

Preaching Toward Revival

by Bill Elliff

Every pastor wants to see spiritual movement among his people. And we all long for an outpouring of genuine revival.

One of the primary means of grace God has given to see His people revived is the anointed exposition of His Word through preaching. We cannot manipulate revival results through our preaching, but we can aggressively cooperate with God in preaching that opens the way for revival. How can we preach *toward* revival?

Learn the Ways of God in Revival

As pastors, we should understand God's patterns in times of revival. God can work however He desires, but His activity in revival has been fairly consistent through the centuries. Every pastor should study church history and biblical accounts of God's ways.

As students of revival, we become wonderfully equipped to see and cooperate with God when He begins to move. We are able to rightly discern the times and apply the proper spiritual truth. We are better equipped to preach in line with His activity.

Ask God What Your People Need

Our opportunity to preach comes around every seven days, and if we aren't careful, we can lapse into preaching messages (even someone else's) that are not God's word "as fits the occasion" (Ephesians 4:29). We must take time to pray deeply for direction in our preaching.

We should invite our leadership teams to pray and think through this with us. Include this simple prayer: "Lord, what do YOU want to say to Your people?"

God knows exactly what His sheep need and what will lead them to revival. Let Him lead. You might be surprised at His direction.

Preach on Revival Themes and Passages

The Bible is filled with accounts of revival and revival themes. Isn't God's whole purpose to bring people to Himself? In these desperate times, it would seem that all of us should be preaching on this theme regularly.

Truths that lead to revival abound in Scripture and can be found in almost any passage. You could preach a single message or a series on any of the following texts:

- Humility James 4:6-10; Luke 18:9-14
- Repentance Psalm 51; Acts 3:19; 2 Corinthians 7; Revelation 2
- Brokenness Psalm 51; Matthew 5:5
- Surrender Luke 14:25-35; Philippians 1:20-21; Acts 20:17-27
- Intimacy with Christ Luke 10:38-42; Mark 3:13-15; Philippians 3
- Prayer for revival 2 Chronicles 7; 1 Samuel 7; Psalm 85
- The role of the Holy Spirit (multiple biblical passages on the baptism, filling, quenching, grieving, gifts, fruit, etc. of the Spirit)

Many passages lend themselves to great revival preaching, although the word *revival* is never mentioned. The following are just a few that speak to issues of personal revival:

- James 4
- Matthew 5:1-12
- Psalm 51
- Isaiah 40
- Revelation 1-5 (Preach through the letters to the churches. What would God say to the church in America today if He wrote a similar letter?)

There are other passages that give clear accounts of corporate revival. Powerful messages can be preached [on the need for revival, what preceded revival, what messages God brought, how the people responded, and what revival brought:

- 1 Samuel 1–7, under Elijah
- Jonah 1–4, under Jonah
- Nehemiah 8–9, under Ezra
- 1 Kings 18, Elijah at Mt. Carmel
- Acts 2 (Although Pentecost is a singular, unique event, the elements and results of revival are beautifully portrayed.)

Illustrate with Great Stories of Revival

There is nothing that illustrates better than stories of life change and of God’s supernatural movement. Most of our people have no context for revival and have a hard time believing in God’s extraordinary work. We need to build their faith.

In the 1857–58 revival, 10,000 people were coming to Christ weekly for months on end in New York City alone. Over 1 million people came to Christ in America in two years, with a population of 30 million.

What would a similar revival look like today? This one illustration from our history reminds us of God’s ability. There are a multitude of [great accounts of past revivals](#) that can build the faith of your people to pray for another outpouring on our nation.

Also, at www.OneCry.com we will be sharing current stories of what God is doing around the nation. (Please [send us your stories](#) of what God is doing in your area.)

Preach Toward a Response

Great preaching has powerful, clear exposition of the text; illustrations that make the truth come alive; and strong, direct application. We should constantly be asking, “So, what? What does this mean for you? What will you do about this today?”

Give people handles—bullet ideas of how this truth can apply to them. If people hear God’s Word and are not led to respond to it, this quenches the Holy Spirit, as they “despise” or treat lightly what God is saying (1 Thessalonians 5:19-20). It’s our job, as much as possible, to give them access ramps to get in on God’s activity.

Provide room for response. [Open a microphone](#) for testimony or prayer. Call people to the altar for prayer.

I recently heard Jim Cymbala of the Brooklyn Tabernacle say that many pastors come to their Tuesday night prayer meeting and want to instantly replicate it at their church, but that doesn’t happen. He said, “Preach shorter, and open up your service for seasons of prayer over your people. Bring the prayer experience into the morning service.” Great counsel.

Finish your message and invite the people to turn in groups of two or three and pray the message into their lives and the lives of others. Have them take five minutes to fill out a spiritual inventory based on what God said, and write a prayer response. Always ask, “How can we help these people respond to and experience the truth God is saying?” God will give you creative ideas if you’ll open up to Him.

As you hear stories of revival among your people, give them the microphone and let them tell what God is doing. Nothing will open the hearts of your people more quickly. They expect to hear from you, but hearing a fellow church member share an experience of personal revival has a profound effect.

Pray for God’s Anointing

Richard Owen Roberts once said that revival can be summarized in one word: **GOD!** Revival is God speaking, God moving, God restored to His rightful place, God manifesting Himself among His people and a watching world. What your people need is not more of you, but more of Him. So pray for God to anoint you with His power and unction so that **He** is seen and heard through your preaching.

And don’t forget the power of fasting. Fasting humbles the soul and refocuses the life, and God has called many men to fast in preparation for seasons of increased usefulness. Pray that a mighty burden would come upon you that would drive you to preach with passion and power. God has used simple men to bring mighty seasons of revival in the past . . . and He can use you.

Revival always begins somewhere. It just may be that national revival will begin in your congregation . . . *and it just might happen this Sunday!*