

# EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

## ‘Will you not revive us again?’

By Carmen Fowler  
The Layman

A woman stood next to me at the back of the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s General Assembly committee meeting room. Commissioners were entering their second hour of debate over the use of the Lord’s name and whether or not Presbyterians should take a position on the profane use of it. “Don’t they know it’s a plain and simple command?” she asked rhetorically. A few more minutes passed and her astonishment rose, “Have they forgotten that there’s real power in His name?” I had been standing shoulder to shoulder with her for some time but had not turned to look her in the eye until now. This was not so much a rhetorical question as a heart’s plea. Here was a woman who had driven from rural Wisconsin to witness her church at work. Now her cheeks were streaked with tears, her brow furrowed in pain.

Finally, sweeping her arm in an arc from left to right, taking in the room, she asked prophetically, “Can these dry bones live?” I said the only words that came, “Lord knows, Lord knows.” With that she nodded, knowingly, and left. I am confident she prayed and wept all the way home. I am confident that she is praying even now. And she is not praying for a reform of the PCUSA form of government, nor for one or two amendments to pass or fail. She is praying for genuine spiritual revival in the Presbyterian expression of the church that she so loves.

The time for reform has passed. The people have forgotten their first love, they have abandoned the ancient ways, indeed everyone does what is right in his own eyes and there is no fear of the Lord. What we need is a revival, something only God can accomplish.

The Psalmist prayed, “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” (Psalm 85:6, NIV). It was the cry of God’s people then and it is the cry of God’s people today. Whenever God’s people come to realize that they have come to the end of themselves they cry out that God would directly intervene. When we reach a time when evil seems to know no bounds and every inclination of the human heart is sinful all the time, we are living in a time ripe for revival. And it begins with a deep ardent yearning in the hearts of God’s people for deliverance. Lord, will You revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?

There are 16 revivals recorded in the Bible and II Chronicles 7:14 is central to understanding them. It reads, “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 will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

The principles of revival revealed in this one verse are five-fold.

- First, one must ask, are we a people belonging to God, called by His name?



General Assembly participants pray in the halls of the GA convention center before the debate on ordination standards.

- Second, are we genuinely humble?
- Third, will we passionately pray?
- Fourth, will we fervently seek His face?
- Fifth, will we earnestly turn from our wicked ways?

If not, why would the Lord listen? Why forgive? Why heal?

Revival becomes necessary when the people of God fail to acknowledge God, exchange the truth for lies, and fail to show forth the grace of God to a watching world. Essentially, revival becomes necessary when the Church abandons her primary calling for lesser loves. Desperate times call for desperate measures and these are desperate times. We live in a generation of itchy ears, false prophets and the active suppression of the truth – not only within the culture, but tragically, within the church itself.

There is good news! Those are precisely the circumstances when God sends revival! Most Biblical revivals were preceded by times of significant spiritual decline, rampant depravity and deep despair. The Bible then tells us that the revival began in the heart of just one believer! That person became the tool God used to stir up His slumbering people. Biblical revivals are centered on a fresh and full proclamation of the Word of God, a return to genuine worship, the destruction of idols, deep repentance of sin and a desire among God’s people to be pure, set apart and offered to God for His use. A people revived by God experience unprecedented joy and a season of mission whereby God reaches others through the testimony of those transformed.

Sound good? Then let us look together at the revivals of the Bible that God might till the soil of our hearts, break up fallow ground, awaken slumbering spirits, and ready us for the revival He is yet to send.

“Will you not revive us again,  
that your people may rejoice in you?”

Psalm 85:6, NIV

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## Revival – The promises and conditions

*“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 will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”*

*II Chronicles 7:14*

### Week I: The promises of God

The Hebrew verb *hayah* means *to live, to recover, or to revive*. It only appears a few times in the Old Testament (Psalm 80:18; 85:6; Isaiah 57:15; Hosea 6:2) and its Greek counterpart only appears twice in the New (Romans 7:9, 14:9). Without using the word directly, the Scriptures make frequent reference to the experience of revival among the people of God.

The concept of revival hangs on the premise that something once lived and is now dead; something once fruitful now lies fallow; something once verdant is now parched. Like a valley of dry bones, disconnected and blanched, the question plagues those who remember, “Can these bones live – again?”

The purpose of revival is to call the church back to hear again the Word of God and experience again the grace of God offered in Jesus Christ. The offer is made anew to respond by a fresh confession of sin and a commitment to reversing the trend of apostasy evident in personal, congregational and denominational life.

The scope of God’s promise extends to all His people who are called by His name. That would logically include even the most nominal expression of the so-called Christian Church in the world today. The question is not “Is God willing to revive?” The question is “Do we genuinely want to live?”

Jesus said of Himself, “I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.” But many so-called Christians have grown satisfied with a paltry spiritual half-life based on half-truths fed them in half-hearted worship.

The decision belongs to each believer: Do you want to live? Do you believe in a living Lord? Do you want a living faith? Do you want to serve as a living stone? Do you want to be a part of a people belonging to God? Not just nominally called by the name “Christian” but authentic agents of Christ, offering your life daily for the advancement of His Kingdom purposes? If so, God promises to revive, again.

#### **Questions for consideration:**

1. What are signs of decay and death in your personal life, congregational life, denominational and national life that lead you to believe that now is the time to call out to God for revival?
2. What does God explicitly promise in II Chronicles 7:14?
3. Are there conditions? If so, what are they?

#### **For further study:**

Read about the revivals in the days of Samuel (I Samuel 7:1-13), Elijah (I Kings 18) and John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-14).

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## Week II: Condition #1 – Humility

In II Chronicles 7:14 God promises to hear, forgive and heal (revive) based on His people meeting four conditions: humble ourselves, pray, seek the Lord's face, and turn from wickedness to holiness. Let us consider each condition in turn.

God says He will hear, forgive and heal *if* His people will humble themselves.

Humility is about rightly understanding my relationship as a creature of God, the Sovereign Creator and Lord of all. Although there are more than a dozen words in Hebrew used in the Old Testament to deal with our aversion to and need for humility, the one used here is *kana'* and calls to mind the picture of one bending the knee or the neck in deference.

Those who would have the very attitude of Christ Jesus (Matthew 11:29; Philippians 2) would willingly, voluntarily and completely humble themselves before God.

Humility is about dying to self and living to Christ.

Where the world glorifies the ones who make a name for themselves, the Christian bows to the One whose name is above every other name.

Where the world gratifies the flesh with immediate pleasures, the Christian bows to the gravity of grace, offering even the body as a living sacrifice, holy temple, where God's Spirit would be pleased to dwell.

Where the world values silver and gold, the Christian values treasures stored up in heaven and a crown of righteousness that will be bestowed only in order that we might in turn have a gift worthy of rendering to the King.

Humility stands in stark contradiction to the world with eyes set on things above and hearts bowed in gratitude to the Savior of our souls.

### **Questions for consideration:**

1. In what areas of your life do you need to humble yourself before God?
2. Read and discuss Galatians 2:20, Matthew 19:16-30 and Matthew 5:3-12.
3. What do these passages teach us about living with a "perspective" of humility?

### **For further study:**

Read about the revivals in the days of Josiah (II Chronicles 34:1-33), Jacob (Genesis 35:1-15) and Moses (Exodus 32:1-34:7).

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## Week III: Condition #2 – Prayer

In II Chronicles 7:14, God says He will hear, forgive and heal *if* His people will pray.

Most Americans claim to pray. The question is to whom are they praying, for what are they praying, and in what spirit?

The kind of prayer referred to in II Chronicles 7:14 is intercession offered in the attitude of Samuel, “far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.” (I Samuel 12:23)

Most of us know how to make our appeal to God, to petition God for the things we want or perceive that we need. Most Christians have a “prayer list” by which they make their requests known to God. And the Father hears the prayers of His children. But that is not the sum of prayer.

Some also know how to utilize prayer as the doorway into intimate communion with God, simply remaining in God’s presence to enjoy Him, meditating, worshiping, adoring God for who He is.

But the “work” of prayer is that of interceding for the world. In the act of intercessory prayer the Christian pleads that God would stretch out His hand. In the ministry of intercession, the Christian strives with God in the cosmic conflict between God and the enemy. True intercession is spiritual warfare and takes the one praying into the reality of battle where evil is assaulting the Kingdom of God.

This is not casual prayer. This is not child’s play. This is war. One should enter into this level of intercessory prayer after having prepared oneself for spiritual battle. So, read Ephesians 6:10-20, suit up and stand firm.

### **Questions for consideration:**

1. For what and for whom did you pray today?
2. Would you describe your prayers primarily as petitions for yourself and those about whom you care, prayers of communion with God, or intercession for the Kingdom’s advance in the spirit of Ephesians 6?
3. Are you willing to become the kind of prayer warrior called for in II Chronicles 7:14? (If so consider Andrew Murray’s *The Ministry of Intercession*.)

### **For further study:**

Read about the revival in the days of Jehoshaphat (II Chronicles 20), Peter (Acts 2:1-47), Paul and Silas (I Thessalonians 1:2-10).

Use Psalm 85 as a “pattern prayer” as you pray with others for God to revive us again.

1. Ask God to grant restoration as in times past (85:1-3).
2. Ask God to grant us His joy and love in our times (85:4-7). The prayer here for salvation is not for justification (adoption through Christ into the family of God for the first time) but sanctification (a moment by moment surrender of self to the Lordship of Christ over all of life). This is a prayer that we might be delivered from the cultural captivity of our generation and become anew God’s own possession to be used as He wills to reach the world that He so loves.
3. Ask God to grant us His peace by His presence in our land (85:8-9).
4. Ask God to grant us His peace among His people (85:10-13).

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## Week IV: Conditions #3 – Seek His face; and #4 – Turn and rejoice

God says He will hear, forgive and heal *if* His people will seek His face.

Do we really “desire” God? (I Chronicles 28:9; 16:11)

Do we pant for God like a deer pants for water? (Psalm 42:1)

Do we crave God’s Word like a baby craves milk? (I Peter 2:2)

Are our hearts set on the things of this world or on God? (Luke 12:28-32)

Are our minds really set on the things which are above, where Christ is? (Colossians 3:1)

Are our eyes really fixed upon Jesus? (Hebrews 12:1-3)

In what ways are we intentionally drawing near to Him? (James 4:8)

In what ways are we seeking first the Kingdom of God? (Matthew 7:7)

Only when we seek the Lord with all our heart will He be found (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13).

Finally, in II Chronicles 7:14, God says He will hear, forgive and heal *if* His people will turn from our wicked ways to the way of holiness.

The fourth condition that would pave the way for revival, should God choose to send it, is the genuine repentance from evil. Certainly, God does not judge the outward appearance but the heart. And certainly we run the risk of being whitewashed tombs whose outward actions appear good when in fact we’re rotten to the core. However, it is equally true that God will not be mocked and that true confession shows forth in changed living.

John’s refrain was “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near” (Matthew 3:2). Paul admonished the people, “everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness” (II Timothy 2:19). Isaiah rebuked the people of God on God’s behalf, “Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!” (Isaiah 1:16-17).

To repent is to turn: Away from evil, sin and idolatry; toward Christ, holiness and fruitful living.

### **Questions for consideration:**

1. Do I really desire God – to the willing sacrifice of what else?
2. What is the evidence in my life that I have genuinely turned from sin to Christ? (Without evidence, do I need to confess anew that I am really just paying Jesus lip service?)

### **For further study:**

Read about the revivals in the days of Asa (II Chronicles 14-16), Zerubbabel (Haggai 1; Zechariah 1:1-6), and Peter (Acts 10) as well as the revivals in the days of Hezekiah (II Chronicles 30:1-9), Philip (Acts 8:1-25), Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8).

**Additional resources:** *Revive us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual Renewal*, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Broadman & Holman, 1999; and *Revival*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Crossway Books, 1987.

### **EDITOR’S NOTE:**

Carmen Fowler is the author of the equipping section that appears in the center of each issue of *The Layman*.

Your feedback is greatly appreciated as future studies are planned.

Share your comments with Carmen via e-mail at [cfowler@layman.org](mailto:cfowler@layman.org), call 1-800-368-0110 or write her at P.O. 2210, Lenoir, NC 28645.