

The Path of Revival

Restoring Our Nation —
One *Church* at a Time

By Mark R. Barnard



Published by ChurchSmart Resources

We are an evangelical Christian publisher committed to producing excellent products at affordable prices to help church leaders accomplish effective ministry in the areas of Church planting, Church growth, Church renewal and Leadership development.

For a free catalog of our resources call 1-800-253-4276.

Visit us at: www.ChurchSmart.com

Cover design by: Julie Becker

© Copyright 2009

ISBN-10: 1-889638-86-2

ISBN-13: 978-1-889638-86-7

SDG

The Path of Revival

If my people who are called by my name

Revival begins when God's people see
They are in need of recovery

Shall humble themselves

The Church must face the painful truth
Spiritual blindness may be at the root

And pray

Prayer is the Church's desperate plea
She cries for removal of complacency

And seek my face

God reveals His opinion
He displays the Church's weakened condition

And turn from their wicked ways

God's people must yield and break
All God shows them they must forsake

Then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land.

Healing, recovery, revival come
The Church freshly blessed by God's son

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ix
Chapter One	
The Church, Churches and the Nation	1
Chapter Two	
If my People	13
Chapter Three	
If my people who are called by my name	25
Chapter Four	
If my people ... will humble themselves	39
Chapter Five	
If my people ... will ... pray	53
Chapter Six	
If my people ... will ... seek my face	65
Chapter Seven	
If my people ... will ... turn from their wicked ways	85
Chapter Eight	
Then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land	105
Appendix	129
Bibliography	135

Acknowledgements

Four years ago I read a book titled, *Healing the Heart of Your Church*, by Dr. Kenneth Quick. It was one book among several that I received from my friend Tom Bowden, church planting director for the South Atlantic District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. As I sorted through the box of books Tom sent, something in my spirit led me to focus on Dr. Quick's book. As I read its pages I was strongly impressed that its content was specifically designed for the church where I served as interim pastor. Several months later the book's principles of corporate healing demonstrated their curative effect. I am convinced that church would not be here today had their leadership not recognized the relevance of the book's message. Since then many churches have benefited from *Healing the Heart of Your Church*.

Often, however, these churches were in dire straits before they willingly considered their need of healing and spiritual revitalization. The purpose of *The Path of Revival* is to take the principles of corporate healing and present them in a way that broadens the scope of their application. Hopefully the ideas found within will appeal to and prove helpful for churches before they need to head for the emergency room.

In an effort to facilitate spiritual health in churches across this nation and beyond, Blessing Point Ministries was formed. Blessing Point works to heal and revive the hearts of local churches and revitalize the Body of Christ. This ministry could not function without the encouragement, prayers, and leadership of people like Nancy Griffin, Robert Palmer, Tom Bowden, Tom Duddles and Dr. Ken Quick. (Those familiar with Dr. Quick's work will recognize my indebtedness to his teaching, particularly in the latter chapters of this volume. I owe him a debt of gratitude for his editorial work on the initial draft of this book as well.) These dear folks serve on the board of Blessing Point and are passionate about restoring the radiance of Christ's Bride. Neither could I personally function in this capacity were it not for the encouragement, wisdom and faith of my own bride – Jeannie.

Blessing Point believes the Lord longs for each local church to be blessed in its

work and witness. We believe local church leaders are God's people in a tough job. We value them! We believe that when a local church wrestles with a lack of meaningful ministry there are often divinely established preconditions that must be met before God will bless. Our prayer is that you and your church would enjoy a fresh, compelling sense of God's blessing on your ministry. We pray that through the fresh sense of blessing you receive many might be brought into the Kingdom through the ministry of your local church.

For the advance of His kingdom,

Rev. Mark Barnard – President
Blessing Point Ministries - Strengthening Churches to Soar
www.blessingpoint.org

Chapter One

The Church, Churches and the Nation

“What America needs more than anything else right now is to know she cannot exist without the worldview that helped bring her into existence.”

- Ravi Zacharias

Driving on a back road in rural Georgia, a song on the radio caught my ear. Sung by Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty, its heartfelt cry summarizes the burden of this book:

“God bless America again
You see all the trouble that she’s in
Wash her pretty face, dry her eyes and then
God bless America again

God I sure do wish you’d bless America again
You know like you did way back when it all began . . .”¹

Those simple lyrics suggest that somewhere along the line America lost God’s blessing. The song implies something changed since the time when it “all began.” It assumes that a nation can enjoy divine favor and that it can be lost as well.

¹ Boyce Hawkins and Bobby Bare, *God Bless America Again*, <<http://www.metrolyrics.com/god-bless-america-again-lyrics-conway-twitty.html>>.

Does a sense of national blessing erode? How does the loss of such blessing manifest itself? If such blessing has been lost, can it be regained, and if so, how? Who can mediate such a re-blessing?

These questions tumble to mind as we reflect on America's current condition. Economic stresses, natural disasters, wars, and declining moral standards challenge us from all sides. Can we honestly say we enjoy the blessing we once did? Today's politicians often end their speeches with "And may God bless America!" How timely it would be for such a speech to end with; "And may God bless America – *Again!*"

The Premise

America's growing problems are not rooted in a lackluster economic model, questionable political policies, the breakdown in the family, or the explosion of evil in our midst. These symptoms reflect a deeper problem. Neither the deeper problem nor its cure resides in secular society. William Wilberforce, known for his efforts to free England from the slave trade in the late 18th century, writes in his book *Real Christianity* as if he were among us today. He says, "The problems we face as a society should be viewed as *spiritual problems* rather than merely political issues. This is a perspective that does not even appear to be considered by the media. What can we expect from the kinds of solutions they offer? Certainly they would only produce transient progress, not fundamental change"² (Italics mine.).

Addressing fundamental change in society means casting off mistaken assumptions as to the nature of our nation's woes. We have come to believe that our problems are of a moral, political or economic nature. (The Enemy loves for us to think that way.) When in reality, our problems are fundamentally *spiritual*. Spiritual problems will not be solved by any government program or by any media-promoted agenda.

If our societal problems are primarily spiritual, where do we go for help? To find solutions we must go to the source of the problem. This brings us to my main premise: *Spiritual problems suggest something is wrong not merely with the nation but in the heart of the Church.*

In his book, *The Living Church*, John Stott says, ". . . if society becomes corrupt there is no sense in blaming society for its corruption. That is what happens when

² William Wilberforce, *Real Christianity* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2006) 177.

human evil is unchecked and unrestrained. The question to ask is: Where is the Church?”³ It is not as if the Church is absent from the scene. Signs of her presence are found everywhere, from fish symbols to Christian radio stations to steeples pointing skyward in towns across the nation. In spite of her presence across the landscape, the Church suffers from a steep decline of influence. Stott lays out the current religious situation with clarity: “Most countries today are increasingly pluralistic in both race and religion. That is to say Christianity, Islam, secularism, materialism, ancient religions and modern cults are all competing for the soul of our country. Which is going to win?”⁴

How has the American Church lost its competitive edge and what impact does this have on the current state of the nation? I propose that a lack of blessing on the Church makes it weak and unattractive to our culture. The deficit of Divine blessing we sense on our nation stems from the lack of His blessing on the Christian Church. Wilberforce describes one of the symptoms of a less-than-blessed Church when he writes, “Yet what we see today in Christendom is a practice of Christian Faith that often produces no greater morality than that practiced by those who categorically deny the essentials of the Christian faith.”⁵

“In spite of her presence across the landscape, the Church suffers from a steep decline of influence.”

We who love the Lord may not agree that Wilberforce’s assessment is true of our time. But a glaring disparity of opinion exists between believers and nonbelievers on the relevance and attractiveness of Christianity. Blame it on the postmodern mindset, on the belief that all religions are created equal, or perhaps on the many stains found on the Bride of Christ. Whichever explanation we choose, Christians must acknowledge that if the Bride of Christ glistened with renewed radiance, nothing could stop the ensuing positive cultural transformation. Nothing could stop the re-blessing of America.

What has brought us to our current state? How has the faith responsible for the establishment of the colonies and whose spiritual passion birthed this nation become so weak and sickly? How is it that secularism’s influence has been on the rise and the Church’s in distinct decline? What’s wrong in the heart of the Church?

³ John Stott, *The Living Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007) 134.

⁴ Stott 128.

⁵ Wilberforce 65.

Anesthesia of the Soul

Anesthesia of the soul is a coping mechanism. It enables us to deal, or perhaps not deal, with the plethora of difficulties we face. Daily reports of violence and disaster assault our emotional and spiritual sensitivity. The sheer quantity of disturbing news we encounter bombards our sanity. We just cannot handle the volume of distressing news to which we are exposed. We choose numbness to protect ourselves from the constant drain on our emotions.

The medical world documents this phenomenon. Researcher Robert Jay Lifton, studying the survivors of Hiroshima and other disasters, calls it “psychic numbing.” It works like this, “In a situation in which our emotional feelings are overwhelmingly painful or unpleasant, we have the capacity to anesthetize ourselves. It is a simple sort of thing. The sight of a single bloody, mangled body horrifies us. But if we see such bodies all around us everyday, day after day, the horrible becomes normal and we lose our sense of horror. We simply tune it out. Our capacity for horror becomes blunted. We no longer truly *see* the blood or smell the stench or feel its agony. Unconsciously we have become anesthetized.”⁶

Many of us in the Church have lost our sense of horror. The horrible has become normal and we must find some way to cope. How many abortions does it take before we don’t want to think about them anymore? How many action alerts from the American Family Association does it take before we don’t want to open their emails? How many minutes in front of the evening news can we endure before we switch to a sports channel, or the History or the Food channel?

Tuning out painful realities produces numbness and numbness produces dumbness. This is not the dumbness of ignorance as if to suggest we are ill-informed because we can’t bear to watch the evening news. Rather we are dumb in the sense that we have lost our voice. John Dawson writes in, *Healing America’s Wounds*, “This is a land of refuge, outreach and example; however, the American Church has lost its voice, and this in part is because we do not know what to say . . . If we do not speak out a godly dream for this nation, the ship of state will lose its rudder and drift with the wind.”⁷ Those words were written fourteen years ago. Fourteen years of drifting have passed. Where has our numbness gotten us?

Two biblical passages address the problem of spiritual anesthesia. The first, Matthew 24:12, predicts a cultural shift in emotional disposition during the days prior to Christ’s return. “*And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s*

⁶ Scott Peck, *People of the Lie* (New York: Touchstone, 1983) 221.

⁷ John Dawson, *Healing America’s Wounds* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1994) 129.

love will grow cold.” This affirms the research done by Lifton. Overexposure to wickedness leaves us “cold” to the normal feelings of compassion that love motivates. It also anesthetizes us to the sense of justice that love demands.

The second passage shows that some events can so disturb people that they unify the godly ones in the face of wickedness. Judges 19-20 tells a story that starts out sordid enough. A Levite took for himself a concubine. What was this religious man doing with a *concubine* anyway? As the story unfolds, the concubine prostitutes herself and then flees to her father’s house in fear. The Levite chases her down and reconciles with the wayward woman. The couple travels to Gibeah. There the men of the town seize the concubine and, as verse 25 sadly reports, *“the men . . . raped her and abused her all night until morning then let her go at the approach of dawn.”* She crawled home and died on the doorstep.

The offense was so heinous and the method used by the Levite to awaken a sense of righteousness so extreme that it broke through the spiritual anesthesia of God’s people. Judges 19:29-30 reveals, *“When he entered his house he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb and sent her throughout the territory of Israel. And it came about that all who saw it said, ‘Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!’”*

Do you find the Levite’s actions shocking? God’s people of the Levite’s era found them so. What of a similar nature would shock us out of our numbness? What would it take to arouse the sense of horror we have lost?

Prosperity Problem

Though we evangelicals may find ourselves at odds with the “prosperity gospel,” we have far more difficulty addressing the thorny problem prosperity may cause *us*. We enjoy a high standard of living in this country. In spite of recent setbacks, we enjoy the highest quality of life the world has ever known. How long can Christians enjoy the general prosperity of a nation and yet maintain their distinctive calling and influence? Prosperity facilitates our cooperation with the world-system. How long can we function in that environment without selling our souls?

What happens if our prosperity is suddenly threatened? The writer of Hebrews reminded his audience: *“But remember the former days, when after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a*

*public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and **accepted joyfully the seizure of your property**, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one” (Hebrews 10:32-34).*

For the original recipients of the letter to the Hebrews, the seizure of their property was a price they were willing to pay. What if the government forced Christians in this country off their property through an unjust application of the law of eminent domain? Would we accept that seizure *joyfully*?

Prosperity creates difficulties when the believer becomes comfortable with a high standard of living. (Ironically, God may be addressing this problem through the economic problems we now face.) Wilberforce alluded to the same dilemma in his day, “In times like we are living in, ideas of radical obedience and self denial fade into the background. Even faithful Christians become soft and more tolerant of the moral decline of the world around them.”⁸ If we fail to recognize the sedative effect prosperity has on us, there is little hope for anything but continued silence in the face of evil. If we overvalue our rights and possessions, fear of losing them makes it difficult to speak up in the face of unrighteousness. We have been bought with a price, the Bible tells us, but perhaps we’ve sold our influence for pennies on the dollar.

Spiritual Lethargy

Emerson once wrote, “Man is as lazy as he dares to be.” Is it possible that we are just too lazy to pay a price, sacrifice and seek the Lord afresh? The early believers faced a similar struggle. Augustine admonished the believers of his day, whose non-intervention within secular society betrayed their self-interest. He writes, “For often we wickedly blind ourselves to the occasions of teaching and admonishing them (*unbelievers*), sometimes even of reprimanding and chiding them, either because we shrink from the labor or are ashamed to offend them, or because we fear to lose good friendships, lest this should stand in the way of our advancement, or injure us in some worldly matter, which either our covetous disposition desires to obtain, or our weakness shrinks from losing.”⁹ (Italics mine).

Self-interest keeps us from substantive intervention in the way things are. In other words, spiritual laziness does not occur by accident. Comfort with the status

⁸ Wilberforce 143

⁹ Saint Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, NY: Random House, 1993) 11.

quo (and the fear of destabilizing it) is the source of our laziness. Confronting evil means *discomfort*. When laziness and apathy infect the Church, we must confront ourselves before we can regain our influence in the world or confront evil. Confronting *ourselves* is the starting place for revival.

Sin in the Camp – Wounds in the Heart of the Church

Regardless of their denominational status, many local churches have histories marked by painful episodes of conflict and hurt. The wounds inflicted have never been addressed. The effects of unhealed wounds or unrepentant hearts in the life of a church leave it limping along with a limited sense of blessing. Such a state requires us to take a hard look at a church's spiritual history. In spite of the *need* to do so, local churches demonstrate a tremendous reluctance to examine themselves.

But if churches ignore problems in their corporate histories, how can they be prepared for revival should it come? Will it not pass them by? Will God bless an entity with unresolved sin in its history or unhealed corporate wounds? No and no again. Local churches that hope for revival without a season of serious corporate reflection fool only themselves. Church splits, a lack of church discipline, abusive pastors, heavy handed church boards, shameful incidents, faithless decisions, financial and moral improprieties, and sinfully reactive behavior do not go overlooked by the Lord. These hinder revival and require corporate repentance.

Richard Owen Roberts writes in his book titled, *Repentance*, "It is generally understood that every individual sins and needs to repent. Many however, have never considered the problem of corporate sin and the mandatory nature of corporate repentance. Yet it is a fact that just as every individual sins, so does every corporate entity. One of the most damaging mistakes of the present day is the prevailing tendency to overlook the problem of corporate sin and the need of corporate repentance. When corporate sin occurs but no corporate repentance follows, the offending entity falls under the judgment of God. That judgment is normally remedial, and it remains in place until either true repentance is exercised or God sends a final judgment of death and destruction."¹⁰

Local churches must seek the Lord's face to hear what He is saying to them. If your church, or denomination for that matter, wants to see revival, it must put itself in a blessable state by taking a hard look at its history and rectifying anything

¹⁰ Richard Owen Roberts, *Repentance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002) 57.

that hinders God's blessing. The next Great Awakening may await a multitude of tarnished, unhealthy churches regaining a fresh sense of God's blessing and power for ministry. It's a tantalizing possibility.

But even if such a revival proved elusive, it is incumbent on every local church to respond to the Lord about any corporate wounding and sin. Why should we struggle with the Enemy's foot on the neck of our ministry because of such unresolved

“We begin to doubt
everything – our
call, God's promises
and purpose
– everything when
we serve in the
context of corporate
dysfunction for long
periods of time.”

issues? Unresolved corporate sin, wounds or pain limits our ministries as if they were chained to an invisible cement truck filled with hardened concrete. Laboring under such conditions leaves pastors and lay leaders looking for the nearest exit. We begin to doubt everything—our call, God's promises and purpose—everything when we serve in the context of corporate dysfunction for long periods of time.

A discouraged church elder once asked me if there were such things as “Ichabod churches.” You will recall Ichabod was the name given to a child whose mother died giving birth in 1 Samuel 4. She went into labor upon hearing that her husband and brother-in-law were killed in battle, and that the Ark of the Covenant had

been captured. “Ichabod” was the last word on her lips. It means “no glory,” as in “God's glory has departed from Israel.” The capture of the Ark meant God's glory dwelling with Israel was gone.

So what then do we make of the frustrated elder's question about “Ichabod churches?” His question assumes that things can go so wrong in the local church that we begin to wonder if God's glory has departed! The term “Ichabod church,” suggests that some congregations function Sunday after Sunday without a clear sense of God's blessing. Christ's letters to the seven churches in Revelation tell us He walks among the candlesticks. So we know His presence is evident even in churches with great need of repentance, but how many churches operate without any sense of His blessing?

Personal vs. Corporate Revival

Finding an answer to the problems in the heart of the Church may seem daunting. But restoring the full radiance of Christ's Bride comes through personal and

corporate revival. We need both. Most current revival teaching revolves around the spiritual life of the individual. But the biblical teaching on the re-blessing of God's people is anchored in the corporate setting. The Lord spoke after a Solemn Assembly at the dedication of Solomon's temple in 2 Chronicles 7:14 when He said, "*If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land.*"

A great assembly of people saw God's glory fill that temple. The guest list was expansive. 2 Chronicles 5:2-3 records, "*Then Solomon assembled to Jerusalem the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' households of the sons of Israel, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord . . . And all the men of Israel assembled themselves to the king at the feast.*" The priests and the Levitical singers were there, as well as the temple musicians. And most importantly the glory of the Lord showed up for the occasion.

The verse we use so often in the context of personal revival was made in response to a corporate assembly. God made His specific promise of revival in a night time appearance to *King Solomon* as the representative head of the *nation*. The Lord used 2 Chronicles 7:14 to describe His future policy toward the nation of Israel, the unique *group* of people set apart to Him.

We then see where 2 Chronicles 7:14 sets out the conditions of God's blessing on His people as a *whole*. He called His people to humble themselves corporately, to pray corporately and seek His face corporately. They were called to turn from their "wicked ways" corporately. Corporate revival receives far less emphasis in teaching and preaching, but it is the primary focus of every Old Testament revival.

In the New Testament, Jesus' letters to the seven churches of Asia focus on the same things. Congregations were held accountable for their corporate condition. Jesus called the majority of those churches to repent as *corporate* entities. Would not corporate repentance anticipate corporate revival?

In corporate revival we're not talking about tweaking a church's program of ministry, but rather addressing spiritual roadblocks to God's blessing on that ministry. *Just as sin hindered God's blessing on the nation of Israel, sin and wounds in the body of Christ hinder God's blessing on local churches.* Though a multitude of helps exist for churches seeking to implement the latest ministry practices, few address this core issue. How have we overlooked it for so long?

The majority of teaching focuses on personal revival because it reflects the individualistic perspective of our culture. In the early preaching during the formative years of our nation, this individualistic approach was not always the focus. Early American preachers had a clear sense of corporate accountability before God. That is not to say we do not need revival to occur on an individual level. There is little benefit to getting our corporate houses in order if we have not thoroughly dealt with our individual hearts. We need both corporate and personal revival.

In the pages that follow we will explore revival in general as well as its personal and corporate implications. Our hope is to recapture the biblical mandate to address corporate failings that limit the scope of God's blessing, particularly on the local church and, by extension, on the Church at large.

I believe that ignoring corporate revival and its requirements has led to the demise of churches and denominations. In previous revivals, God bypassed certain churches and even whole denominations. What if those old organizational structures addressed the corporate wounds and sin in their history and were ready when the new wave of awakening arrived?

Instead, their lack of responsiveness often necessitated the birth of new movements through which God could work as He willed. One needs only remember Jesus' warning to the *church* of Ephesus, to grasp the urgency and relevancy of our topic. "*Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place – unless you repent*" (Rev. 2:5). In other words: repent corporately or it's lights out! This is the powerful role corporate repentance and revival play – the re-blessing of His people as an entity, particularly as a local church.

Summary

David Olson surveys the contemporary spiritual landscape in his book, *The American Church in Crisis* and writes, "A chill wind is blowing in America, affecting the future of Christianity. Most of the basic indicators point downward . . . will the future become a dark night of winter for the Church or will spring break forth and create new life?"¹¹ The answer to that question rests within the heart of the Church at large and more specifically within the heart of each local church across this country. Can God bring us to new health and vibrancy? Can we shake off the spiritual anesthesia? Can we loosen the desensitizing grip

¹¹ David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008) 182.

prosperity has on our hearts? Can we overcome the spirit of lethargy? Can we be healed from the wounds in the history of our churches that leave us limping along? The answers may seem uncertain, but some things are not.

Here is my point: The re-blessing of America rests squarely with the re-blessing of the Church. The re-blessing of the Church rests with the re-blessing of a multitude of local churches. Jesus calls us to repentance and revival as local communities of believers. Revelation 3:19 says, “*Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, be zealous therefore, and repent.*” It is up to us. We must look at Church history and soberly recall He has bypassed and even removed ministries that proved unresponsive to His discipline in the past.

I pray both our nation and Church reach the *blessing point* together. May we see a new work of God in our time. May it start with individual congregations and their leaders having the courage to hear from and respond to the Lord of their church. May our radiance as His Bride be renewed. May it result in a new era of positive cultural transformation. And may God bless America – *Again!*

Chapter Two

If my people ...

“Ordinary Christianity is not enough, more is demanded. Are we not beginning to feel that nothing can deal with this situation but a manifestation of true life and living, holy living as it is under God? And if not why not?”

- Martin Lloyd Jones

“The power of God seemed to descend upon the whole assembly ‘like a rushing mighty wind.’ And with astonishing energy bore down on all before it. I stood amazed at the influence that seized the audience almost universally and could compare it to nothing more aptly than the irresistible force of a mighty torrent . . . Almost all persons of all ages were bowed down with concern together and scarce one was able to withstand the shock of this surpassing operation.”¹² David Brainerd penned these words in 1745, describing a move of God among a tribe of American Indians. His account stirs us to a righteous jealousy to see the same spiritual energy released in our day. Could God’s “astonishing energy” and “irresistible force of a mighty torrent” find its way into the Twenty-First century?

In the previous chapter we established the defining text directing us toward the re-blessing of God’s people: 2 Chronicles 7:14. It is the passage we turn to when the topic turns to a new work of God in our midst. *“If my people who are called*

¹² Stephen F. Olford, *Lord Open the Heavens!* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publications. 1969) 60.

by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (NIV). What is the blessing point to which we aspire in revival? It is where we receive the benefits contained in this power-packed Scripture verse.

When the spiritual energy of its promise gets released among us, we are freshly assured that "the gates hell will not prevail" against the church (Matthew 16:18). We find ourselves emboldened for the gospel. The fruit of our witness flows freely as the presence and power of God get released among us. The transformation of culture begins as God's people regain their sense of blessing, functioning as salt and light in a dark and decaying world. The need to experience these benefits frequently draws us back to the promise God made to Israel many years ago.

This verse occupies center stage in much of the preaching we hear on the subject. Preachers have leaned on it to exhort people to experience a fresh, new, and powerful work of God. They often sought to capture the essence of revival in their own words. Dr. Stephen Olford put it this way, "Revival is that strange and sovereign work of God in which He visits His own people, restoring, reanimating and releasing them into the fullness of His blessing."¹³ A. W. Tozer describes the power of the Holy Spirit released in times of revival when he writes, "I mean that effective energy which God has, both in biblical and in post-biblical times, released into the Church and into the circumstances surrounding her, which make her fruitful in labor and invincible before her foes."¹⁴

Vance Havner says, "What we call revival is simply a return to normal New Testament Christianity. Most of us are so subnormal that if we ever became normal we would be considered abnormal!"¹⁵ Did you follow that? Revival leaves us appearing abnormal in comparison with our culture or with a less potent strain of Christianity. John White, in his book *When the Spirit Comes with Power*, puts revival in context: "Most significant movements start by being a little wild, settle down to respectable middle age, then rejoicing in their respectability, relax into creeping death."¹⁶ He adds "Revival is war."¹⁷ Staving off creeping death is a battle! We fight for the very life of Christ's Bride!

Charles Finney writing early in the 19th century said, "Revival is the renewal of the first love of Christians, resulting in the conversion of sinners to God. It

¹³ Olford 15.

¹⁴ A.W. Tozer, *Paths to Power*, (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications) 11.

¹⁵ Vance Havner, *Messages on Revival*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1958) 15.

¹⁶ John White, *When the Spirit comes with Power* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988) 178.

¹⁷ White 35.

presupposes that the church is backslidden and revival means conviction of sin and searching of hearts among God’s people. Revival is nothing less than a new beginning of obedience to God, a breaking of heart and getting down in the dust before Him with deep humility and forsaking of sin. A revival breaks the power of the world and of sin over Christians.”¹⁸ And Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones writes of revival, “It is a kind of sign that God gives . . . in order to confirm His work in the Church, and to establish His people . . . it overflows in mighty blessing to those who are without.”¹⁹

These definitions capture our imagination. We desire to see such a revival in our day. The Scriptures have much to teach us about the viability of such a hope. We want to review this material in a manner that helps us prepare for a new work of God in our midst. First and foremost, we must know what revival looks like. A review of the Old and New Testaments reveals four concepts related to revival.

Four Biblical Concepts of Revival

Recovered Health and Healing

Revival is closely identified with recovered health and healing. The end of 2 Chronicles 7:14 brings this out, “. . . *then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sin and **heal their land.***” This verse to which we turn in regard to revival does not even mention the word “revival”! Rather, upon meeting the conditions of the verse, God promised the nation of Israel *healing*. When the Bible speaks of healing in this context, what should we understand? The word “heal” here is the Hebrew word, *raphah*. Its root is used to describe mending, as in stitching pieces of cloth or fabric back together. It includes the idea of repairing or making thoroughly whole,²⁰ as when a physician cures, not simply the symptoms, but the root cause of an illness. In this context, the word speaks of the restoring of Israelite land previously cursed. God chose to inflict non-productivity of the land to get His people to pay attention. Agriculture was the economy in Solomon’s day. When God disciplined His people, He hit them where it hurt – in the wallet. But if they met His conditions, the land would be healed and again bring forth fruit.

This concept of healing shows up in other contexts, such as in Jeremiah. “*But I*

¹⁸ Havner 15.

¹⁹ Martin Lloyd Jones, *Revival* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987) 15.

²⁰ James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible* as published within *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984) 110.

will restore you to health and heal your wounds, declares the LORD, *'because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares'*" (Jeremiah 30:17). Jeremiah addressed the Israelites in the early stages of the Babylonian captivity. He predicted the restoration or revival of the nation some seventy years later. One can only imagine the damage that needed healing as a result of being forced out of their homeland and being made refugees in a foreign land. The national psyche would need lots of repair work. But the primary focus here reveals that God promised a day when the nation would be healed in the sense of reestablished. It would not languish forever. The Lord planned to restore them to health and treat their painful wounds. Jeremiah 33:6 elaborates on the resurgence of the nation in the days to come. *"Behold, I will bring to it health and healing and I will heal them."*

The prophet Hosea used the same image. He combined revival and healing in the same declaration. *"Come, let us return to the Lord. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day"* (Hosea 6:1-2). The word "heal" here is the same one used in 2 Chronicles 7:14 and Jeremiah 30:17. When Hosea describes God as having "torn us," "heal" makes sense given its meaning to mend as in the stitching of a torn garment. But the idea of healing as in the restoring of health is not far behind, for healing is also used relative to being "wounded." The word "revive," closely tied to the idea of healing, brings to mind the idea of experiencing new life, the very thing one would expect to feel when restored from severe wounds.

There is a secondary and relevant application of the phrase *"and heal their land."* The land was the real estate that made up the Israelite nation. Divine discipline caused the land to decline agriculturally. Productivity, prosperity and the general well-being of society diminished as a result. They faced challenges in economic decline, famine, and drought. This was God's message to them that there was a problem in their relationship with Him. But just restoring the land to productivity may be too narrow given the references to healing found in Jeremiah and Hosea. Healing Israel's relationship with God was the primary focus, not simply restoration from famine or drought. The curse on the land was symptomatic of the spiritual health of the people. As such, the concept of "healing the land" may be applied more broadly to the healing of the society that occupied the land.

Restored spiritual health among God's people therefore brings societal benefits. Revival transforms culture and heals the land in this broader sense. It restores order and moral backbone, and produces social reform and conversions to God's kingdom. The effects of revival can heal the entire culture. The influences of evil

become retarded. Israel regains their national distinctives as God's people. They would enjoy the benefits of that healing as spiritual health permeated society. Healing of the land has broader social and cultural implications than just the restoration of agricultural productivity.

The broader sense of healing is what most people intuitively think of when they read 2 Chronicles 7:14. Revival brings benefits to the nation among whom the people of God reside. As God's people restore their relationship with God, the changes in their hearts affect the social agenda. Wilberforce wrote about the connection between a new move of God and social improvement: "If, by God's grace, a new wave of true spirituality were to break forth and gain ground, there is no way of predicting the way public morals and the political welfare of the nation would benefit. The encroachment of toxic decay would be forced to cease. The blessings of God would once again be released in our land."²¹

“Are we willing
to consider
the possibility
that evangelical
churches are
suffering spiritual
ill health?”

Isn't that the vision we covet for our nation? And yet we cannot escape one particularly potent observation. If revival is closely associated with healing and restored spiritual health, what does that suggest about the *pre-revival* state of God's people – the Church? Are we willing to consider the possibility that evangelical churches are suffering spiritual ill health? Do we really believe that? What are we doing with our symptoms? Do we tolerate these symptoms hoping they will go away on their own? Or are we willing to go to the One who holds the promise of healing us totally?

In the passages we reviewed, each referred to God's people as an entity, *not* as individuals. Each addressed the *nation* of Israel. Individual believers are touched by revival but the healing promised always applied to the corporate entity known as Israel. If we take any application from this, it is that God's work to which we aspire is described consistently as *corporate* revival and more specifically corporate *healing*.

These principles of corporate healing and revival are applicable to us corporately today. They work in the Church at large and particularly in the local church. In fact they *only* work in the Church at large to the extent they work in local churches. God's people, whatever the size or location of their ministry, can regain spiritual

²¹ Wilberforce 158.

health through the principles of corporate revival.

What about your church? Is it in need of corporate healing? Have wounds been inflicted on your local body whose lingering effects still limit you, maybe decades after they occurred? We may overlook, minimize or ignore them, but the Lord of the Church knows and these issues are still alive before Him. If your church has languished because of unaddressed traumas, the healing promise of revival should appeal to you. Attending to our corporate wounds prepares us for a literal reviving of our corporate energies.

Renewed Blessing

The Bible connects revival and a renewal of God's blessing. The Prophet Haggai wrote, *"Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree, it has not borne fruit. **Yet from this day on I will bless you.**"* (Haggai 2:19) This minor prophet makes a major point. He describes the moment of blessing, the "blessing point" to which we aspire.

Haggai's two chapter account describes a people who grew content while the Jerusalem temple lay in ruins. After the initial wave of Jews returned from Babylon, sixteen years after they laid the foundation, the temple sat desolate. What were God's people up to during this period of time? What preoccupied their minds and distracted them from finishing the temple? Here's what the Lord said about them, *"Thus says the LORD of Hosts, 'This people says, "The time has not come, even the time for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt."'"* Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet saying, *'Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?' Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Consider your ways!'"* (Haggai 1:2-5) Here was God's sticking point with His people. They put off rebuilding the temple but found plenty of time to upgrade their homes. They grew insensitive to God's priorities as reflected in the luxury of their "paneled houses" as compared to the destitute condition of the temple.

It is likely that the remnant having returned to Jerusalem not only ignored the condition of the temple but after a while did not even see the condition of the temple. They grew blind to the physical condition of the structure. They got used to a run down temple facility, and became preoccupied with their own priorities. They found satisfaction in upgrading their decor while God's house lay in ruins. This disparity became the focus of Haggai's message. He leveled a one-two punch in his double admonition to *"Consider your ways"* in 1:5 and again in 1:7.

Haggai also helped the occupants of Jerusalem understand why they had not enjoyed the success for which they hoped. Note the dynamic of diminishing returns the prophet describes: *“You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes”* (Haggai 1:6). It is as if God’s people had just enough to exist but never enough to prosper. Their situation deteriorated with resources chewed up by unexpected needs.

The Israelite economy was not the problem but the symptom. The problem they did not even know they had was hidden from their eyes. God hoped the pain of their lean harvests and financial drain would cause them to seek His face. Haggai revealed the close connection between their root problem and the dire straits in which they found themselves when he wrote, *“‘You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, I blow it away. Why?’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house. Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands’”* (Haggai 1:9-11). The last phrase is especially poignant, *“on all the labor of your hands.”* Their efforts to advance their well-being would be fruitless until they addressed the issue that stood between them and God.

However, the story of Haggai had a positive outcome. It encourages us for the struggles we face. The Israelites reached the blessing point after they finally reached the turning point of “considering their ways.” Thank goodness they did! *“So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerrubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God”* (Haggai 1:14). As they began to rebuild the temple, God encouraged them over and over. He assured them that He was with them (1:13; 2:4). He told them not to be afraid and that His Spirit was abiding with them (2:5). He assured them that He would fill the house they were rebuilding with His glory (2:7). He let them know that He had all the resources they needed to accomplish His will (2:8). He promised them His peace (2:9). He gave them a vision of the future and though their work seemed like nothing in their eyes, the latter glory of the temple would exceed the former! (2:9)

No more would they suffer under divinely-imposed discipline. God rescinded the law of diminishing returns previously placed on them. The prophet Haggai

reiterates God's former policy toward them then goes on to state that they will enter a new era of blessing. "*I smote you and every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew, and hail; yet you did not come back to me,' declares the Lord . . . 'Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree, it has not borne fruit. **Yet from this day on I will bless you.***" (2:17, 19).

There was a policy change in heaven! Formerly they struggled under the corrective influences of almighty God, but they listened to the prophet and demonstrated evidence of authentic repentance. The response from heaven was immediate. God's disposition toward them radically changed. The revival recorded in Haggai's day demonstrates that, when we respond to the Lord's discipline as a people, we can expect to enter a new era of blessing. Fruit takes the place of frustration and blessing replaces divine discipline.²²

Fresh Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

Of all the biblical concepts related to revival, a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit represents the most common when we anticipate a dramatic new work of God. It must be noted that the Great Awakenings in America all bore the signature of the Holy Spirit's outpouring, even as at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first made His presence known in the early church. "*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them and they were **all filled with the Holy Spirit***" (Acts 2:1-4).

The subsequent boldness displayed by Peter and the rest of the early believers resulted in a massive influx of people into God's kingdom. The Holy Spirit came a second time in Acts 4:31 to reanimate God's people. "*And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak the word of God with boldness.*"

We know that reviving does not come from the exertion of our own energy. We need to be reenergized by a source of power other than our own. The Holy Spirit lives in every believer and we each yield to Him to varying degrees in our daily lives. It is His goal to increase the territory of our heart under God's control. God constantly works out the progressive aspect of our sanctification. But in revival, He orchestrates an event where He reanimates us, reorients us, and revitalizes us.

²² See also Deuteronomy 28:1-14 for signs of God's blessing on a people.