

Study to grow: Revival course

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Session 1: Introduction

Point 1: Learn from the past

There is lots of rubbish around about revivals. Many - especially African leaders - make the word mean whatever they think it should mean. This leads to confusion.

So how can we get the right ideas? We have to learn from the past and it is a good teacher.

That was why Joshua put the stones in the middle of the Jordan. They reminded Israel of what God had done in the past, and they were to learn from that for the present and future.

Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day. (Joshua 4:9)

From the many revivals the world has seen, certain ideas are common.

Point 2: Where does revival begin?

Here is the view from the Welsh revival -

“It is difficult to trace the origin of some things which are now great and formidable: their beginning was small, and all the early circumstances are lost in doubt and uncertainty.”

So while it might be nice to know how these great moves of God started, often the beginning is very unclear. This is almost surely the Lord’s work. If there is uncertainty about the start, no one can boast “I started it!”

Point 3: What is revival like? What can we expect?

Someone who had been through a revival experience in the past said this -

“What of those people who say, ‘Oh that we had revival!’ I don’t think they know what they’re asking for because it can be a terrible thing when you’re face to face with God. It’s what I’ve found in my own personal experience. You’re up against something completely not of this world, it is supernatural. The awareness of the holiness of God is something that really is difficult for anyone to describe.”

So beginnings are uncertain and revival goes beyond what anyone can imagine.

Point 4: Who is in charge?

Many will claim “I am leading this!” Here is the truth, which all have to accept. It comes from a well-known Writer on revival – and here is right. God alone is in charge of revival. Here is how we should see it -

“This is revival. It is a supernatural moving of God’s Spirit so that the community suddenly becomes conscious of the moving of God, beginning amongst His own people.”

Point 5: Response

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." (1 Kings 19:11)

This "Study to grow" course is not a nice pastime. It is part of what we are wanting the Lord to do in our lands. As we study, this prayer should be always in our hearts - "Lord, please do not pass us by."

Session 2 : What is revival and when does it come

Point 1: What is revival?

A very famous Preacher and teacher wrote this, and it's a good place to start -

"Do you know what a revival is? It is just this glimpse of God, of the glory of God, passing by. That is precisely what it is. Just this glimpse of God. The God who is there in the glory, as it were, comes down and pours out his Spirit and ascends again, and we look on, and feel, and know that the glory of God is in the midst, and is." (Martin Lloyd Jones.)

Let's take a "glimpse of God" ourselves and see what can be learnt.

Point 2: Revival is a glimpse of God

Isaiah caught a glimpse of God and it changed his life -

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” (Isaiah 6:1-5)

QUESTION:

What was it that Isaiah saw which so touched his spirit?

Write your answer down and we will discuss the answers on our zoom. All questions will be discussed, so if you are stuck, don't worry!

Point 3: Revival is a glimpse of God's changing power

Now let's look at some of the answers to the question I asked - there are others and I hope you find at least one other one.!

Peter and the disciples were still rather timid in the beginning of their resurrection walk with the Lord, until they saw God's power. Then this happened.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)

From this Peter finds the power to address a vast crowd, and the fire changes them –

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (v 37-8)

Revival is God acting in the power he has. There is more to come -

Point 4: Revival is a longing in our heart

God wants revival but we have got to want it as well. It's a two-sided experience.

Many revivals have found hope in this verse –

“For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.”
(Isaiah 44:3)

God wants it. Do we?

Here is that desire seen in a man in the Hebrides revival-

“But if I know anything at all about my poor heart, I think I can say, and I think that you know, that I'm thirsty. I'm thirsty to see the devil defeated in this parish. I'm thirsty to see the community gripped as you gripped Barvas. I'm longing for revival and God you're not doing it. I'm thirsty and you promised to pour water on me. God I now challenge you to fulfill your covenant engagements.”

God is ready to transform through reviving power. On the human side, God's people have to long for it.

Point 5: Response

Do we really long for revival? Are we willing for the exposure of our hearts, the shaking up of the church, the blazing purifying fire which will expose and cleanse? This is a question we must all face and is not to be taken lightly.

1 “Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming,” says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. “But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes.

(Malachi 3:1-2)

Session 3: When does revival come?

Point 1:

There is a season for revival. Certain events come together and prayer increases. rises. What are the signs of a season of revival?

Jonathan Edwards, the leading Pastor in the American Great Awakening saw it -

“Edwards was now more than ever convinced that revival was a necessity if the Church was to survive in a vibrant state. Spiritual stagnation haunted him and the spiritual bankruptcy of the Church so grieved his heart that he refused to let go of God until an infusion of the Holy Spirit came upon him.”

Point 2:

The season of revival comes when the church is weak and powerless in these areas -

*** Weak in faith**

Faith should be high - like this -

Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” (Exodus 14:13-14)

Sadly, Moses found it like this -

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the

Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

(Exodus 14:10-12)

*** Weak in commitment**

The church should be like Jonathan –

Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, “Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.” (1 Samuel 14:6)

Here is the sad truth -

“These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

(Matthew 15:8)

Point 3:

*** Weak in prayer**

This is how prayer should be -

Jesus withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:41-44)

This is how James sees so much so-called prayer in the church

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:3)

*** Weak in prophecy**

This is how it is – the true prophetic word is rare -

In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. (1 Samuel 3:1)

This is what we get –

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! (Ezekiel 13:3)

*** Weak in the teaching of the word**

This is what we should have -

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

This is what we get -

You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother— my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. (Hosea 45:5-6)

Point 4:

*** Weak in unity**

This is what we should be -

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

This is what we get -

For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. (1 Corinthians 11:18-19)

*** Weak in works of power**

This is what we should be –

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

This is what we get -

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. (2 Timothy 3:2-5)

Point 5: Response

We might say that these signs of weakness are good – they are signs of the potential for revival. They are also very sad things to read. The Lord loves his church and does not like to see the church in this sorry state. We must long for revival, but out of sorrow and not pride. This is how he saw Israel - we must have the same heart for the church as we long for revival -

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboyim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. (Hosea 12:1-8)

Session 4 : The pattern of revival.

Point 1: Revival saves the church.

The biography of one revival preacher says this –

“We are told that he addressed his discourses to professing Christians, chiefly with a view to rouse them to greater life and activity, maintaining, it is presumed, that an awakened church is to be the principal instrument in converting the world.”

Looking for a pattern of revival, there is one key idea and we must never forget it. Here it is -

An unrevived church cannot save the world. So revival is essential to release the church into its purpose and plan.”

Point 2: A stirring of the Spirit

There is a simple pattern to revival. It begins with the stirring of the Holy Spirit’s presence. Let’s look at a real experience from South Africa.

“On a certain Sunday evening there were gathered in a little hall some sixty young people. I was leader of the meeting, which commenced with a hymn and a lesson from God’s Word, after which I engaged in prayer. After three or four others had (as was customary) given out a verse of a hymn and offered prayer, a girl of about fifteen years of age rose at the back of the hall and asked if she might propose a hymn. At first I hesitated, not knowing what the meeting would think, but better thoughts prevailed and I replied, Yes. She gave out her hymn-verse and prayed in moving tones.

While she was praying, we heard as it were a sound in the distance, which came nearer and nearer, until the hall seemed to be shaken, and with one or two exceptions, the whole meeting began to pray - the majority in audible voice, but some in whispers. Nevertheless, the noise made by the concourse was deafening. A feeling which I cannot describe took possession of me. Even now, forty-three years after these occurrences, the events of that never-to-be-forgotten night pass before my mind’s eye like a soul-stirring panorama.”

Point 3: Awakening

Stirring must be followed by “awakening.” Awakening begins when we recognise that only the mercy of God can forgive and cleanse us.

*** For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. (Psalm 51:4)**

Only God can do it by his Spirit -

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. (Rom.8:11)

Point 4: Once the Spirit begins to stir, the pattern becomes clearer

What happens in the years leading up to a revival. Here are the first 3 steps -

First, a dissatisfaction with the church

Revival stirs when God’s people - or a few of them - are totally dissatisfied with the powerlessness and corruption of the church. This is the view of Jonathan Edwards concerning the Great Awakening in America -

“Edwards was now more than ever convinced that revival was a necessity if the Church was to survive in a vibrant state. Spiritual stagnation haunted him and the spiritual bankruptcy of the Church so grieved his heart that he refused to let go of God until an infusion of the Holy Spirit came upon him.”

Second the beginning of intense prayer, often in a small group.

Usually, just a few begin to pray with Hannah's passion:-

"I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." (1 Samuel 1:15-16)

Some begin to pour out their soul before the Lord for the state of the church and the need for his reviving fire. Here are two women who took this path -

"We find in Monmouthshire the hand of the Lord upon two sisters, one an invalid, who, during 1903-1904, were burdened over the prevalence of sin, and the increase of crime in the county, one sister saying, tearfully, "I cannot sleep day nor night because my dear Lord is despised and set at naught." Another child of God—a retiring, timid lady—bemoaning the deadness of the churches, said, "I shall die unless God exerts His power, and sends a Revival!" We hear of three ministers of the Gospel meeting together"

Third the beginning of conviction of sin in a few.

Conviction of sin is central within a revival preparation. Here is one Pastor speaking before revival fell –

"And I found a good many persons under the deepest exercise of soul, crying out most bitterly of their lost and miserable state, by reason of sin; of their unbelief, in despising Christ and the offers of the gospel; of the hardness of their heart; and of their gross carelessness and indifference about religion."

King David, the Tax Collector, those listening to Peter all felt this powerful conviction and in the revival process many others will feel it as well.

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. (2 Samuel 12:13)

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' (Luke 18:13)

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)

Point 5. Response

This is not a rigid pattern, but like pregnancy it has its clear phases. We need to know roughly what is happening so we can pray the right prayers.

Session 5. More about the pattern.

Point 1 – (Step 4) Stirring of the Spirit which many can feel

This stirring is clearly seen in this revival -

"An anxious desire having been expressed by Mr. Buick that others of the lay brethren from Connor should visit the neighbourhood, a meeting was held in his own church, to which they were invited. "It was," as he testifies, "an earnest, heart-stirring meeting. A holy flame was kindled. A strong desire for a gracious revival began to gain ascendancy."

There is always a sense of the wind beginning to blow.

Point 2 (Step 5) Fall of revival fire is unmistakable

Once the fire falls, there is no denying its presence or its power -

When the great outpouring came, worldly men were silent with an indefinite fear, and Christians found themselves borne onward in the current, with scarce time for any feelings but the overpowering conviction that a great revival had come at last. Careless men were bowed in unaffected earnestness, and sobbed like children. Drunkards and boasting blasphemers were awed into solemnity and silence. Sabbath-school teachers and scholars became seekers of Christ together. All this came suddenly, and many thought it strange. Ireland

Many come to Christ and many Christians and churches are revived and renewed. It is a move of the Spirit wider than any one fellowship or church. Many come to Christ and many Christians revived. Then this happens as happened in Ephesus –
In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. (Acts 19:20)

Point 3. (Step 6) Trouble

Sadly, many in the church will not want revival. It disturbs them, reveals their true nature and challenges them to change and growth. So revival inevitably stirs up resentment. I found this in the Methodist Times-

“Of course, it may be all to the good that we should be all shaken up; and tornadoes clean the air, and earthquakes are wholesome, but they are not particularly welcome to those who are at ease in Zion.”” (William Stead. Editor Methodist Times 1905)

Many call for revival without appreciating just how it will turn the church upside down. In my experience, many do not want this kind of shaking. Then it is a short step to opposing it, criticising it and pulling it down.

Point 4 (Step 7)The Fire dies down

The revival experience is often quite short. Here is Jonathan Edwards again -

“About the month of August the physical features of the revival in a great measure passed away, but we had abundant evidence that the work of the Lord was still going on, more silently but as progressively as ever.”

The effects of the revival live on, but usually the pouring is brief. God’s people have work to do and cannot be forever standing within the fire. We have to be excited to move out from it and with it to service.

Many leave

Many get caught up in the excitement of revival, but after it is over they leave. This should not trouble us. In the parable of the seeds, only 25% of the seed fruited. 75% was lost. This is similar to what happens in revival. Here is a comment from one revival and it is worth reflecting on.

“As one example, the Sendenyu Baptist Church had seen seven amazing years of revival during the 1950s awakening but ‘by 1967 onwards,’ as records in their own Church souvenir booklet show - ‘the believers began to turn backward to their former state of sinful life again...”

Point 5: Response

Session 6. Revival and the Holy Spirit

Point 1: Testimonies of His work

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. (John 3:8)

We have to put a great deal into revival. Hard and long prayers, the deep longing, the passion. We have to be careful that we do not let this get too high in our minds. Revival is the work of the Holy Spirit. We can urge him to act but we cannot make him act.

Testimonies

I have come across some powerful testimonies about the work of the Holy Spirit in revival. I'll let those who have seen Him at work testify first in their own words.

“The presence of God filled Lewis and eventually other islands. His presence was so powerful that you were constantly living in the expectation that something.”
(Hebrides revival)

“Take notice, if it were known that this was my last message to my fellow-countrymen throughout the length and breadth of Wales before being summoned to judgment, and the light of eternity already breaking over me, and it is this—the chief need of my country, and my dear nation at present is a SPIRITUAL REVIVAL THROUGH A SPECIAL OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY GHOST.” (Dean Howell before the Welsh revival)

The move of the Holy Spirit is revival. As he blows - gently or with great power - the earth moves, hearts are shaken, people come to Christ, Christians are changed and the church catches fire. We may urge Him to do this but in the end it is a move of grace on his part. Our part is to see the desperation of a powerless church, pray without ceasing and long for a repeat of what our forefathers saw regularly.

Point 2: Holy Spirit – who is he?

The word “Holy” is so important in revival, because it is the holiness of God which highlights our need for conviction of sin.

“Holy” means “separate, set apart for God.” This is what we have to be if revival fire is going to fall. We have to be holy, so that a holy God can pour himself on us. Moses points the way here.

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” (Exodus 3:4-5)

Point 3: He is holy.

- * Pure (Eyes too pure to look on sin)
- * Perfect - as your heavenly Father is perfect
- * Eternal - from everlasting to everlasting
- * Perfect light - to expose the worker of darkness
- * Far from sin

It’s probably the last one which is our way ahead. It is unconfessed sin which prevents revival from coming and it is conviction of sin which breaks open the way. Let’s learn from Isaiah.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings:

With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord almighty.” (Isaiah 6:1-5)

So our first lesson here is that Conviction of sin and confession are the key starting point for any revival expectation.

Point 4: What is His work in revival

The Holy Spirit lifts up Jesus. “He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me.” (John 16:14)

The Holy Spirit teaches us truth. “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.” (John 16:13)

*** The Holy Spirit gives us power to change and to testify.** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:7)

Point 5: Response

Session 7. The effects of revival

Point 1: What can we expect to see when the revival fire has passed and the excitement has died down?

The Church is better equipped for its task

The Church must save the world, but if it is unrevived it cannot do that. When the Spirit has empowered and raised up new opportunities, the church can enter into that task with confidence. Now we are “More than conquerors.” (Romans 8:37)

Here is a good comment from the Hebridean Revivalist preacher Duncan Campbell -

But when God steps down, when hearts are made clean by Him, then He finds an avenue through which He can move; the community becomes saturated with God, so that many of those who find the Saviour come into saving relationship with Him before they come near any Church or place of meeting.” (Duncan Campbell)

Point 2: Renewed lives

There is a big change of behaviour in the lives of many people. The Lord’s purposes become their main objective, and individuals, families and churches begin to live in a new way with a new experience of the Spirit’s leading.

“Those amongst us that had formerly been converted, were greatly enlivened and renewed with fresh and extraordinary incomes of the Spirit of God; though some much more than others, according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Many that had before labored under difficulties about their own state, had now their doubts removed by more satisfying experience, and more clear discoveries of God’s love.””

— The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield by Joseph Tracy

Point 3: Release from sin

Many are freed from the chains of old sins which have dragged them down. Here is one example -

Then all were startled as Elder Keel, the leading man in the church, stood up and said, "I am an Aachen. God can't bless because of me. About a year ago a friend of mine, when dying, called me to his home and said, 'Elder, I am about to pass away; I want you to manage my affairs; my wife is unable.' I said, 'Rest your heart; I will do it.' I did manage that widow's estate, but I managed to put one hundred dollars of her money into my own pocket. I have hindered God, I am going to give that one hundred dollars back to that widow tomorrow morning." Korea

New vision

Now the church is ready to take up again its true vocation - to change the world. Many in the communities in which the church is placed will see what has happened to the church and will be open not only to conversion but to the new style of living which many in the church are now living.

When we see the Church revived, putting on her beautiful garments of holiness, and putting forth the strength of faith, prayer, and renewed energy—when we see these changes wrought in the principles, habits, and lives of such large multitudes, we may well say, in a higher and nobler sense, "The Lord Is Abroad." It is said of those who seek pleasure in the things of time and sense, "They regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operations of His hands," (Isa. iv. 12;) while, on the contrary, it is the privilege of "the pure in heart" to "see God" in the dispensations of His providence, and the marvelous manifestation of His Spirit's power in the salvation of men. (From time of great awakening)

Point 4: Children of the revival

The greatest fruits of revival are the children of the revival. The Lord will raise up leaders - religious, social, political, commercial - who will rise up into positions of influence. They will be men and women of integrity, of spiritual humility and power who will lead the nation back to the path so godliness and the cross.

The fruit of revival is those people whose lives are changed, and many of them become the leaders of church and community in the coming decades. A revival replenishes the Lord's stock of spirit-filled and dynamic leaders which will lead his people and his creation on to better things.

