

REFLECTOR

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“Holding Forth the Word of Life”

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Altar Fires : Intercession

Armin Gesswein (1907-2001)

There is an unmistakable [need] for the revival of intercession in our land and for our land. If it seems strange, though, that our desired general reformation has yet to materialize, it may be that our intercession [has become] too general. I once heard of a preacher who told those who were gathered before him: “We are not here tonight to pray for some big, general revival. We are here to be revived.”

The New Testament does not focus on some “great general revival,” not even on revival in the total Body of Christ, as much as this is needed. What appears consistently in the New Testament is a revelation that the individual Christian and the local church are the focus of the Holy Spirit’s awakening.

God’s call is not first of all to revival. It is a call to the praying that brings revival to our churches. **God’s fire is altar fire.** We must again build up the altars of repentance and prayer that are broken down. Only the living God can revive us, but He has also made ample provisions for the kind of praying that brings revival.

Why is it that churches so seldom catch the vision of prayer which is on the heart of Jesus and His Church? He built a prayer meeting—a praying congregation. When the Spirit of prayer departs from our churches, the glory of the Lord departs from with it. The world gets into our churches, and we get into the business of problem-solving instead of life-changing. The ministry of Jesus went deeper than problems. His analysis was not just human and horizontal; it went to the taproot. He knew what was in man. He changes people and sets them on a new course.

I once read a book entitled *Nine Bad Shots in Golf*. To my surprise, I found I had all nine of them. But greater still was my surprise when I discovered that one good shot could cure all nine. There are few problems in our churches that prayer cannot solve. One good prayer meeting can cure most of them and bring about the revival we say we need and want.

It all comes down to this: **revival in our churches is as near as our prayer meetings.** Not only Scripture but all of Church history shows that no revival has come any other way. We must build up the prayer life of our churches in every way; the personal prayer life, the praying of prayer partners, the family altars, every kind of group praying and prayer fellowships and meetings of the total assembly. “He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Can we possibly improve on Jesus’ plan for revival in our churches? John Chrysostom said it well: “God can refuse nothing to a praying congregation.”

CHURCHES ON FIRE (Part 1)

Let us not wait for some kind of a general revival in the land before seeking God to revive our local congregations. We do not need a forest fire to get a fire going in our fireplaces.

Our praying for revival has gotten into a rut, a stalemate. Nothing much is happening. I do not know of anything about which we pray for more than about revival, and yet we receive very little by way of answer. This is sad, especially because God wants revival with all His heart. He has given it priority in the Scriptures.

General praying is never effective. There is no real faith and expectation. And prayer without faith is dead.

WHERE THE FIRE STARTS. In the New Testament God leads us another way. If we go that way He will answer immediately. The Lord brings revival (and most everything else) in and through local *congregations*.

It is strange how we get away from what is so plain in Scripture. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the *churches* (Revelation 2-3, NIV).

The local congregation is the basic unit for the great and mighty working of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. When we recognize this, our praying becomes clear and definite. So does our faith. The New Testament reverses what we are doing. It calls us in loud voices: *get your churches on fire!*

To start a fire in a fireplace all we need is a little match. God looks for

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PERSPECTIVE

247th Anniversary

July 4, 1776

PRAY! USA!



I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

We are certainly living in the perilous times foreseen by Paul’s revelation in **2 Timothy 3:1**. Christianity and the Church are under attack by fellow Americans! Who would have thought this scenario? Our hope is praying churches. To that end, I am devoting my space to **Armin Gesswein’s** call to pastors and churches. I have witnessed during the past forty years what happens when churches become praying churches. For example, a few years ago, **Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, Lexington, Kentucky**, under the leadership of **Dr. Hershael York** (now Dean of the School of Theology, Southern Theological Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky and pastor of Buck Run Baptist Church, Frankfort, Kentucky) decided to dedicate an entire year to prayer. The launching event was an all-day Sunday (six hours) prayer seminar the first Sunday in January with the theme, “A Day in God’s Courts.” The Holy Spirit moved mightily. Dr. York reported a record number of baptisms that year and urged other churches to follow their example. In today’s powerless churches, it is unlikely that more than five minutes is devoted to prayer. I see no hope unless churches become praying churches.



Yours in Calvary love,

J. Gordon Henry

“Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?” (Psalm 85:6)

PROGRESS REPORT. THANKS.

Continue to pray earnestly for Adam and his team. A major prayer need is for doors to be opened for Adam and others to conduct prayer seminars. Continue to pray earnestly for the work in other nations. Pray for funds to be available to supply Prayer Seminar Workbooks to these teachers. Our desire is to continue establishing **Lighthouses of Prayer** around the world to push against the spiritual darkness that is deepening.

Doorkeeper and other financial support should be sent to the Baltimore address: THE PRAYER SEMINAR, P.O. BOX 42038, BALTIMORE, MD 21258-2038. Draft your checks to “THE PRAYER SEMINAR” (now the official name for J. Gordon Henry Ministries). For your convenience, response envelopes are included with the monthly **Reflector**.



someone whom He can ignite. John Wesley was asked what his secret was. He answered: "I just get on fire and people come and watch me burn!"

Next to the little match I put some paper or other simple combustible material. Fire follows the law of combustion. So does revival. Start alone. Then get another and another and another to pray with you, and soon the fire builds. Then it will ignite others in the church. A pastor told me that he announced to his congregation that he was going to start praying each evening for a revival greatly needed in his church. He invited anyone who would join him. At first about a dozen people came, but most of them stopped coming. Then people who were serious about revival came back, and little by little, other joined in. The Holy Spirit began to work, giving assurances.

God led the church to invite a certain evangelist to hold a series of meetings. He was not a big-name person. Revival broke out. Conviction of sin was deep. Many repented and were converted. The pastor told me there was a special mark on those who came to Christ during that revival.

The pastor said something else. Before that revival, when he and others on the visitation team would call on neighbors around the church to invite them to attend no one responded. Doors were closed on the callers. But now the same doors were open and some of those same people came to church and to Christ. **A church on fire can light up a whole neighborhood.**

God's fire is not wildfire, nor promiscuous fire, nor brush fire, nor forest fire, nor prairie fire. It is **altar fire**. We must build up the broken altars of prayer again, as Elijah did. "The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously: it must not go out" (**Leviticus 6:13**). Revival in our churches is as near as the praying which brings it.

Fire has two tendencies. Either it burns on or it dies out. To keep a fire burning we must simply *keep on doing* what we did to get it started. We must feed the flame.

THE WIND OF THE SPIRIT. We have all noticed that good draft perks up a poor fire and quickly flames it again. That is what prayer will do. In Norway's revivals the people would pray: "Let the Spirit of prayer rest on the congregations." That is the secret. That is Pentecost (**Acts 1-2**). It spread in a hurry because the wind of the Spirit is so strong, due to earnest praying.

And where does the fire go? Before He went to Heaven, Jesus outlined exactly how and where it would spread: "In Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (**Acts 1:8**).

I do not think these early believers had any idea that one congregation would scatter its holy fire into the whole world but Jesus said it would. IT DID! No one reading this can even imagine how much will happen when God revives our churches.

CHURCHES ON FIRE (Part 2)

Someone asked Dwight L. Moody how he could have a revival in his church. "Build a fire in the pulpit" was his quick reply. Strangely, the wind of the Spirit blew the other way at Pentecost. It blew from the pew to the pulpit. However, this indicates **real revival** is in the church. It is a good sign when the Spirit is evident in the body of the congregation and not only in the pulpit.

Most preachers are trained to think of spiritual progress as moving from the pulpit to the pew. Consequently, most believers are allowed to become bleacher Christians, spectators and not participants.

Do not misunderstand me. There must be preaching, and it must be strong. But strong preaching on repentance with weak praying will misfire or even backfire. Preaching ignites in the atmosphere of prayer. The praying congregation lifts and inspires the preacher. The whole meeting is different when the congregation is carrying the preacher, not when the preacher must work like a locomotive to get a church going.

The Holy Spirit can "congregationalize" His mighty power. Such a congregation produces "mass energy." We must work from the pew to the pulpit as well as from the pulpit to the pew. That is the lesson of Pentecost.

Peter, the preacher at Pentecost, is not even mentioned until **Acts 2:14**. Before that he was in the congregation, getting on fire with the other members. He had not preached for over fifty days. He had backslidden badly and was now fully restored, revived and recommissioned. In **Acts 1**, he had just led the powerful prayer meeting on earth and now he was set on fire with the rest of the praying praying members. He did not even have time to prepare a message but he was prepared by God. He then preached his message pulpit to the pew. That is the lesson of Pentecost.

The Spirit-filled congregation as well as Peter preached. Thousands were convicted of sin, and about 3,000 Jews were converted to the Messiah. That is revival.

Back to First Things. If we procrastinate and postpone, we are without excuse! We may try to blame a lack of revival on the "great apostasy." Others leave revival up to the "sovereignty of God" (i.e., "He will send such awakening to the Church when He chooses"). None of these hurdles kept the early Church from praying its way through the Pentecost. Others insist we cannot promote a revival. Evangelism—yes, revival—no. "God must send revival."

We must listen to God and do what He tells us to do. Get those prayer meetings built up! Certain means must be used, call it "promotion" or what we will. Jesus did not always walk on water; He used a boat!

Jesus is now walking and talking and working in the midst of His churches (**Revelation 1-3**). His feet are on fire and in His powerful right hand He is holding the ministers of seven congregations. He wants to fire them up, along with their churches. He wants to make them lampstands with enough holy light to light up their cities for God! He is calling these churches back to first things, calling them to repent, to get back to their "first love" and "first works." I know that it is difficult to get a lukewarm church on fire when the whole culture is lukewarm. But that is what the Lord was doing when He commanded the Laodicean church to "be zealous ... and repent" (**Revelation 3:19**).

It all goes back to our prayer meetings. They reveal the "first love" and the "first works." They are number one in the mind of Jesus. We should not need a bunch of sermons to wake up a congregation for prayer. We have done that with poor results. Jesus never preached a single sermon on holding prayer meetings. And yet He put together the most powerful prayer meeting in the Bible. He simply commanded ("charged"—a military term) every member to go and they went!

I did not hear a sermon on the importance of a prayer meeting. A plain word from Jesus was enough for me. At once I made a decision to get involved in prayer meetings. In fact, the first prayer meeting I ever attended was one I started myself. That decision changed my life.

How to Start. What then should we do? Let us get our boards and responsible leaders together, share God's Word on this, repent of our forms of prayerlessness and seek His way for building a praying congregation. Then let us pursue the matter with zeal!

My burden is for revival in every church. They want it. The next step: Prayer [seminars] annually. Every Church should have a prayer coordinator for constant prayer build-up of every kind.

Sincerely yours,

Armin Gesswein

Notes from My Bible

- Note 6079.** Prayer is the work that must come before all other work.
- Note 6080.** God has provided armor to protect us when we go to the prayer closet (where the spiritual battle is fought) but He does not put the armor on for us. See **Ephesians 5:10-18**.
- Note 6081.** It is not easy to pray; it is easier to be a preacher, a youth worker, elder, deacon, teacher, visitor.
- Note 6082.** Satan would rather you do anything than pray and has battle plans to defeat your prayer life.
- Note 6083.** Study **James 4:7**. It is true that you are to resist the devil as stated in **James 4:7b** but this act is predicated by **James 4:7a**—"Submit to God" which involves conviction followed by repentance and followed by confession of specific sins before resistance becomes effective.

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers."
1 Thessalonians 1:2

THANKS FOR YOUR PRAYER
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