

ONECRY

BUILDING A CULTURE OF
PRAYER AND REVIVAL IN
YOUR CHURCH



***Building a Culture of Prayer and Revival in Your Church* by Bill Elliff**

Copyright © 2021 by *OneCry*: A Nationwide Call for Spiritual Awakening.

All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce or use this work in its entirety, provided nothing is changed, no fee is charged, and credit is attributed to *OneCry*. Please address any questions to:

OneCry
P.O. Box 31
Buchanan, MI 49107
800-321-1538 // info@onecry.com

Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, and 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Links Listing

<i>7-Day Personal Revival Journey</i>	OneCry.com
<i>Personal Revival Checklist</i>	Onecry.com/personal-revival-checklist
<i>Prayer with No Intermission</i>	BillElliff.org/products/prayer-with-no-intermission-40-days-to-unceasing-prayer
<i>Prayer with No Intermission Small Group Resource</i>	BillElliff.org/pages/resources
<i>Revival Champions</i>	Onecry.com/champions

“Revival is an extraordinary work of the Spirit of God in the hearts of God’s people, producing extraordinary results” (Richard Owen Roberts). It is a sovereign manifestation of a merciful God. We cannot manipulate revival, but we can and must prepare for God’s extraordinary movement. In fact, God has made certain astounding promises for those who do:

“If My people . . . will humble themselves, and pray . . . then I will hear from heaven” ([2 Chronicles 7:14 NKJV](#)).

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you ([James 4:8](#)).

It is our job as spiritual shepherds to make room for God—first in our lives personally and then in the lives of those we oversee. The prophet Isaiah reminds us,

A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” ([Isaiah 40:3-5](#)).

So how do we prepare this highway in our life, our church, our sphere of influence, our city, our nation? How can we aggressively cooperate with God in developing an environment for revival and awakening, particularly in light of the spiritual emergency that surrounds us? How do we turn, pray, and unite together and help others do the same?

Turn!

“Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”

– President Ronald Reagan

(Spoken before the Brandenburg Gate in 1987 at the wall that had divided East and West Berlin for 26 years and was a symbol of Communist oppression. The gate was opened 29 months later.)

1. START PERSONALLY

When Jesus was calling out His first leaders, He gave us the order in which we are to fulfill our ministry:

He appointed twelve, so that they would **be with Him** and that He could **send them out** to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons ([Mark 3:14-15](#)).

Our first calling is to *be with Jesus*—to walk in intimacy with Him, hearing Him, learning from Him, drawing from the vast eternal resource of His life in us. Only intimacy gives us God’s fresh words and power.

Revival returns God to His rightful place, and this must first occur in our own lives if we are to lead others. A Church Revival Journey starts with you taking your own [Personal Revival Journey](#).

There is no substitute for time with God. We put this off, crowded by the busyness of life, and miss the very pathway that would bring revival to our souls and to the people we shepherd. Here are some ways we can accomplish this:

- **Daily time:** Let *nothing* steal daily time in God’s presence. If He awakens you early, get up. Develop this priority appointment with God, and see it as such, with no exceptions. It is here you will encounter the Reviver.
- **Extended time:** Develop a rhythm of regular retreats. Take a day monthly to find a place of solitude and listen long to the Lord. Read large portions of His Word; examine your soul in His presence. Do not crowd Him out with phone calls and emails and projects. Be *with* Him.
- **Fasting:** Life is loud. Our mind runs constantly, our emotions drive us, our will is aggressively waging a battle for control. Fasting humbles the soul ([Psalm 35:13](#)). It quiets our mind, will, emotions, and the competing voices around us so that we may give our attention to the Lord God and to seeking Him ([Daniel 9:3](#)). Fasting is often tied with revival in the Scriptures.

- **Cultivated communion:** Paul told us to “pray without ceasing” ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)). This must be possible, by God’s grace, or it could not have been commanded. Make it the ambition of your life, above all else, to be in constant communion with God, talking to Him incessantly throughout the day. Let prayer be the air you breathe, the atmosphere in which you live.
- **Spiritual examination:** Revival begins with remembering from where we have fallen and returning to our first Love ([Revelation 2:1-5](#)). Take time, with openness, to listen to the Lord regarding your current spiritual condition, and make confession and restitution in every corner that needs cleansing. Let the precious Holy Spirit reveal the groundwork of your heart.

Suggestions for Building the Culture:

1. Begin by completing the [7-Day Personal Revival Journey](#).
2. Set aside a day to spend with Jesus. Use the [Personal Revival Checklist](#) to do a fresh examination of your heart. Read large portions of God’s Word as He directs. Do not leave until God gives you permission. *Be with Him.*
3. As God directs, share humbly and transparently with other leaders and with your people what God is doing in your life. Ask them to pray that God would send revival to your own heart. Lead the way in humble acknowledgment of your need.
4. Begin to fast one day a week, crying out to God for personal and corporate revival.

2. REMOVE BARRIERS

Isaiah believed ([Isaiah 40:3-5](#)) that the preparation of God’s highway began with some road-work. Obstructions abound. Our job as spiritual foremen is to study the landscape of our church or ministry, and discover both the heart and structural barriers.

- **Heart barriers:** Do you know the heart issues that are most prevalent in your church or ministry? Do they include pride, materialism, immorality, unforgiveness, robbing God, quenching or grieving the Spirit? Ask God to help you discern these issues. Then, like the prophets of old, let God fill you with His fresh messages and ideas for the people you shepherd. Deliver God’s Word fearlessly, in grace and truth.

Model a life filled with God’s Spirit, and see problems in the church as opportunities to teach. Such issues are not intrusions—they are opportunities for revival.

Don’t be afraid of fresh voices. Seek wise input to help you discern these heart attitudes and challenge those under your influence. Bring in teachers who can reinforce what needs to be said to your people.

Flood your small groups, and every area of your ministry, with materials on reviving the heart. Do everything you can to bring repentance and healing in needed areas.

- **Structural barriers:** We often fail to realize that practices we've adopted along the way (our "wineskins") may be hindering the work of the Spirit among us. God has given multiple "means of grace" to us to find and experience Him, both individually and corporately: the Lord's Table, baptism, preaching, worship, confession, testimony, community, solemn assemblies, fasting, witness—all of the practices illustrated in the early church.

These were intentionally given to the church. God knows what He is doing in instructing us to carefully lead our people into His presence utilizing these means. Which of these are missing in your ministry? What means of grace has God given you as a leader that you are not utilizing in your circle of influence?

One of the most common barriers is our unwillingness to take the risk of opening up our public gatherings to allow Christ's body to express itself in testimony, public confession (as needed), and prayer. Change the flow of your gatherings. Allow time for such ministry, shepherding it gracefully. Remove the barrier of a slick, tightly scheduled, programmatic service. God is a wonderful Leader when we give Him room. Above all, open the way for God to manifest His presence when you are together. Let the primary evaluation of all you do in your church be, "Was God there?"

Finally, seize the moments God gives. When God seems to "settle down" in a worship service or group gathering, and His presence is evident, tarry there. Give God room to do His work without rushing the moment.

Suggestions for Building the Culture:

1. Do a spiritual inventory of your church or ministry to identify the primary heart issues. Talk and pray with a select group of key leaders to identify the heart barriers to God's manifest presence.
2. Schedule a retreat with other key leaders to identify the primary spiritual and methodological barriers to prayer and revival in your ministry. What needs to be emphasized? What needs to change?
3. Let God build fresh messages or series of teaching on these areas. Teach a message or series on revival and awakening. Do a 40-day study on prayer such as [Prayer with No Intermission](#). (View the small group resources [here](#).) Keep preaching on these themes, as God directs, until He manifests Himself.
4. Provide some room, as God directs, for sharing, prayer, and testimonies. Stand by the microphone as people come so you can shepherd these moments.
5. Plan a Sunday to hold a solemn assembly in your service.

Pray!

1. DEVELOP INTERCESSORY RHYTHMS

When you study the biblical and historical accounts of revival and spiritual awakening, you will discover some amazing constants. The most prevalent is that every revival has been preceded by increasing prayer. As Matthew Henry observed, “When God intends great mercy for His people, the first thing He does is set them a-praying.”

How can you help build a culture of revival? *Pray*. Pray personally, pray corporately.

This presents a dilemma for most pastors and ministry leaders, because prayer seems to be our people’s last resort, not their first response. Our self-centered, humanistic Christianity balks at prayer. It seems needless until we’re in crisis.

But we must start somewhere. Most importantly, we must begin in our own closet, and then seek to build concentric circles, pulling people closer and closer into the heart of God. You might be surprised to discover that there are more people interested in the right kind of prayer than you realize.

As spiritual leaders, we should be the greatest experts in our community on prayer. Our job, after all, is to “devote ourselves to **prayer** and to the ministry of the word” ([Acts 6:4](#)). We will be surprised how much of the other components of our leadership are automatically directed and resolved as we really pray. If you don’t know how to lead a prayer meeting well . . . learn! Ask God to teach you, and study available resources. Many of these can be found at [OneCry.com](#).

The First and Second Great Awakenings were marked by a wonderful and sustainable prayer pattern that would serve us well to study and develop. The people committed themselves to the following rhythms of revival praying:

- a. **Weekly Prayer:** One day a week, time was set aside for personal or small group prayer devoted to revival and awakening.

Take time in your worship services to allow breathing room for prayer. Open the altar, filled with leaders who know how to help others, for times of ministering to needs, praying over individuals, and praying for revival and awakening, as God directs.

- b. **Monthly Prayer:** First Mondays or Wednesdays were given to prayer for revival and awakening by individual churches.

Begin a monthly prayer meeting with your people. Open the doors of the church for people to come and unite in prayer for revival and spiritual awakening.

- c. **Quarterly Prayer:** Congregations came together to pray. In fact, often all the churches in a community would sign a covenant for First Monday prayer.

There is only one church in each city, and we should be acknowledging and praying with each other. “All the house of Israel lamented [**cried out**] after the LORD” ([1 Samuel 7:2b](#)). This takes time to develop, but it could begin by simply inviting one or two other pastors to combine your congregations in a First Monday prayer meeting on a quarterly basis. How awesome it would be to see, in time, the whole church in the city united in periodic prayer!

- d. **Annual Prayer:** They called other churches to join them.

Calling our churches to join with God’s church across the nation in prayer for national spiritual awakening is vital. The first Thursday in May has been wonderfully designated for this very purpose, the National Day of Prayer. Currently, over 55,000 prayer events are held on this day.

Duncan Campbell of the Hebrides Revival told a young pastor, Bill McLeod of Canada, that he believed God wanted to use his church in revival, but that it would begin when attendance at his prayer meeting exceeded his Sunday morning attendance. McLeod believed him and began working toward that end. The day came when their prayer meeting did exceed their Sunday morning attendance . . . and God moved in ways that sparked the Canadian Revival in 1971.

Suggestions for Building the Culture:

1. Begin personally praying for revival in your church, city, and nation, every day. Don’t expect those you lead to do something you are not doing.
2. Ask the Lord and your other leaders what steps can be taken immediately to begin developing a rhythm of prayer in your church or ministry. You probably cannot begin all of this at once, but **start!**
3. Start a revival prayer group that meets weekly or monthly.
4. Institute First Monday or Wednesday prayer. Don’t be discouraged by small numbers, but ask God for real intercessors to join you.
5. Jumpstart your church with 21 days of fasting and prayer. Or, utilize [Prayer with No Intermission](#), a 40-day church-wide experience.

2. LEARN GOD’S WAYS

God can do whatever He desires, whenever He desires, however He desires. His ways are higher than ours. But He has illustrated through our history a pattern of His ways, particularly as it relates to the cycle of revival. We see this pattern of vitality, decline, judgment, crying out, repentance, and revival repeated again and again. Understanding God’s ways

enlarges and directs our praying, preaching, and leading. It builds us and those we lead to cry out in greater faith, and it helps us cooperate with God as He moves.

You can learn these ways of God, and you must. Educate yourself and your people to be able to understand and cooperate with God's activity. The best tool for this learning, of course, is His Word. Study the manifold accounts of revival in Scripture.

Read great revival literature—particularly the historical accounts of revival—asking God to open your eyes to His patterns. It is interesting to note that the great Welsh Revival of 1904–05 was preceded by several conventions and leaders who were teaching and preaching on revival themes. This prepared the soil for the worldwide visitation that was about to occur, as they helped churches and leaders understand God's ways.

Suggestions for Building the Culture:

1. Study and preach on the revival accounts in Scripture. Make your own growing list of the ways of God in revival.
2. Build and study your own revival library. Seek to become an expert (in your area) on God's ways in revival, for His glory.

Unite!

1. FIND A FRIEND, BE A FRIEND

Movements are born and history is changed among friends. God's plan of discipleship is non-negotiable and amazingly effective. If you want to grow in your understanding related to revival and spiritual awakening, find someone who is a step ahead of you. Seek them out. Spend a day with them. Call them for advice and counsel. Pursue people in your life who will disciple you in this area.

Also, commit yourself to disciple others around you. If you are a pastor, disciple your staff and key leaders in these truths. When you go to a conference, take them with you. Read books together. Pray together.

If you are a Christian business leader, look for those around you who seem hungry for the things of God, and begin to intentionally develop a friendship that will open opportunities for mentoring them in God's ways of revival. Help them discover the path to personal revival.

Suggestions for Building the Culture:

1. Ask God to place on your mind the name of a potential mentor. Take them to lunch, spend time with them, and see what God develops. Concentrate on developing a growing friendship.
2. Gather a group of pastors, or your staff, and go through the [Revival Champions](#) material, a once-a-month study that will teach you about prayer and revival.

2. THINK "KINGDOM"

There is one church in your city. Only one. It is comprised of many expressions and streams, but it is marked by those who have been saved by God's grace and who believe His Word. Movements of genuine revival are always marked by cooperation and unity across denominational, ethnic, generational, and cultural lines.

If you think that your church alone possesses the keys to revival, you are not only mistaken, but you are arrogantly aborting the marvelous beauty and diversity of Christ's kingdom. So think larger.

Oneness (which was Christ's final prayer in John 17 for His body) is not obtained organizationally but organically; and praying together is the quickest means of unifying pastors, leaders, and ministries. In God's presence, barriers fall and hearts unite.

It is important to note that unity in a city does not mean we must lay aside our unique doctrinal understandings; it means we must prioritize them. There are some issues that we

should die for (e.g. salvation by faith alone, the authority of Scripture), but there are other areas that are not central to our unity. We can agree to disagree on peripheral interpretations and practices.

How glorious for the world to see a united church in a city, in love with Christ and each other! How powerful when all the churches in many cities have been joined in prayer and one cry for revival. And how God honors this kingdom-mindedness! It is here that He commands the blessing ([Psalm 133](#)).

If we want revival, we must intentionally pursue God together. And we must have God's kingdom movement mentality.

Suggestions for Building the Culture:

1. Start small, but start. If you are a pastor, invite a small group of pastors to join with you for prayer. Continue this, and let God expand the group. Retreat on a two- or three-day prayer summit. If you are a Christian business leader, look for like-hearted businessmen, and begin a monthly prayer group for revival in your city.
2. Pray and think of ways, under God's leadership, that the whole church in your city could become a vibrant community of prayer: city-wide quarterly prayer gatherings, National Day of Prayer events, etc.
3. Pray publicly in your services for the other church gatherings in your area. Become their greatest cheerleaders.

3. PERSEVERE!

Leaders who understand revival know that there are always the common marks of united prayer and persevering leadership in any movement of awakening. You are called to be a persevering leader. You may only see "a cloud as small as a man's hand" ([1 Kings 18:44](#)), but your perseverance in building a culture for revival is the right thing to do in this critical hour.

You may not see the reviving of God in your day, but your cooperation with God's activity will help those who are willing, and it may prepare the highway on which the Lord manifests His presence in power. God is not limited—national revival could easily start in your church and city!