, in contempt, called The College. It is a log house, about twenty feet long, and near as many broad; and, to me, it seemed to resemble the school of the old prophets. That their habitations were mean, and that they sought not great things for themselves, is plain....From this despised place, seven or eight worthy ministers of Jesus have lately been sent forth; more are almost ready to be sent; and the foundation is now laying for the instruction of many others.

The Log College eventually developed into the College of New Jersey and subsequently Princeton University. It has been deemed the forerunner of modern seminaries. Many of the college graduates started log colleges of their own. The impact of the Log College led to a continual founding of schools as Presbyterians moved westward. In fact, at least sixty-three educational institutions were spawned by its example, and the cumulative years of pastoral ministry from Log College graduates alone were 426. Educational institutions can play a key role in awakenings.

Gilbert was mightily used of God in the cause of revival. He often worked with other revival leaders including Whitefield. Gilbert's most famous sermon was "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry" preached in Nottingham, Pennsylvania on March 8, 1740. He railed against ministers in the synod, declaring that many were unregenerate and therefore unfit to preach the new birth. The sermon concluded with an invitation to the people to seek churches who provided profitable teaching. The sermon was an indictment of the entire Presbyterian ministry, especially of those opposing revival. The sermon was published and distributed widely. The result was a division among Presbyterians in 1741 between the "Old Sides" and "New Sides," anti- and prorevival groups, respectively. Gilbert and others argued for conversion experience validated by a changed life as necessary for church membership. In addition, the New Sides believed ministers should not only be educated, but should also give evidence of an inward, divine call.

The Old Sides opposed the enthusiasm of the great awakening; among the New Side churches revival flourished. Old Sides ministers declined from twenty-five to twenty-two for the period 1745-1758, while New Side ministers increased from twenty-two to seventy-two. Through the leadership of Gilbert, an agreement was reached between the parties in 1758. The united Presbyterians continued to grow rapidly through the time of the Revolutionary War.

The Great Awakening in New England centers on the ministry of Congregationalist pastor Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and the subsequent itinerant visits by George Whitefield from England. Edwards' place in early American Christianity is without peer. He stands as one of the greatest minds ever produced on American soil. He is remembered for his preaching, philosophical contributions, theological formulations, and his personal piety. Oliver Wendell Holmes echoed the opinion of many when he called Edwards and Benjamin Franklin the two most significant thinkers in early America.

Edwards was born on October 5, 1703, the only son among eleven children to the Rev. and Mrs. Timothy Edwards. Timothy and Esther Stoddard Edwards lived in the same modest flat the entirety of their sixty-three years of marriage. Young Jonathan quickly distinguished himself as a prodigy. He read Latin by age six, and by thirteen read the writings of John Locke with great pleasure.

Before the widespread awakening of the early 1740s several localized revivals occurred in New England. Edwards' first record of revival, the *Narrative*, chronicled the Valley Revival of 1734-35. Edwards was only thirty-one at the time. Edwards began by noting five church revivals under Solomon Stoddard's ministry in Northampton during the years 1679, 1683, 1696, 1712, and 1718. The Valley Revival was so named because it spread from Northampton up and down the Connecticut River valley.

Several factors contributed to the revival's origin. Concerned about the dullness of the people toward the faith, Edwards called his people to honor the day of the Lord. This caused some to grow concerned over their laxity. This concern increased following the conversion of several families in the nearby town of Pascomuck.

Edwards also encouraged youth to form small groups for prayer and discussion, hereafter many adults joined in as well. Edwards repeatedly commented on the preeminent role young people had in this and subsequent revivals. The death of two young people in separate incidents added to the growing seriousness of the people. Revival erupted when Edwards preached a series of messages on justification by faith. Edwards himself was amazed at what he termed the "surprising works of God." He wrote how that for some time in Northampton the only topic of discussion was of spiritual matters. Many persons came to Christ as a result of the supernatural activity of God. A frivolous young woman's dramatic conversion was the first of many. Over three hundred professed faith in Christ in only six months.

By the spring of 1735 the church was crowded to capacity each week. Often the entire congregation was moved to tears due in some cases to joy, in others to sorrow for sin. In the months of March and April, nearly thirty were added to the church in addition to the spirit of revival among the believers. People came from other areas to see the amazing work. Many of them were awakened and spread the revival elsewhere. Edwards recorded that no less than twenty-seven towns ultimately experienced revival. Soon Edwards' church counted over six hundred members, remarkable for his day.

The awakening reached its climax across New England in 1740-42, particularly through the itinerant work of Whitefield. In October 1740 George Whitefield came to Northampton on a visit to the Edwards family. A fresh awakening followed his visit there. A letter by Edwards to a Boston pastor described the work of God in 1740-42. As had occurred in 1734-35, Edwards wrote that the entire town was transformed into an unusual God-consciousness. During the summer of 1741 many times meetings continued all through the night.

On July 8, 1741, he preached his most renowned sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," which spurred profound brokenness and repentance in the church. His sermons were not all in the imprecatory style of "Sinners." In fact, revival came to Northampton in 1740 in the midst of a series on the love of Christ from I Corinthians 13. Still, the impact of "Sinners" should not be overlooked. The sermon was powerful because of the incredible imagery employed by Edwards. Based on the text Deut. 32:35, "Their foot shall slide in due time," Edwards' thesis was "There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God." His powerful imagery is almost visceral in its effect:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked. His wrath toward you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the

fire....it is nothing but His hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment.

He concluded the message with an appeal to flee the wrath to come and follow Christ. Response was remarkable with many crying out to God in great agony for mercy.

In 1741, Edwards published *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, a collection of sermons that included five 'marks' that illustrated the Spirit's true activity in revival.

#### THE FIVE MARKS:

1. When the operation is such to *raise their esteem of that Jesus* who was born of the Virgin, and was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem; and seems more to confirm and establish their minds in the truth of what the gospel declares to us of his being the Son of God, and the Saviour of men; is a sure sign that it is from the Spirit of God.
2. When the spirit that is at *work operates against the interests of Satan's kingdom*, which lies in encouraging and establishing sin, and cherishing men's worldly lusts; this is a sure sign that it is a true, and not a false spirit.
3. The spirit that operates in such a manner, *as to cause in men a greater regard to the Holy Scriptures*, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity, is certainly the Spirit of God.
4. If by observing the manner of the operation of a spirit that is at work among a people, we see *that it operates as a spirit of truth, leading persons to truth*, convincing them of those things that are true, we may safely determine that it is a right and true spirit.
5. If the spirit that is at work among a people *operates as a spirit of love to God and man*, it is a sure sign that is the Spirit of God.

--Edwards, *Distinguishing Marks*, in *Complete Works*, II:266-68.  
Emphasis added.

Others involved in the awakening included David Brainerd, missionary to the Indians, Ebenezer Pemberton, and Samuel Davies. George Whitefield had an unparalleled impact on the colonies due to his extensive itineration and effectual oratory. Though he never enjoyed good health, he made the arduous trek across the Atlantic to the colonies from his native England on seven occasions (1738, 1739-41, 1744-48, 1751-54, 1754-55, 1763-65, 1769-70). His most powerful visit came during his second campaign. On September 14, 1740, shortly before his twenty-sixth birthday, Whitefield began a tour of New England described as the greatest single evangelistic tour in New England's history. His itinerant ministry across the height and breadth of the colonies fanned the flames of localized revival into the inferno of a great awakening.

Benjamin Franklin, who published many of Whitefield's sermons, recognized the unusual elocution of the young minister. On one occasion Franklin estimated that Whitefield spoke to twenty-five thousand people in the open air. Considering Whitefield's ability to persuade, note this account by Franklin when Whitefield was raising money for his orphanage:

. . . I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and 5 pistoles in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the copper. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver; and he finished so admirably that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all.

Whitefield's enormous popularity and evangelical fervor led to massive crowds. For a time he was the most popular figure in America. Crowds by the thousands thronged to hear him on his journeys. While in Boston on his second campaign, over 15,000 came to hear him. This was greater than the population of the city! During his time there, two ministers in Boston stated that more people came to them for spiritual aid in one week than had done so in the previous twenty-four years

combined. He preached virtually every day, and generally several times daily.

A memorable account of Whitefield's immense popularity is seen in an account by Nathan Cole, an unlearned farmer who heard of Whitefield's visit to Middletown after the evangelist visited with Jonathan Edwards. Cole recorded that the announcement of Whitefield's coming to preach delivered the entire countryside to hear him.

Nathan Cole's account of Whitefield's visit to Connecticut on October 23, 1740:

I was in my field at work; I dropped my tool that I had in my hand and ran home to my wife, telling her to make ready quickly to go and hear Mr. Whitfield [sic] preach at Middletown, then run to my pasture for my horse with all my might. . . . As I came nearer to the road, I heard a noise something like a low rumbling thunder and presently found it was the noise of horses' feet coming down the road. . . . I turned and looked towards the [Connecticut River] and saw the ferry boats running swift backward and forward bringing over loads of people. . . . The land and banks over the river looked black with people and horses. All along the 12 miles I saw no man at work in his field, but all seemed to be gone.

When I saw Mr. Whitfield come upon the scaffold, he looked almost angelical -- a young, slim, slender youth before some thousands of people with a bold, undaunted countenance. . . . he looked as if he was clothed with authority from the Great God, and a sweet solemn solemnity sat upon his brow, and my hearing him preach gave me a heart wound. By God's blessing my old foundation was broken up, and I saw that my righteousness would not save me.

--Cited in *Christian History* Issue 38 (Vol. 12, No. 2), 12.

In the years that followed, revival spread in Virginia and to the southern colonies. It was here that Baptists Shoal Stearnes and Daniel Marshall began the Sandy Creek Baptist Church in North Carolina,

considered to be the mother church of Baptists in the south and of the Southern Baptist Convention. These men came to Christ through the ministry of Whitefield and became Baptists later.

From 1755 to 1792 Baptist churches in the south grew from 28 to 441, over 1500 per cent! This remarkable growth can be attributed in great part to the Great Awakening. Stearnes and Marshall, with a total of eight families, migrated to Sandy Creek, North Carolina, where they formed the first southern Separate Baptist Church in 1755. Within only a few years the church grew from 16 to 606 in membership. Its influence is seen in the observation by Morgan Edwards:

Sandy-creek church is the mother of all the Separate-Baptists. From this Zion went forth the word, and great was the company of them who published it: it, in 17 years, has spread branches westward as far as the great river Mississippi; southward as far as Georgia; eastward to the sea and Chesopeek Bay; and northward to the waters of Potowmack; it, in 17 years, is become mother, grandmother, and great grandmother to 42 churches, from which sprang 125 ministers, many of which are ordained and support the sacred character as well as any sort of clergy in America.

Many positive effects can be gleaned from the First Great Awakening. First, it brought **a renewed focus on living out one's faith**. Edwards and others championed the role of the intellect *and* the emotions as significant features of genuine Christianity. Edwards rightly noted that occasional cases of extremism did not deny the reality of the experiential side of the faith.

A second feature is a corollary to experimental faith. This awakening created **a fresh focus on prayer**. Tennent, Whitefield, Edwards, and others were men of prayer. Edwards' conviction about prayer is reflected in his writing about the promotion of revival. While much the Calvinist and committed to the absolute sovereignty of God, Edwards urged fellow ministers to

be much in prayer and fasting, both in secret and with one another. It seems to me, it would become the circumstances of the present day, if ministers in a neighbourhood would often meet together, and spend days in fasting and fervent prayer among themselves.

Edwards' clearly believed God's sovereignty extended to the prompting of prayer among his people:

So it is God's will . . . that the prayers of his saints shall be on great and 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 prayer of his people.

In addition, Edwards' wrote *A Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement* to encourage others to prayer. In this work he reported on a call to prayer issued in Scotland in 1744. He cited numerous occasions of awakening, including Germany, England, Wales, and Scotland in Europe, and in the colonies.

Third, any true spiritual awakening ultimately results in **effective evangelism and missions**. Evangelistic effects included not only the numbers of persons converted, but the rise of new methods as well. One of the most notable innovations was the practice of itinerancy. While not unknown before this era, it became an accepted and effective tool for spreading both the gospel message and the good news of local revivals. Following the example of the Grand Itinerant Whitefield, many pastors took extended tours during the Great Awakening. These included Gilbert Tennent, Benjamin Pomeroy, Eleazor Wheelock, Jonathan Parsons, Andrew Crowell, Samuel Buell, Philemon Robbins, and others.

Theologically, the Great Awakening championed the Testament emphasis on justification by faith. This was the consistent message of revival preachers of various denominational stripes. The rise of significant **social institutions** is another feature. The log college was the forerunner of modern seminaries. In Philadelphia, a tabernacle

erected for Whitefield's meetings became a charity school which in turn led to the University of Pennsylvania. Eleazor Wheelock (1711-1779) began a charity school for Indians in 1754. George Whitefield helped Wheelock and Indian preacher Samson Occom raise money in England for the school. That institution ultimately became Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. Numerous other schools emerged in the years following. Bethesda and other orphanages ministered to the needy.

The **impact of the awakening on the culture of the American colonies** was critical. The awakening helped to unify the colonies. The moral climate was changed as well. Church historians have noted the First Great Awakening helped to prepare the colonies for the struggle to become a nation later in the century. Secular historians have noted the impact of the Great Awakening on the formation of the United States.

Finally, the awakening produced **role models for church leadership**. Much can be gained by examining the pattern of life demonstrated by the leaders of a mighty movement of the Spirit of God. Edwards reminds us you can be committed to intellectual pursuits and maintain a fervent piety. The contrasting preaching styles of these men give contemporary preachers the freedom to be themselves. Whitefield modeled effective leadership. Many have rightly said that leadership is influence. Whitefield led not by appointment of external authority, but by his character, conviction, and consistent message.

### **More Recent Times**

Other awakenings followed. The Second Great Awakening, beginning around the start of the nineteenth century, ushering in what historian Latourette called the "Great Century of Christianity." This awakening featured the preaching of Charles Finney, the camp meetings, and college revivals. It led to some of the most expansive missionary ventures in the history of the Church.

Youth played a vital role in the various movements of revival during this time. Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, Williams

College in Massachusetts, and Yale College all experienced waves of revival from the end of the 1700s into the early 1800s.

These stirrings came on campuses filled with unbiblical teaching following the formation of the new nation. One minister observed:

Infidelity was prevalent everywhere, and the college of William and Mary was regarded as the hot-bed of French politics and religion. I can truly say that then and for some years after in every educated young man in Virginia whom I met I expected to find a skeptic, if not an avowed unbeliever.

At Hampden-Sydney, the handful of Christian students there met in the woods to pray, fearing the persecution of other students. But through this small group and a godly college president, revival began which spread to surrounding communities and sent young ministers with a renewed passion across the region.

At Williams College a small group of college students met one day under a haystack to avoid a driving rainstorm. The Spirit of God reached where the raindrops could not, leading these young men to commit to a missions effort around the world. Young Samuel Mills, who was such a poor student he was not allowed to participate in his graduation exercise, led the group to believe reaching Asia was possible, saying “we can do it if we will.” From that group came the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions on June 28, 1810. This was the first official foreign missions organization in the United States. The first missionaries include familiar names: Adoniram Judson, Samuel Nott, Luther Rice, Gordon Hall, and Samuel Newell.

In the years following, preachers like Charles Finney witnessed powerful movements resulting in many coming to Christ. At one point Finney preached 98 messages over a six-month period in Rochester. On the western frontier (now Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee), camp meetings sprung up where many rough frontier people found Christ.

A Layman's Prayer Revival touched the U.S. in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, impacting much of the United States just before the Civil War. Prayer meetings sprung up in cities from New York to Chicago. The meetings began in New York, where marvelous reports of answered prayer were reported. At one large meeting in Philadelphia, George Duffield was so moved by the meeting that he left and penned the hymn, "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus." A lay missionary named Jeremiah Lanphier, who would never become satisfied with his evangelistic efforts in New York, started the first prayer meeting.

Jim Collins wrote the book *Good to Great*. In it he argues that the enemy of *great* is *good*. We settle for good enough, which is why we do not have great government, or hospitals, or schools, or churches. Good is enough for most of us. If there is anything that stands out to me in my own study of the lives of leaders of great revivals, it is their passion for Christ that would not allow them to settle for the status quo. What about you?

Space does not permit discussion of other movements in the twentieth century, from college revivals in the 1950s, to the Jesus Movement of the 1970s. However, there has not been a great awakening in America for centuries. Is it not time?

To learn more see Malcolm McDow and Alvin Reid, <i>Firefall: How God Changes History Through Revivals</i> (Emunclaw, WA: Pleasant Word Publishers).
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**For Further Thought:**

--How does reading about past movements of God encourage you to seek His face for revival today?

--Would the telling of accounts of God's reviving work in the past encourage others today? How could you help spread the word about previous revival movements?

--Do you seek to reach the lost as much as you seek God's movement?

--Are you willing to reach the outcasts of society and to try nontraditional (but not unbiblical) approaches? After all, preaching in the fields was novel in Wesley's day, but not to Jesus and the early church, who did this as well.

## Chapter Four

### Revival in Your Life, Your Home, Your Church, and Your Community

Reading about the work of God in revival can be inspiring, convicting, and intimidating. After all, Santyana observed that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Perhaps you are asking, “How can I see God move like this in my life, in my home, in my church?”

That is the ultimate question. On one level, we have no control over the work of a sovereign God, on another, we can seek Him, live for Him, and be ready when He moves. The Word of God promises God’s blessing on our faithfulness to Him. How can we put ourselves in a position to see God work mightily?

Someone much wiser than me used the analogy of a sailor to describe preparing for God to move in awakening. A good sailor cannot control the wind; in fact, the best sailor on earth has no power to have the wind move as he would wish. But a wise sailor knows he has full control over his sails. When the wind blows he must be ready. When the wind begins to mount he must set the sails. God will send the wind of His Spirit where He will, but we must be ready to set the sails.

No formula or program exists to make revival happen. But there are principles we can apply to move forward confidently in obedience to God.

**1. Look in the mirror.** As I said earlier, unless the minister, the leader, the fathers and the mothers seek God’s face, revival is only a hypothetical possibility. In the Great Awakening, Gilbert Tennent preached a famous message called “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry” because in his day he saw so many ministers who did not even

act saved. Today, we might call for a message entitled “The Danger of Superficial Christianity.” The great need of our time is for men to yearn to become men of God with a book of Acts boldness (Acts 4:13, 4:31), a willingness to change like Paul (Acts 17; 19:8-9), a desire to reach all people (Acts 1:8), and a desire to engage culture with the good news (Acts 11:19-26), starting with how he leads his own family.

Perhaps there are other issues: secret sin (how is your internet surfing?), neglect of prayer, neglecting your family, materialism, etc. Following this material you will find aids to help you in seeking God for personal revival.

As an evangelist, Rodney “Gypsy” Smith preached in England and America. This evangelist saw God move mightily in great revival. Once someone asked Gypsey Smith how to experience personal revival.

“If you want God to move,” Smith said, “Go home, and draw a chalk line round yourself, and stand in the ring and say 'Lord, begin here!' ”<sup>6</sup> To you, the reader, regardless of your age, I have one simple message: it is chalk time. Will you search your heart? Are you accountable to anyone who will help push your walk with Jesus?

**2. Look at the Family.** Puritan pastor Richard Baxter observed that there would be no revival in the community unless God first moved in the families of believers. How are things in your home? Do you have times of family prayer? Do you speak openly of the things of God (Deut.6:4-9)? Are you more interested in seeing your children be “successful” financially than longing for them to see God move? Or, are you only interested in their security, rather than focusing on preparing them to change the world? Studies show 88% of Christian families do not pray together. How about yours?

Another evangelist from years ago said this: If you want to see God work mightily in your life, do three things.

First, let a small group of Christians get totally right with God. This could mean your home.

Second, let that group put themselves totally at God's disposal, so He can use them for His purposes.

Third, let them bind together for prayer. Would you and a few others do this? God can use you, if you will let Him.

**3. Look at the Church.** If we would be honest we would have to admit that the church in America has lost much of her influence in the communities across the nation. If most churches in our land vanished from their communities tomorrow no one would notice! We cannot blame the lost world for that, for lost people simply act according to their nature. We need God to fill our churches with passionate, Christ-honoring, sacrificial, truly worshiping believers who cannot wait to get out of the weekly worship service to reach the community.

Let's be honest: the most resistant people to a movement of God are often church people. I wrote a book a few years ago called *The Radically Unchurched: Who They Are and How to Reach Them*. The book deals with the need of the church to penetrate the unchurched culture to reach people we typically fail to touch. But a student of mine wisely observed after reading the book that the radically unchurched are not the problem. The problem is that we have too many who are radically *churched!*

Where is your church spiritually? If it suddenly disappeared from your community would it be missed? What hinders your church from being all God wants? Would your church be described as a group of people united to advance a movement? Or are they mostly a group of people intent on maintaining an institution?

We can talk all we want about spiritual awakening, but one thing is certain: unless we are willing to <i>pay the price</i> to see the Spirit of God move among us, we will continue only talking about it.
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**4. Look in the Community.** If God truly sent revival to your community, would it not be reflected in the schools, the stores, and the streets? Imagine how your community would look if God moved. No

awakening reached every single person, but when God truly moves, people can tell! I have a friend whose youth group experienced a move of God that changed their small community. In fact, within a couple of years, the public school cancelled the prom and held a dinner instead with a minister as the keynote speaker!

### **For Further Thought:**

--Are you willing to let God mold you into a holy witness in the community? Consider the following:

If revival comes, we will spend less time focusing on the local institution (the church facility) and more on living for Christ daily (see Acts 2:41-47).

If revival comes, your church will look more like a movement being advanced than a facility to be maintained.

If revival comes, churches will stop having to ask whether or not people unlike them racially, economically, or other ways will be welcome, and will instead ask how they can reach more people, period.

If revival comes we will focus less on our personal preference in worship style and focus more on living lives of worship as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2).

If revival comes, we will not only be sick and tired of being sick and tired, but we will want to see change, starting in our own lives.

If revival comes, reaching people for Christ will matter more than our personal preferences.

If revival comes, the people in your community will know it.

If revival comes, the very culture of your church will change from focusing on pleasing church members to reaching lost people.

## Chapter Five

### Practical Guides and Resources

No doubt the fact that you are reading this illustrates your desire to see God at work in your life and ministry. While no program or three-step plan exists to bring revival, the following resources can assist in preparing the climate for a fresh wind of God in your church.

Two resources follow for your use. The first is a personal resource called “Preparing for Personal Revival.” The second is a corporate season of prayer for revival and renewal called a Prayer Vigil. A forthcoming ebook called *Pursuit* will provide a personal, 40 day guide to seek personal revival.

### Preparing for Personal Revival

*Pray* the prayer of the psalmist: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23,24).

*Be totally honest* as you answer each question.

*Agree with God* about each need He reveals in your life.  
Confess each sin, with the willingness to make it right.

*Repent* from sin! Turn from every sin the Lord reveals in your heart and forsake it.

Praise God for His cleansing and forgiveness.

*Review* these questions periodically to remain sensitive to your need for ongoing revival.

1. Genuine Salvation (2 Corinthians 5:17)
  - a. Was there ever a time in my life that I genuinely repented of my sin?
  - b. Was there ever a time in my life that I placed all my trust in Jesus Christ alone to save me?
2. God's Word (Psalm 119:97; 119:140)
  - a. Do I live to read and meditate on the Word of God?
  - b. Are my personal devotions consistent and meaningful?
  - c. Do I practically apply God's Word to my everyday life?
3. Humility (Isaiah 57:15)
  - a. Am I quick to recognize and agree with God in confession when I have sinned?
  - b. Am I quick to admit to others when I am wrong?
  - c. Do I rejoice when others are praised and recognized, and my accomplishments go unnoticed by men? (Romans 12:15)
  - d. Do I esteem all others better than myself? (Phil. 2:3-4)
4. Obedience (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Samuel 15:22)
  - a. Do I consistently obey what I know God wants me to do? (James 1:21-25)
  - b. Do I consistently obey the human authorities God has placed over my life?

5. Pure Heart (1 John 1:9)

- a. Do I confess my sins by name?
- b. Do I keep “short sin accounts” with God (confess and forsake as He convicts)?
- c. Am I willing to give up all sin for God?

6. Clear Conscience (Acts 24:16)

- a. Do I consistently seek forgiveness from those I wrong or offend?
- b. Is my conscience clear with every man? (Can I honestly say, “There is no one I have wronged or offended in any way and not gone back to them and sought their forgiveness and made it right”)

7. Priorities (Matthew 6:33)

- a. Does my schedule reveal that God is first in my life?
- b. Does my checkbook reveal that God is first in my life?
- c. Next to my relationship with God, is my relationship with my family my highest priority?

8. Values (Colossians 3:12)

- a. Do I love what God loves and hate what God hates?
- b. Do I value highly the things that please God (e.g., giving, witnessing to lost souls, studying his Word and prayer)?
- c. Are my affections and goals fixed on eternal values?

9. Sacrifice (Philippians 3:7,8)

- a. Am I willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary to see God move in my life and church (time, convenience, comfort, reputation, pleasure, ect.)?
  - b. Is my life characterized by genuine sacrifice for the cause of Christ?
10. Spirit Control (Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 5:18-21)
- a. Am I allowing Jesus to be Lord of every area of my life?
  - b. Am I allowing the Holy Spirit to fill (control) my life each day?
  - c. Is there consistent evidence of the “fruit of the Sprit” being produced in my life?
11. “First Love” (Philippians 1:21,23)
- a. Am I as much in love with Jesus as I have ever been?
  - b. Am I thrilled with Jesus, filled with His joy and peace, and making Him the continual object of my love?
12. Motives (Acts 5:29; Matthew 10:28)
- a. Am I more concerned about what God thinks about my life than about what others think?
  - b. Would I pray, read my Bible, give, and serve as much if nobody but God ever noticed?
  - c. Am I more concerned about pleasing God than I am about being accepted and appreciated by men?
13. Moral Purity (Ephesians 5:3,4)
- a. Do I keep my mind free from books, magazines, movies or other entertainment that could stimulate fantasizing or thoughts that are not morally pure?

b. Are my conversation and behavior pure and above reproach?

14. Forgiveness (Colossians 3:12,13)

a. Do I seek to resolve conflicts in relationships as soon as possible?

b. Am I quick to forgive those who wrong me or hurt me?

15. Sensitivity (Matthew 5:23,24)

a. Am I sensitive to the conviction and promptings of God's Spirit?

b. Am I quick to respond in humility and obedience to the conviction and promptings of God's Spirit?

16. Evangelism (Romans 9:3; Luke 24:46,48)

a. Do I have a burden for lost souls?

b. Do I consistently witness for Christ?

17. Prayer (1 Timothy 2:1)

a. Am I faithful in praying for the needs of others?

b. Do I pray specifically, fervently, and faithfully for revival in my life, my church, our nation, and the world?

## **Prayer Vigil**

This focuses on a season of prayer for several hours, such as a Friday evening 8 PM to midnight. Could be used as a starting point for an all night prayer meeting.

Leaders: The pastor and any other leaders who can facilitate this time of prayer

### **Suggested Order of Service**

(Note, there is no need to follow the time frame—take what time is needed)

**7:00 – Time of worship through song** (Hymns, praise and worship songs that are prayers in song)

**7:20 – Opening Prayer and Instructions**—Note that this is a time of prayer, not a time of speaking, preaching, etc. Some time will be spent in corporate prayer, some in small groups, some alone, and some time will be spent in Scripture reading and singing.

### **7:30– Preparing for personal revival**

- Leader reads Psalm 139:23-24
- Spread out across sanctuary and get alone with God. Take this time seriously, for God will not send revival unless we first cleanse our own hearts.
- Option: use “Preparing for Personal Revival” as a handout. (included at end of section)
- Return as you hear music play—but stay as long as you need if needed

### **8:00 – Worship through Song**

One hymn or praise song to bring the people together

## **8:05 -- Scripture reading**

Have a group of individuals (include all ages, reflect the church) prepared ahead of time to read these:

- Psalm 51:1-17
- Isaiah 1:16-18
- Isaiah 53:1-12
- Psalm 1:1-3
- Psalm 84:1-12

## **8:15 – Preparing for Corporate Revival**

- Leader reads Psalm 85:1-6
- Divide into groups of 3 or 4. Find a place where you can gather and pray without interruptions.
- Prayer items
  - **Church Leaders** – the condition of this church begins with the leadership.
    - Purity, wisdom, love, passion for God
  - **Church Members**
    - Each day you see people at work or school, in the neighborhood, at the shop—pray for spiritual eyes to see ways to speak to them of Christ.
    - Many fellow believers are hurting and need your prayer.
    - Accountability, humility, brokenness

## **8:30 – Scripture Reading**

Again have people ready to read these Scriptures

- 2 Chronicles 7:12-16
- Matthew 9:36-38
- Isaiah 42:5-9
- Acts 4:23-31
- Isaiah 6:1-8

## **8:40 – Worship through Song**

Perhaps sing hymns and songs that are filled with biblical passages or themes

## **9:00 -- Preparing for Worldwide Revival**

Leaders reads Acts 1:6-8

- Join your group with one other group (total of 6-8) and find a place to pray. Pray for effective witness, church planting, and other efforts.
- Prayer Items
  - Your Jerusalem (your local community)
  - Your Judea (your city and/or state)
    - Political leaders
    - Moral issues
    - Laborers to share Christ
    - Fellow churches throughout the state

- Your Samaria
  - Other racial or ethnic groups
  - Those with different moral or religious views
    - pray that they would find Christ
- The Uttermost – the United States, the World
  - Missionaries
  - Any mission trips your church is planning

**9:30 – Closing season of prayer**

Have everyone come together and kneel as a body. The pastor leads in a time of closing prayer and commitment.



## Author

Alvin L. Reid, Ph.D, is professor of Evangelism and Student Ministry and holds the Bailey Smith Chair of Evangelism at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. Alvin has written or edited more than a dozen books on evangelism, youth ministry, and spiritual awakening. To find out more about these and other resources go to [www.alvinreid.com](http://www.alvinreid.com). Alvin, his wife Michelle, and their children Josh and Hannah live in Wake Forest.

For more resources go to [alvinreid.com](http://alvinreid.com).

For information on ministry training go to [sebts.edu](http://sebts.edu)

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Much of this work, including quotes, comes from my part of this book. For more information or to order a copy see book *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History Through Revivals* (Eunclaw, WA: Pleasant Word, 2002). Or, go to [www.pleasantword.com](http://www.pleasantword.com).

<sup>3</sup> McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on Wesley's organization see chapter 9 in Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall* (Eunclaw, WA: Pleasant Word, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Smith, Gipsy, *The Beauty of Jesus: Memories and Reflections* (London: Epworth Press, 1932). 169.