

## Responsibility Before Revival Comes

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When we begin to seriously look for the next move of God, it is important to focus on what God's purpose is in "revival." We can review the great revivals in church history and note a number of similarities in the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Powerful. Marvelous. People were saved, healed, and filled with God's Spirit. We always remember the positive results of revival but there is also a negative shared by them all. It is this: at some point, the marvelous, the miraculous ceased and a lengthy period of time transpired before another revival appeared. Do you think that was a part of God's plan?

Understanding God's purposes in revival helps us to learn how to maintain His intent. A shocking truth is that *God's purpose* is not the salvation of souls. Salvations are a *result* of the revival, not the *reason* for it. Rather, God watches the hearts of His children – the already-saved – and knows we get side-tracked by life's activities to the point of losing something precious from Him that we once possessed.

Look, for instance, at the fairly recent Charismatic Renewal, or Revival, of the 1960's and '70's. Of course God is always in the process of fulfilling His Word (i.e. J1.2:28,29). But further, the previous revival, known as "Pentecost," failed to fulfill God's main goal. *It has always been the purpose of God to reveal Himself to man so that man could become enough like God to have fellowship with God.* We must not see revival as some titillating experience with God. It is so much more than that!

In the move called Pentecost, the people who received that tremendous outpouring of God's Spirit were supposed to *reveal* to the *people of God* (in all denominations) that there is a greater measure of God than they presently had. At that time, the recipients of His grace-gifts refused to be the revelation of God to others, but embraced the outpouring for themselves. They held onto the Holy Spirit rather than reveal Him in His power to the rest of the Body of Christ.

God is looking for people, men and women of all ages, who can contain Him and will reveal Him. He is looking for those who will be revelators of Who He is. When we, as the church (or part of the church), begin to control the truth revealed by God. We lose *His* purpose trying to define and control the move. He will allow that mistake and wait, for decades if necessary, before He sends another outpouring of His Spirit. Thus, the periods of time that have elapsed between "revivals."

In both the Old and New Testaments, God had to pour out fresh revivals. Down through church history since the first century, the same thing has happened. I believe it has always been God's intent to send only one outpouring, but when man would begin to take over, each revival waned. Yes, revivals have always left a residue, an *alive* remnant. But God has let the church go its own way until we thirsted for a fresh revelation again, a fresh outpouring. We would lose sight of His intent, and so to remind us of Who He is and why He comes in a visitation of power, He brings a new revival.

We have work to do in preparing for the next move of God. We need to go back and deal with the basics again. We have to get our lives in godly order; our relationships set aright, and return to our first love. And, yes, we need to pray.

Let's recognize the fresh emphasis on prayer in the Body of Christ today. We know prayer precedes revival and, therefore, are not surprised to see the Lord leading His people in that way. Previous generations in the church knew how to pray but needed to learn to praise. Today, we are experts in praising God, but, by and large, we have failed in prayer. We need to do both – praise and pray. One without the other is like having a single oar in a boat. One oar only sends us around in circles. We need both oars in the water to make forward progress.

As we learn what prayer is and what it isn't, we should also be careful not to allow the praying to become an idol in and of itself. It's not in how many hours we pray, nor is it in the application of some prayer formula. The power of prayer is because we have placed our *faith* in God, not in the process of petition. Prayer is actually two-way communication with the Almighty God. What a privilege! It is being in His presence, talking with Him and learning to hear His voice. It is not coming into His presence to present a list of wants. It is discovering what delight there is in just being with Him. We sing, "I just want to be where You are, dwelling daily in Your presence," and that is what we are talking about here. Learning to praise and singing to God and about Him, teaches us how to be in His presence without presenting Him a want-list. As we mature in God, our focus turns away from our self-issues and concentrates on Him. It is all about Him.

Sadly, the prevailing attitude concerning prayer today is, "If I have walked in obedience, I *deserve* answers to prayer." Not so, dear friend. It is not by merit or any good thing that may emanate from us. Answers to prayer come by grace – grace – grace – God's grace and more grace. The Body of Christ is so high-minded. We must put that away. First, we must expose that attitude too often camouflaged as "spiritual authority" in some circles. There *is* an authentic spiritual authority that comes from God and is pure and untainted by our human tendencies of pride. But, we do not tell God what to do because of who *we* are. He is Lord! We can come to Him making our requests known because He said to do that (Phil.4:6). It's because we are *His* and have faith in Him that He answers our prayers, not in how good we have been.

In trying to understand what prayer is and isn't, let's be aware of another common problem. Too many people see prayer as an end in itself. We *feel good* because we have spent so much time in prayer. If that is the case, then "prayer" or "praying" has become an idol. Prayer ought to be our reaching God and God reaching us. When it happens that way, a change comes about in individuals, for *we cannot have divine contact and remain the same!*

Besides laying a foundation of prayer preceding revival, let's understand there are a few other things we can (even must) do in preparation for its coming. In this message, we will look at four personal activities individuals ought to be considering if they have a hunger for more of God. It is not what we *do* so much as it is in creating a pure and holy place in our hearts for Him. Again, it is not the *activities* we do in preparation as much as it is allowing a thirst for God to increase that cannot be satiated by any other.

### 1) Emptying of self

It is no accident that all four Gospel writers retell the story of the "Last Supper" (Mt.26:17-35; Mk.14:12-25; Lk.22:7-38; Jn.3:1-17:26). After they had partaken of the Passover meal and Judas left to complete his deed, we should learn from Jesus' conversation with the remaining eleven disciples. The disciples thought they had full understanding as they had walked with Jesus for over 3 years and experienced His truth, revelation, power, and authority. In Luke's account, Jesus addresses bold, confident Peter. "Satan desires to sift you as wheat, Peter, but I have prayed for you 'that thy faith fail not:' and when you are converted, strengthen your brothers" (Lk.22:31,32). But Peter didn't actually hear Jesus. He thought he was so mature and strong in his faith and commitment. Peter offered Jesus some "unknown information" about himself. (Unfortunately, we do the same and call it 'prayer!')

Peter said, "I'm the faithful one, Lord. I'm ready. I'll not leave You or fail You. The others may drop off, but not I." Jesus replied by telling Peter the cock would not crow in the morning before Peter had denied, three times, even knowing the Lord (Mk.14:30; Lk.22:34; Jn.3:38). Did Peter believe Him? He didn't even hear because there had been no *emptying of self* – yet.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter was wearing a sword. Again, Luke tells us that Jesus turned from Peter and talked to the eleven. He reminded them that when He first sent them out, they were to take nothing with them – no purse, no scrip (money), no shoes, nothing (Lk.22:35). In verse 36, Jesus said,

“But now – this time – you’re going to need some things.” Among the list of items is a sword. Why a sword at this time? Let’s try to understand.

Again, all four Gospels relate the story of Jesus and His eleven disciples walking to the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt.26:36ff; Mk.14:31ff; Lk.22:39ff; Jn.8:1ff). Jesus knew exactly what lay before them – and Him. They did not know. Once in the Garden, Jesus invited Peter, James, and John to draw a little closer (Mt.26:37; Mk.14:33). They had already seen some things the others hadn’t (i.e. the Transfiguration – Mt.17:1-13; Mk.9:2-10; Lk.9:28-36). We can learn from this that *with increased revelation there is increased responsibility*. Speaking to these three, Jesus tried to tell them of the hard road ahead. It wasn’t that Jesus feared anything of the physical abuse and pain He knew was coming. On the contrary, He dreaded becoming what His Father hated (see 2Cor.5:21; 1Pet.2:24). That totally overwhelmed Jesus. May we detest the things that cause God to turn from us! (see Is.59:2).

Then, Jesus asked them (Peter, James and John) to pray with Him – to “watch and pray” while He went on a bit further into the Garden (Mt.26:38-41; Mk.14:34-38). Yes, their hearts were willing, but when Jesus returned He found them *asleep*. So is the church today! Satan clouds the minds of people as we watch things deteriorating in our society. We can be overwhelmed and *sleep* through important issues with an attitude of “Who are we? What can we do? We’re just a few voices.” We forget we are *anointed voices*!

Jesus awakens them, “Couldn’t you watch with Me for an hour? I need you.” Today is much the same. Jesus says to us, “I need you to help Me get the work done. Church, I need you to pray.”

A second time, they slept. These are those great ones: great Peter, loyal and faithful, great John, the beloved disciple, great James, the quiet leader. Returning a third time, Jesus says, “Sleep on, now. It is enough. Rise. Let us be going” (Mk.14:41,42). Sleep on – but the work of God will go on (Selah.) Peter could have been a part of the end. He could have been there to bring strength to the Lord, but he wasn’t. And the soldiers came.

Here’s the test: You, who could not watch an hour, can draw a sword. And the sword the Lord gave them was for this test. Jesus wanted to see what they would do with the sword. Listen carefully, for we stand in a similar place of testing. “Lord, I want to understand Your Word – I need knowledge. I want insights and revelation and truth from Your Word.” He says, “All right. I’ll give you the *sword*. Let’s see what you’ll do with it.”

As we see those who refuse to commune with Him, to share His heart, we watch them put His two-edged sword in their mouths instead of their hands. And, the sword kills – the letter kills (2Cor.3:6). Instead of the Word coming forth with the grace of God and the understanding of the Lord, becoming “a word fitly spoken, like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Pr.25:11), it comes out lashing and destroying, leaving bodies on the beach. Peter pulls his sword and strikes, and cuts off – the hearing!

We need to be able to be trusted with the sword of God’s Word. I don’t want to just receive a lot of little words, memorize a lot of verses, and carelessly pull out the *sword* every time I think someone needs it. I want to walk softly under divine inspiration and anointing.

Can we apply the principle to *witnessing*? Effective witnessing (sharing with others the good news of the Gospel) is not simply firing the same formula of memorized verses at every person I meet. It’s developing a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit to know when to speak and when to be silent, when to be weak and when to be strong, when to be loving and when to be the absolute strength in God. “Well, I don’t want to be that involved or have to stretch out of my comfort zone.” Sleep on, then! Put away your *sword* until you learn how to use it.

Later, Jesus told His followers to “Tarry. Tarry until you are endued with power from on high, and *then* you’ll be My witnesses” (Lk.24:49; Ac.1:4-8). What a progression toward *revival*! Ten days in the

Upper Room. They don't have to have Jesus there to do it all for them. He left them with one thing to do: pray. The Lord is not going to be there in dynamic revelation of Himself in visual form until they learn how to commune with Him invisibly (in prayer). They don't know that and they don't know how to pray because they always had Him right there with them, in the flesh.

Earlier, when they asked, "Teach us to pray," Jesus gave them the "Lord's Prayer" (Lk.11:1-4; also Mt.6:5-15). What was He doing by giving them those particular words? It wasn't for memorization. He was trying to get them in touch with Father. They didn't want Father (the unknown); they wanted Jesus (the known and familiar). He instructed them, "Now stay in the Upper Room until you touch heaven." When you become aware, when the Holy Spirit makes His presence known, there's only one thing to do – empty yourself of your *self*, so that everything that is familiar to you will be gone.

"Lord, do something new. Change me. Bring revival. Save the lost. Oh, God, use me." This can be our most sincere prayer. And He says, "Yes, fine. Let go of the *old*." As long as we're locked into the *old*, our eyes cannot behold the *new*. No more, "I remember the way it used to be..." longing for the old, comfortable fit. What will it be like, this something *new*? We don't know specifically, but it's going to be more glorious than anything. We *shall* behold His glory in a dimension the church has never known or seen. Whatever it is, however, it will not waver from the known *ways* of God.

Recall that Moses asked God for a special, divine visitation. God told him to stand on the rock – actually, in the cleft of the rock. Let's remember that Jesus is the Rock ("On Christ, the solid rock I stand.") Stand in the cleft. God will make a cleft for you – it's called Calvary. Don't become so spiritually mature you lose touch with a deep appreciation for the Cross. It is only by the grace of Calvary that we are endued with power from on high. It's only by the grace of Calvary that we can be possessed by the divine Spirit of God. When we remind ourselves of Jesus' work on Calvary, there remains no room for pride. It is there, only at Calvary, in the cleft of the rock (Rock) where I can see His goodness and enjoy His lovingkindness, His tender mercies, His forgiveness, His visitation, and yes, His correction and judging.

The next move of God will bring the spiritually needy into the church. There is no question; they will come in the thousands. We must be prepared to be useful to God at that time. Therefore, we will need to deal with our priorities, and emptying oneself of *self* is something only that person can do.

What brought the day of Pentecost? Preparation. Once the powerful Spirit of God visited Peter and the others in the Upper Room (Ac.2), that experience caused them to humble themselves and *empty* themselves of all pride in their *doing*. Focus switched to *being*. Afterward, God could use them mightily with the masses. The story continues in the Book of Acts.

## 2) *Embracing the Body*

Acts 1:14 – "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women..." In the retelling of this event, Luke names many who were there at the moment of the birth of the church, both men and women (v.13).

The next move of God will come where men and women *together* have lost all defensiveness about gender-ism, and have come to realize we are one Body of Christ. We must deal with gender prejudice, and that goes both ways. God wants to bring the church together through right relationships – women with women and men, men with men and women – until the Body of Christ truly becomes a single body.

Psalm 133 tells us the Lord commands a blessing where unity thrives. The Psalmist uses the word translated "brethren" in many Bible translations, which is actually a word used in the widest sense of literal relationships. It is neither gender specific nor exclusive, but refers to "kindred," brothers *and* sisters.

In *embracing the Body*, we will need to address any sort of prejudice that exists. Socio-economic, cultural, and gender are the obvious. Let's acknowledge that all who name the name of Jesus as their personal Savior, who truly have come to Father God through the shed blood of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, ALL these are members of the universal church, the Body of Christ. When we find that agreement, then we'll understand what is indicated in the next areas concerning prejudice.

Not only are we to face and deal with what may be considered obvious areas of prejudice, but God is also after denominational and/or doctrinal prejudices. In these two areas, we are talking about how people *interpret* the Scriptures within Christian circles. That is, how *man* states his "best understanding" from the Word. The area of interpretation is also where we find vast differences of opinion on certain topics. Those differences in interpretation often reflect different perspectives and focuses, and have led to great battles within the church, or between denominations. Prejudice. We may be totally surprised when we get to heaven and find out the truth about what we thought was the truth!

There *are* Biblical absolutes, however. Jesus is God, the only begotten of the Father; Calvary, representing the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, is the only way to the Father; the Holy Spirit comes from God and is the power source of every believer. Absolutes. The necessity of water baptism is also an absolute, but whether it must be in the Jordan River, or sprinkled or immersed is by interpretation. We are to celebrate the "Lord's Supper," but what we call it or whether we use wine or juice is by interpretation. And, there are other absolutes. We may not tamper with God's absolutes and still call ourselves "Christian." But, when we find agreement in the absolutes, we are "brethren." When we are critical of how another carries out these practices, we have a revelation of ourselves: we are hung up on something. Prejudice.

*Embracing the Body*, the *whole* Body of Christ. God will break all prejudice in His next mighty move, but nothing He does, says, or directs will be contrary to His absolutes.

### 3) **Entering into Intercession**

"*Entering in*" is not simply kneeling down and saying words. It seems Peter could always say a lot of words before God's time was right for a major shift. Until there is an *entering into* God, a touching of heaven through the power of the Holy Spirit, there is no change in anyone. True in the first century, but also now.

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come" (Ac.2:1). This does not have to refer to a specific date on the calendar, as in the actual "Day of Pentecost" in the Jewish counting of time. The text basically says, when Pentecost was "completed" or "fulfilled." Stanley Horton says this means "when the period of waiting was coming to an end." We can see that the Jews had been waiting for the Old Testament prophecies to be fulfilled, and "now" was that time for many of them. We can legitimately think in terms of the Greek word /kairos/. That word refers to a period of time in which something must happen in order for a change to come about. It is a season of opportunity. We might say we are waiting for the "kairos moment." When was it that Pentecost was "fully come?" After 10 days in the Upper Room? Or, when?

I believe the truth is, "Pentecost" was fully in force the day after Jesus ascended. Think about it. What was Heaven waiting for? Did they need more time to "get ready?" Do you think the Holy Spirit was not "ready?" Jesus told them that when He left, He would send "the Comforter" referring to the Holy Spirit (John16:7). Surely it did not take any time at all for Jesus to ascend to heaven and the Holy Spirit to arrive here in His place.

Then, why spend those ten days in the Upper Room? Why did Jesus' followers have to *tarry*? It is reasonable to understand that it took them 10 days to *enter in*. It's not always easy to *empty self*. We often need to come to the place of recognition that something negative exists before we can deal with it. Then follows confession and repentance.

*Emptying of self – embracing the whole Body – entering into His presence.* There is a logical progression in this and each of us, individually, will stand accountable before God as to how we have *prepared* for His next visitation. How long till our next revival? That depends on us, not God. We need to empty our *selves* of ego and pride, embrace the Body of Christ (including the confrontation of every type of prejudice), and enter into His presence with joy. When we are unable to be successful in some area, we must go back and empty again.

Let me share a personal example. Quite a number of years ago, I found myself being repeatedly and deeply wounded, hurt, emotionally devastated, by the same person. This went on for several years. I worked with the Lord to come to honest, sincere, true forgiveness for this person. Trying to surrender this entire situation to the work of the Holy Spirit in me, I heard myself pray, “Lord, if this person pleases You, then they please me.” What liberty that brought to me! God knew exactly what I needed to hear and embrace in order to begin the deeper healing in me.

Can we come to the place, concerning any negative situation in our lives, where we can honestly say, “Lord, if You’re not upset about it, then me either!”? We must learn how to move on when people around us do not see what we see. We need to walk in agreement with what He says in the Book. Revival is on its way, church. We need to get ready in every way we can.

Here is another progression we can learn that will help us in *entering into* God’s presence. Ask – seek – knock. We know how to *ask*. We bring our requests to Him and make our petitions known. We ask remembering to be grateful for His attention, His hearing our cries. We have been taught these things well.

But the next dimension is to *seek*. It is more fervent than merely asking. The Lord says, “You will find Me when you – *seek* – or search for Me with all your heart” (Jer.29:13). The Psalmist reminds us to “Seek the Lord, and his strength” (Ps.105:4). The verse continues, “seek his face...” Does it say, “from time to time?” No. We are to seek Him continually (“evermore”).

Ask. Seek. But then, we have to *knock*. Thinking in terms of progression, if *ask* is first, and *seek* is greater, is *knock* then like beating down the door? No. The word means to “rap.” It is simply knocking on a door. What do I do when I knock on a person’s door? I have to leave the option of opening it to the person inside while I stand in patient expectation, just waiting.

If we look at the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25, we can see something about *waiting*. There were five wise virgins and five foolish ones. Usually, we use this parable to teach about being admitted to heaven, or being shut out, or we may use the story to teach about blessing and non-blessings. But, this time, let’s look from a different perspective, a different viewpoint. It is not to say one perspective is correct and any other is in error. Just looking from a different view.

The five foolish virgins – did not have enough oil. For what? The wait. When we run out while waiting, we tend to become cantankerous, disgruntled, hostile, resentful, mad at God, even determined never to witness for Him again. Our thinking goes something like this: “God told me...” or, “I trusted Him...” or, “I have been holding onto His promise for so long...” and finally, “I give up!” We run out of oil – Holy Spirit oil – the oil that gives us hope and excitement and purpose during the waiting time.

His is the oil that gives us light for the path while we’re waiting through our nighttimes. What a testimony we are when we wait joyfully, expectantly, just keeping on being who we are in Him yet waiting and rejoicing until the fulfillment comes. Can we wait for His perfect timing with no doubting? All doubt disappears under the bathing of the oil of His Spirit. Can we wait in patient *expectancy*?

#### 4) Expecting

Job 14:14 – “All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come.” Who controls that time? He is Lord – “till my change come.”

Psalms 62:5 and 6 – “My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him. He is my rock and my salvation...” In other words, my hope is in God, and in Him alone.

Has God ever really let you down? Did He ever lie to you? Really? Or, did we make up some things and put His name on them? We must be careful when we “claim” some prophetic word given. It may be an accurate word, but not for everyone. Or, it may be some person’s good thoughts that we assume is from the heart and mouth of God, but isn’t. Or, we may need to continue to wait patiently for God to fulfill His word, in His time, and according to His plan.

Has God ever spoken a word to you, confirmed it in His Word and by His Spirit, but not performed it? Not likely. Has He ever failed you? His Word is sure. He says, “Lo, I am with you always” (Mt.28:20). “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deut.31:6; Heb.13:5). That promise ought to be enough to carry us through any waiting period. It is time to *empty* ourselves, or rid ourselves, of all that is self-serving or egotistical.

Anointed with oil. How do we obtain that anointing? The same way we were filled the first time. Empty yourself, forget about your “self,” turn your eyes to Him and say, “Fill me.”

Before revival comes, we can be a part of the preparation by embracing the revelation the Lord brings. Embracing is not simply nodding in mental agreement. It is by doing the things God directs, making the changes that need to be made. *That* is getting ready for that great and glorious day. We must find grace to wait for His next visitation and be filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit in the waiting. That means we need to be doing our Father’s business while we wait. We don’t merely sit and do nothing waiting for the outpouring of God. Use the oil that is in you. Yes, tomorrow will be greater, but only if we do what we have for today.

Then – “When the day of Pentecost is fully come” – it happens *suddenly*.