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NOTES ON REVIVAL

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Evan Roberts is a name that may not be very familiar today. But at one time, it was very well known. As a very young man in 1904, God used him to help bring about an amazing transformation of an entire nation—and in a way that even touched the city of Portland, Oregon.

God's remarkable use of this humble Christian began with a burden that he felt for his homeland of Wales. Evan began to pray and ask that God would grant that 100,000 of his unbelieving fellow Welsh people would come to Jesus Christ and be saved. That was an astonishing request; but, of course, he prayed to an astonishing God! He managed to persuade the leaders of a church to allow him to speak about what was on his heart. Only seventeen people showed up to hear him; but he believed that those were the people that God would use to begin the work of transforming his nation.

And so, he shared the burden God had given him—and spoke with confident certainty that God would indeed bring revival to his land. He also felt led to tell them that four things absolutely must happen:

- (1) They must put away any unconfessed sin.**
- (2) They must put away any doubtful habit.**
- (3) They must obey the Spirit promptly.**
- (4) They must confess Christ publicly.**

Those seventeen people committed themselves to this call and began to pray. And they kept praying—in spite of times of discouragement and seeming indifference. Soon, other prayer meetings began to form and grow; and young people began to fill the churches to overflowing. The historic "Welsh Revival" of 1904 broke out as a result of those prayers—utterly transforming the country of Wales. The goal of 100,000 new conversions to Jesus Christ was reached—and in only six month's time!

‘The Welsh Revival’ drew the attention of amazed news reporters and Christian leaders from around the world—and it quickly spread to many other places around the globe. Its impact even reached the city of Portland, Oregon—which, in 1905, itself experienced an amazing revival. Before that time, in 1898, a small group of Portland ministers gathered on what is now Council Crest to ask God for revival; and God answered just a few years later—in the same wave of outpouring that transformed Wales. Portland area churches became packed with people. Major stores in downtown Portland closed down each day from 11 am to 2 pm, so that their employees and customers could go to one of many public prayer and worship meetings—and with people jam-packed each day in the city's largest auditoriums where those meetings were held. Store owners signed an agreement with each other not to "cheat" and stay open during mid-afternoon prayer times. The front page of the March 31, 1905 edition of *The Oregon Journal* reported, "At Midnight Nearly Ten Thousand People, Singing Hymns, Proclaim the Power of Revival." It wrote that it was "the unique night of Portland's history—a shaking up such as the town had never known before"; and that the city of Portland "is in the throes of a religious upheaval such as it has never known in all its history.”

The following summary is written to inspire humble prayer among God's people, so that He may see fit to grant a fresh awakening of His church and revival in our time—not just for the transformation of the city of Portland, but for the entire State of Oregon and for the whole nation!

I. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'REVIVAL'?

When we speak of revival, we're not talking about a type of scheduled evangelistic meeting that a church decides to hold. Even though human efforts are definitely involved, a true revival isn't something that people bring about. Rather, it is—above all else—a work of God.

For the sake of this discussion, a revival can be defined as:

a gracious work of God--in response to the concerted prayers of His people--by which the Holy Spirit profoundly renews the church from out of a period of spiritual decline, and grants such remarkable power and success to the proclamation of the gospel that it dramatically transforms a generation.

Noted Christian historian Earle Cairns wrote that "revival primarily applies to believers and results in a deeper Christian walk, witness, and work, both at home and abroad. Evangelism is both a product of revival and a stimulus to revival" (Earle E. Cairns, *An Endless Line of Splendor* [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986], p. 15).

Revival is when God does a work in His spiritually apathetic people that causes them to once again passionately seek Him:

*Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.
Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
Cause Your face to shine,
And we shall be saved! (Psalm 80:18b-19).*

Revival is what happens when God answers the prayer of Psalm 85:4-7;

*Restore us, O God of our salvation, and cause Your anger toward us to cease.
Will You be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong Your anger to all generations?
Will You not revive us again,
That Your people may rejoice in You?
Show us Your mercy, LORD,
And grant us Your salvation (Psalm 85:4-7).*

It's what Ezra prayed for, after the dark times of his people's exile in Babylon, when he said,

“And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage” (Ezra 9:8).

In periods of great spiritual and moral decline—a time of “bondage”, as Ezra would have called it—God often graciously allows His people to see the desperateness of the situation and to cry out to Him for a fresh awakening for the times:

*O Lord, I have heard Your speech and was afraid;
O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years!
In the midst of the years make it known;
In wrath remember mercy (Habakkuk 3:2).*

And in such times, it is God's earnest delight to hear those prayers and grant needed seasons of refreshing:

*For thus says the High and Lofty One
Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
“I dwell in the high and holy place,
With him who has a contrite and humble spirit,
To revive the spirit of the humble,
And to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15).*

Such outpourings of revival upon Gods' people were what the apostle Peter anticipated when he spoke of "times of refreshing" from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19).

One of the finest works on the subject of the history of revivals (Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History Through Revivals* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997], pp. 7-10), distinguishes six different types of revival:

1. Personal Revival—within the life of an individual Christian.
2. Institutional Revival—usually within a church or a school.
3. Regional Revival—one that spreads within a local community or group of churches.
4. Specialized Revival—focusing on persons of a particular age group or context.
5. National Revival—a transformative spiritual movement within an entire country.
6. Global Revival—with an impact on several nations on every continent at once.

II. WHAT ARE THINGS TYPICALLY LIKE BEFORE REVIVAL COMES?

Many historians on the subject have observed that previous times of revival were preceded by a notable spiritual decline; and that this decline is most visible in two important areas:

1. In the spiritual deadness of the church. Empty ritualism grew to be substituted for genuine worship. Skepticism about the authority of God's word stifled its ministry. It responded to its lack of spiritual power by adopting the styles and methods of the world in a desperate effort to become relevant. It drifted with the tide of cultural and moral changes. It lost its focus on the ministry of the

life-transforming power of the gospel. It suffered from a notable loss in numbers.

2. In the deterioration of secular society. Human rationality and skepticism became elevated while divine revelation became a subject to be mocked. A long pattern of inferior and immoral leadership led increasingly to a loss of social direction and hope. "Spirituality" turned increasingly paganistic and inwardly-focused; while outward compassion became cold. Immorality became the norm—increasingly shocking in its expression, and increasingly hostile in its opposition to traditional Christianity. The problems of society seem to be pandemic and without human solution.

Just prior to the Great Awakening in Britain in the early 1700s, Joseph Butler (*Analogy of Religion*, 1736) wrote:

*It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted, by many persons, that Christianity is not so much a subject of inquiry; but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment; and nothing remained, but to set it up as a principle subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for it having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world (cited in A. Skevington Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960], p. 15).*

In 1738, Thomas Secker—then Bishop of Oxford—wrote:

In this we cannot be mistaken, that an open and professed disregard of religion is become, through a variety of unhappy causes, the distinguishing character of the age. Such are the dissoluteness and contempt of principle in the highest part of the world, and the profligacy, intemperance, and fearlessness of committing crimes in the lower part, as must, if the torrent of impiety stop not, become absolutely fatal. Christianity is ridiculed and railed at with very little reserve; and the teachers of it without any at all (Ibid, p. 16).

The condition of the times just before the Second Great Awakening in America were also dismal. The gains of the previous generation's revival—a revival that helped fuel the American Revolution—had been forgotten. People had been abandoning churches and neglecting corporate worship in alarming numbers.

*"While the revolution was being won to secure fundamental freedoms, the religious convictions of many people were being lost. Promiscuity, profanity, gambling, and drunkenness increased. . . . Many of the ideas from Europe were accepted and promoted by Americans Thomas Paine, Ethan Allen, and other opponents of biblical Christianity. These ideas gained popularity in colleges. Paine's *The Age of Reason* was published in France and sent to the United States. Paine ridiculed the Christian belief in divine revelation" (McDow & Reid, p. 228).*

By the mid 1790s, many of the spiritual gains of the First Great Awakening had been allowed to slip away; and religion and morals had declined terribly. So-called "Infidel Clubs" began to form and abound—in which men and women claimed the right to indulge in all kinds of immorality. Men drank

themselves to death; and of women it was said that 'not one of them could or would pretend to know who was the father of their offspring'. Colleges were places in which religion was mocked, Scripture was treated with scepticism, and 'free-thinkers' bore significant influence over the minds of the youth. In 1795, Lyman Beecher described the typical campus in these words;

College was in a most ungodly state. The college church was almost extinct. Most of the students were skeptical and rowdies were plenty. Wine and liquor were kept in many rooms; intemperance, profanity, gambling and licentiousness were common . . . most of the classes before me were infidels and called each other Voltaire, Rousseau, D'Alembert, etc. (Cited in J. Edwin Orr, The Eager Feet [Chicago: Moody Press, 1975], pp. 8-9).

J. Edwin Orr writes of the terrible spiritual malaise of the times just before the Second Great Awakening;

The last decade before the turn of the [nineteenth] century began in discouragement. Bishop James Madison in the diocese of Virginia agreed with the conviction of Chief Justice John Marshall, a devout layman, who wrote that the Church was too far gone to ever be revived; while Bishop Samuel Provoost of New York felt that the situation was hopeless, and simply ceased functioning (Ibid, p. 10).

A similar spiritual decline characterized the times just prior to the Third Great Awakening of the mid-19th Century, or as it is often called, the Layman's Prayer Revival (an awakening which few have heard of today, but which the noted Harvard historian Perry Miller called "The Event of the Century"). Many had become disillusioned with—and even hostile toward—the Christian faith because of the failed end-times predictions of William Miller and the “Great Disappointment” of 1844. Others had grown so wealthy and prosperous in the decade and a half that followed that they simply ignored the needs of their soul. "Men", as one commentator said, "forgot God in pursuit of gold". But a financial panic shortly thereafter sent shock waves across the United States, as "'excessive railroad building, over-speculation and a wildcat currency system' led to a major banking crash." On October 14, 1857, "the United States banking system collapsed. Thousands of people in the industrial centers of the East were decimated" (*Ibid.*, p. 252).

In the dismal years just prior to this third great movement of God, *The New York Observer* ran a series of articles that spoke of the notable lack of revivals. In 1845, it wrote: “Dear Christian brethren, we must have revivals . . . or we are undone” (cited in McDow & Reid, p. 253).

Other examples could be presented to show that our times today are very much like the times that proceeded great, generation-transforming revivals at other points of our nation's history. And all of this should cause us to think of what exciting and ripe times these are to pray for revival!

III. HOW DOES REVIVAL TYPICALLY BEGIN?

1. It starts with the recognition of a desperate need on the part of God's people. "Every revival in history has started when that one or those few have recognized the need and have become desperate

enough to offer unqualified commitment instead of qualified compromise to God. . . . Desperation leads to conviction, repentance, cleansing, and revival" (Malcolm & Reid, p. 16). There's a sense that, unless God does something, all is lost!

2. It is sought from God through a humble and sincere repentance of sin. There is a personal repentance in which Christians seek to turn from the kind of hidden sins and worldly habits that hinder their walk with God. But there is also a sense in which they own and repent before God of the sins of their nation and their people. (Read the prayers in the "9s"—Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9—for remarkable examples of this!)

3. It is pursued through God's people pleading together for it through united, 'extraordinary' prayer. Consider the title of the book that Jonathan Edwards wrote on the subject of prayer for revival—the full, unedited version of which is:

An Humble Attempt to promote an explicit agreement and visible union of God's people through the world, in extraordinary prayer, for the revival, of religion, and the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth, pursuant to scripture promises and prophecies concerning the last time,

OCCASIONED

By a late memorial published by a number of ministers in Scotland, and sent over to America; giving an account of a certain concert for prayer, which has already been come into by many ministers and others in Great Britain and some other parts, and in which they desire the general concurrence of their Christian brethren every where.

CONTAINING

A copy of the said memorial with a more particular view of the affair it relates to; a variety of arguments and persuasives to comply with the motion therein made, for united and extraordinary prayer; and answers to some objections.

TOGETHER WITH

Seasonable considerations on the aspects of providence in many late wonderful dispensations, and the present state of things in the church and moral world; pointing out the fulfilling of the Scriptures, and the voice of God to his people, in these events.

Phew!— By the time we're through reading through the title of this one book alone, we're already much closer to the 'last time' than when we started! But you get the idea. Revival is pleaded for in a 'united' way (with groups of believers and different churches of genuine, believing Christians, all getting together in a way that crosses denominational lines), through 'extraordinary' prayer—that is, Christians gathering at other than the usual times, saying no to other things in order to devote themselves to prayer, focusing their time of prayer on the one great objective of praying for revival and

the salvation of the lost, perhaps accompanying the time of prayer with humiliation and fasting, *and keeping at it*.

Like someone once said, "The only place you'll ever find power coming before prayer is in the dictionary" (McDow & Reid, p. 256). Of nowhere can it be said that this is *more* true than in the matter of revival!

IV. WHEN HAS GOD GIVEN REVIVAL IN THE PAST?

The full history of revival around the world would be impossible to try to reproduce here. But there is a sense in which to trace the key turning points in our own nation's history is to trace the history of its revivals! The most notable and transformative seasons of awakening in our nation's history have been:

1. THE GREAT AWAKENING (early 1700s): the revival in England and the Colonies under the preaching of such men as George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards.

2. THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING (late 1700s to early 1800s): the revival that spread across the frontier and across colleges and churches, through camp-meetings and through the ministries of James McGready, Charles Finney and Asahel Nettleton.

3. THE LAYMAN'S PRAYER REVIVAL (mid 1800s; just prior to the civil war; sometimes called the Third Great Awakening): largely a prayer movement that began with the labors of a New York lay-missionary Jeremiah Lanphier that inspired the Union Prayer Meetings that swept the nation; an awakening furthered and greatly maintained in the United States by the ministry of D.L. Moody, and in Great Britain by the ministry of Charles Spurgeon.

4. THE GLOBAL AWAKENING (early 1900s): most notably begun by the Welsh Revival of 1904 through Evan Roberts and others; and spreading in short time around the world; particularly furthered in the United States and its urban regions by the ministries of R.A. Torrey, Wilbur Chapman and Billy Sunday.

5. MID-CENTURY RESURGENCE (1940s to 1960s): a name given to this time of awakening by J. Edwin Orr; an expansion of religious interest and activity after World War II; especially furthered by the world-wide ministry of Billy Graham.

6. THE JESUS MOVEMENT (1970s): a specialized revival among youth, and focusing primarily on college campuses; having its beginnings in ministries centered along the West Coast; furthered by the evangelistic work of Chuck Smith and Billy Graham.

Knowing the history of the awakenings that God has granted in generations past should encourage us to pray that He would grant a fresh and much-needed awakening in this generation.

V. THE CHALLENGE . . .

1. Develop an informed burden for revival. Read up on the subject, and think about the stories of what God has done in the past. To get started, here are some particularly helpful resources:

Malcolm McDow & Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall 2.0: How God Has Shaped History through Revivals* (Wake Forest, NC: Gospel Advance Books, 2014).

Earle E. Cairns, *An Endless Line of Splendor: Revivals and Their Leaders from The Great Awakening to The Present* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986).

Keith J. Hardman, *Seasons of Refreshing: Evangelism and Revivals in America* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006).

Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards: On Revival* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1984).

2. Develop a depth of daily walk. A great discipline to develop is a daily Bible Reading and Prayer habit. To help with this, you can find free, downloadable Daily Bible Reading and Prayer Journal sheets—with instructions for use—at Bethany Bible Church’s website: <http://www.bethanybible.org/pdf/journal.pdf>.

3. Develop a team for prayer. God has plainly told us what to do in 2 Chronicles 7:14;

***“[I]f My people who are called
by My name will humble themselves,
and pray and seek My face, and turn
from their wicked ways, then
I will hear from heaven, and will
forgive their sin and heal their land.”***

Consider whether or not God may be calling you to request the permission of your pastor or church leadership to gather together with some fellow believers from your own and other church families, and begin to pray regularly for revival. Just gathering with a few fellow followers of Jesus, praying together from 2 Chronicles 7:14, and asking God for what He might do in our time today—that might be a great way to start!

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In closing, consider what one of the most significant historians on the subject of revival—Dr. J. Edwin Orr—wrote at the end of his excellent book on nineteenth century revivals. Think of how these words speak to our own times—and what God may be calling His people to do in them!

The nineteenth century proved to be a time of evangelical renewal and advance, in which shown widely the Light the Nations. The phenomena of the Great Awakenings brought blessing untold to the Christian believer, to the congregation, to the Christian community, to the Church at large, to the labouring man, to the world of women, to the welfare of children, to the care of the sick, to the shelter of the insane, to the protection of the unfortunate, to the education of the

young, to the guaranteeing of liberty, to the granting of freedom, to the administration of justice, to the evolution of self-government, to the crusade of peace among nations--in fact, in the nineteenth century, the Evangelical Awakenings may be shown to be the foremost method of an Almighty God to promote the betterment of all mankind and His chiefest instrument to win men to transforming faith in Himself.

*The world is now in another age of revolution like the one which preceded the century herein described. Again, a flood of immorality and a wave of lawlessness has enveloped the earth. In some countries, it is said that Christianity has become a waning influence, about to be ushered out of the affairs of men. How long must it take for despair to drive the Christians to prayer for another Revival of New Testament Christianity? (J. Edwin Orr, *The Light of The Nations*, [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965], pp. 275-6; *emph. Added*).*

We often wait for God to send revival in our time, but it may be that God Himself is waiting for us to earnestly ask Him for it! The testimony of history shows us that when Christians gather together to earnestly pray FOR revival, their gathering for prayer is itself the beginning stage of God's gracious answer TO that prayer!

Let's not delay any further then! Let's give ourselves to 'extraordinary prayer' together for revival in our time!