Prayer has been a hallmark of revivals through the years, and prayer movements in various places, coupled with the strong conviction that God wants to bring revival, causes some to believe that God will soon revive His people again. For at least 10 years, Christians in New York City have been praying for revival, especially as the Billy Graham Crusade in Flushing Meadows Park approaches. And they are asking that as God renews His people, a fire of evangelism will be lit and will spread from New York to the rest of the nation—and the world. It is our prayer that the following articles about revival will prompt you to pray for an Awakening in your life, your city and your nation, as well as in New York.
THE ROAD TO REVIVAL

Is There Hope for Revival in Our Time?

by David Bryant

C ould Wall Street be the launching point for a full-scale revival in the Church? Absolutely. In fact, that’s precisely what happened almost 150 years ago.

A business leader named Jeremiah Lanphier was burdened for the spiritual condition of New York City. He distributed flyers inviting others to join him for a noon-time prayer meeting for revival, in a building just a stone’s throw from where the World Trade Center was constructed a century later. That first gathering in September 1857 was nothing surprising in this for New Yorkers. For 10 years, nearly 100 churches have cooperated in “The Lord’s Watch,” a 24/7 prayer vigil seeking God for a Christ-awakening in New York that would make an impact on the nations. Furthermore, over the years we’ve seen tens of thousands, from many Christian traditions and ethnicities, united in prayer rallies and in nationally broadcast Concerts of Prayer. All have one conviction: We have hope that what God did in the 1800s, He is able, willing and ready to do again.

There’s every reason why you should be filled with the confidence. God desires to pour out a Christ-awakening in New York that would make an impact on the nations. Furthermore, over the years we’ve seen tens of thousands, from many Christian traditions and ethnicities, united in prayer rallies and in nationally broadcast Concerts of Prayer. All have one conviction: We have hope that what God did in the 1800s, He is able, willing and ready to do again.

There’s every reason why you should be filled with the same confidence. God desires to pour out a Christ-awakening where you live as well.

WHO NEEDS REVIVAL?

Does the American Church really need revival? What does God see as He looks at the American Church? Despite the glitz and glamour, does He also find waterless pits (Zechariah 9:11)? Is there a sense that in spite of all our measurable activity, the Church generally is paralyzed? Are we outwardly prosperous while being inwardly weak and stagnant?

Research tells us that there is little difference between the lifestyles of Christians and our society as a whole. The sad part is that the living Christ Himself is marginalized; He is not glorified as the Supreme Lord of the Church. If the American Church would spend time getting a better picture of our true state—“wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17, NIV)—surely we would run to Christ and ask the King of Glory to enter the doors of our hearts afresh (Psalm 24). The picture of Christ standing outside His churches is a haunting image for any generation.

If the Church is blind to its true spiritual condition, then revival will simply be viewed as a divine additive, given basically to increase the effectiveness of our ministries instead of restoring the glory of God in His Church.

But once we recognize how far we have fallen (Revelation 2:4-5) and again realize our covenant relationship and responsibilities to God, then we will humble ourselves, pray, seek His face and turn from our wicked ways. It is then that we learn that the road to revival is paved with contrite and broken hearts. With such a people our God is pleased to dwell (Isaiah 57:15). Thankfully, there is nothing the Father is more willing to do than to transform us, taking us into a deeper encounter with all that He is as our Savior and Lord.

REVIVAL IS ALL ABOUT THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

Pre-eminently, all true revival is about God bringing glory to His Son by the power of the Holy Spirit through His Church. Between His ascension and His consummation, this is one of the most strategic activities of the Holy Spirit. Corporate revival necessitates Trinitarian activity: Father-initiated, Spirit-driven, Son-centered. Biblical revival is supremely Son-focused—it is utterly Christ-dominated. Some of us call it a Christ-awakening. If any spiritual experience—whether called revival or something else—diminishes, bypasses or leaves people away from Christ, it is not of God and holds no hope for any generation.

The first issue before us, then, is not to define the characteristics of revival. Rather, it is to comprehend more fully the Christ who is the Center and Circumference and the Beginning and End of corporate revival. Fundamentally, revival is an awakening to all that Christ already is. St. Irenaeus said: “Christ brought us into contact with all that He is as our Savior and Lord.”

We encounter with all that He is as our Savior and Lord.
He makes things new by reintroducing us to His Son, who stands at the epicenter of His renewing purposes among the nations. In revival, God accelerates, intensifies, deepens and extends the newness that Christ secured for us by His Cross and Resurrection. At the same time, our capacity to express this newness and to minister it to others increases. In revival, God invites the Church into more of who Christ is, giving Him the supremacy even as we invite Christ into more of who we are, giving Him the centrality.

But there is another hallmark that can be equally helpful.

The sovereignty of God in a Christ-awakening

Corporate revival comes from God alone. No human-designed formula can compel God to grant it. The Church cannot plan it, stage it or organize it. It is not ours to create; it is ours to receive. It may be Church-obtained, but it is Christ-attained. This is the distinguishing mark between revival and a human-produced “revivalism.”

However, the Holy Spirit—the primary agent of revival—often chooses to work in grace through our prayers, Bible studies, worship, fellowship, sacraments and daily obedience. There may be nothing Christians can do to guarantee corporate revival at any particular moment. But we can always intensify our preparations for the wonderful gift of God, in keeping with our hope in His promises. Scripture connects God’s sovereignty with our cooperation like this: “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you” (Joshua 3:5, NIV). Or as Jesus said: “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom is at hand, repent and believe the good news” (cf. Mark 1:15).

A FEW CAUTIONS …

Remember the following points when seeking God for revival:

- Resist fantasies. It is unhealthy to expect current outworkings of corporate revival to mimic the specific characteristics of a previous revival in another generation. Our Father is always ready to glorify His Son in and through His people—above and beyond what we’ve known before.
- Keep the focus. Avoid the temptation to seek revival rather than God Himself. Christians must engage fully the heart of revival, which is the manifest presence of God’s Son. Never should a revival movement be allowed to become more testimony- or story-fed than Bible-fed and Jesus-focused.
- Take responsibility. Some see revival as a panacea, thus excusing themselves from responsible obedience to Christ in the day-to-day struggles of the Church and its mission to the world. We are called to faithfulness, regardless of whether God grants revival at a particular moment.
- Look beyond nationalism. Sometimes revival is pursued as a last-ditch effort to salvage a whole nation when it is a work of God promised initially for the Church. Revival’s impact on a surrounding community or culture is secondary. Our desire must be for God to get the greatest glory through the awakening of His people in whole new ways to Christ and His Kingdom—even if the nation as a whole rejects this gracious hope and undergoes subsequent divine retribution, as happened to Jerusalem in A.D. 70—despite a revived Church in its midst.

Is revival necessary to advance Christ’s Kingdom?

If by “necessary” we imply that Christians cannot obey God, preach the Gospel, pray and make disciples as our Lord commanded, then the answer is a resounding no! The Church clearly has known God’s blessings without revival. But revivals remain desirable because they intensify the display of God’s glory in the Gospel before a watching world with saving effects. Revivals are not God’s only means of advancing the Church, but they are a wonderful means of blessing that should be sought by His people—especially when they have endured long periods of spiritual drought and lifelessness.

There is no reason whatsoever that individual believers must remain in sin or live lives of frustration and spiritual deadness. Every Christian should always confess sin, seek after God with the whole heart, pray for the empowering of the Holy Spirit and implicitly trust Christ every day. As any of us draws near to God, He promises to draw near to us. And when He does, we will experience much more of the presence and fullness of our Redeemer—and in that sense, we will receive at least a foretaste of biblical revival in its true sense. 

David Bryant is founder of PROCLAIM HOPE! This article is based in part on “An Urgent Appeal,” which he helped draft (from the National Revival Network). His latest book, “Christ Is All! A Joyful Manifesto on the Supremacy of God’s Son” (New Providence Publishers, 2004), expands on the Appeal’s vision.
Abram was called to leave his old life and to go out with the Lord to raise up a new posterity through which “all peoples on earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3, NIV). Thus, his descendants were chosen to be God’s witnesses to the nations. His evangelistic strategy was to make them so morally different from the degenerate nations around them that people, seeing their holy lifestyle, would want to follow their Lord (Zechariah 8:23; Isaiah 55:4-5).

It does not appear, however, that the people of Israel grasped their responsibility. They seem to have been so occupied with their own interests that there was little compassion for others. With the exception of Nineveh—and that only by God’s overruling the reluctance of Jonah—there is no indication of revival reaching any Gentile country.

Nevertheless, God keeps before His people the vision of a coming Kingdom in which His Messiah Son will reign over all nations (Daniel 7:13-14). He will not be defeated in His purpose for creation. A day will come when “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14, NIV). We may be sure that any activity that does not contribute to that destiny has no enduring significance.

In the fullness of time the promised Savior appeared. Not surprisingly, His public ministry began in revival led by John the Baptist—the greatest revival that Israel had known in more than 400 years. Jesus was baptized, and the stage was set for a mighty world reformation.

Yet, incredible as it may seem, Jesus walked away. The movement that began to gather around Him took a different course. Contrary to the pattern seen so often before, the Son of God did not seek the immediate superficial following of the masses. Rather, in His infinite understanding of the human problem, He concentrated His attention upon making disciples who would be the nucleus of a multiplying Church. Holiness, as in the Old Testament, dominated the call of revival in His ministry, but evangelism and discipleship were given new emphasis.

Jesus’ method of training this vanguard was simply to draw learners around Himself. His teaching was incarnated in His own servant lifestyle. As His disciples grew in self-confidence, He involved them in work suited to their gifts, and He checked to see how they were coming along. After several years together, He sent them out to replicate in principle what He had been doing with them—to make disci-
Fulfilling the Great Commission

This began to unfold in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It can be called the revival of Jesus. For three years He had been working for the day when His followers—taught by His example, redeemed by His blood and assured by His Resurrection—would go out as His witnesses to the world.

Evangelism became spontaneous. Without any exhortation or training seminar, that entire Spirit-filled congregation in the Upper Room moved into the streets and began to declare the wonderful works of God. When a crowd gathered, Peter lifted up Jesus, and about 3,000 were converted (Acts 2:5-41). More important, every day thereafter, others “were being saved” (Acts 2:47, NIV).

The Book of Acts reads like one long narrative of Pentecost. Nothing could stop the Church—not the anger of mobs or the irritations of daily trials. But like rivers at flood tide, the Christians went on their way, praising their Lord and scattering the seeds of the Gospel. Holiness in the Church, reflecting the character of God, overflowed in love.

The book closes abruptly by simply noting that teaching about the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ continues boldly. Revival goes on. And, indeed, whenever the Church is alive, there will be no end until the Great Commission is fulfilled and all nations, adorned in the beauty of holiness, are gathered by the throne of heaven to rejoice in God forever (Revelation 7:9).

Yes, the prayer of the Sons of Korah will be answered—and in a more glorious way than they ever could have imagined! (Ps 122:1-9)

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What We Can Learn From Old Testament Revivals

Use your influence. Some of the kings of Israel and Judah used their authority to lead people into worship of the one true God. These included David (2 Samuel 6:12-15), Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:41-50, 2 Chronicles 20:1-30) and Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-8, 2 Chronicles 29:1-31:21). As these leaders did, so we can help the people around us—in our families, churches, Sunday school classes, circles of friends and workplaces—to see their need to follow God alone.

Get rid of other “gods.” When Jacob’s family was in peril (Genesis 35:1-7), when Joshua led the conquest of the Promised Land (Joshua 24:14-27) and when Samuel served at the close of the era of the judges (1 Samuel 7:2-9), the people did away with all their foreign gods. We, too, must rid ourselves of anything—money, status, friends or anything else—that competes with God for our worship.

Obey all that God commands. During the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:3-8, 24:3-7, 33:1-10, 35:20-29), the people made a firm commitment to obey everything that God commanded. So, too, we must examine our lives and see if there are any areas where we are disobeying God. We must confess this sin and purpose to obey God completely.

Worship God sincerely. Early in Solomon’s reign, during the dedication of the Temple (2 Chronicles 7:1-10), the people knelt in reverent worship and gave thanks to God. In the same way, if we expect God to work powerfully in us, we must be attuned to Him, praising Him for His greatness, thanking Him for His goodness and giving freely and generously to the work of God. It is God’s will that we, too, freely give back to Him the time, talents and resources He has granted us, to be used for the Kingdom of Heaven.

FIVE KEY REVIVALS

The Second Great Awakening

America’s next revival began in 1801 at the Cane Ridge camp meeting in Kentucky, where as many as 3,000 were converted. The banner year for camp meetings was 1811, when approximately one-third of all Americans attended one of them. By 1806 the Awakening had reached Williams College in Massachusetts. There, five students prayed during a thunderstorm in the shelter of a haystack, four of the five committing themselves to becoming missionaries. The Haystack Prayer Meeting, as it came to be called, was the beginning of the American foreign mission movement.