

There Will be No Birth Without Travail

I was young, intellectual, self-assured, secretly prideful but broken. In the midst of my pain, I encountered God in a life-changing experience. That encounter created not just hunger but desperation for more of God. That desperation led me to an amazing church in Detroit, Michigan, one filled with God's manifest presence and power.

Myrtle D. Beall, affectionately known as "Mom Beall," birthed and led that church, Bethesda Missionary Temple, which became the fifth largest church in the United States at the time. Most astonishing was that through travailing prayer, she birthed a revival in 1948 that rocked the city as well as the nation. She came to be known as the mother of the Latter Rain revival.

She was a stellar woman of prayer, releasing life-changing revelation, miracles and direction. Captivated by her incredible God-given mantle and anointing, I longed to apprehend everything she possessed. Not only did I enter Bethesda Missionary Temple's ministry school, but I sought to learn to pray as she did. Her knowledge of the Word coupled with her prayer life transformed multitudes inside and outside the church.

I ventured into a small prayer meeting to learn to pray as she did. Imagine a 29-year-old amid about 12 to 15 older people. I was university educated, a professor, yet desperate to learn to pray in a way that birthed the miraculous, ushered in revivals.

Overwhelmed at first by the group's intensity, volume, abandonment and simultaneous praying, I "caught" travailing prayer. It positioned me on a trajectory of life-transforming

experiences, not only in my own life but others' as well. Travailing prayer became my way of life. I wanted to see what Mom Beall saw. I wanted to experience what she did. And it began to happen.

A Burden Placed on Us by God

First, I learned that travailing prayer can't be learned through a book. I "caught" it. How? By positioning myself with others who knew and practiced it. I had to either jump in and start praying as the prayer group did or leave. Like them, I prayed in tongues, just as loudly as they did to drown them out. It was like jumping off the high dive at age 6: When I did, something happened. I was overtaken by the Holy Spirit. I caught it!

I also learned I could not go into travailing prayer at will as we do with many other practices in the Christian life. In the Psalms, David often said, "I will praise the Lord." And Holy Spirit works in us "both to will and to do His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13b). But only He moves us into this kind of prayer. And almost always, the call to travailing prayer is heralded by a sense of unusual or extreme discomfort, serious concern, upset or agony about something or someone.

I almost always start out my prayer with praise and worship, declaring the greatness, majesty, strength and might of God. That often leads into a place where Holy Spirit lights upon me, transitioning me into a place where He hijacks my prayer. I stop praising and slip into a realm where travail pours out of me like water from an unstopped well. I am borne along by Holy Spirit, and I continue until the flow stops and the answer or breakthrough comes. The burden lifts.

The word "travail" is found in both the Old and the New Testament in both Hebrew and Greek. Summarized, the words mean to "birth children, torture, very hard work, intense pain, agony, torment." In other words, when the call to travail

comes, strong emotions accompany it. We feel as though something is terribly wrong, burdening or tormenting us. We may even feel mentally oppressed or depressed.

People in travail may initially think something is very wrong and try to escape what seems like an emotion. They try to shake off the feeling, but it only intensifies. They may crawl in bed, try to watch a movie—anything to get rid of that agonizing feeling. But the only thing that will relieve it is to yield.

Travailing prayer is a burden placed on us by God that we must “pray through.” If we fail to do so, the burden will weigh us down until it crushes us. The whole purpose of travail is to birth something supernatural.

Birthing Prayer

In fact, travail is birthing prayer. It births revival, miracles, deliverance and a multitude of other things.

God Himself travails: “The Lord will go forth like a mighty man, He will rouse up His zealous indignation and vengeance like a warrior; He will cry, yes, He will shout aloud. He will do mightily against His enemies ... I have for a long time held my peace, I have been still and restrained myself. Now I will cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant together” (Isa. 42:13-14, AMPC). Several biblical passages liken travail to the birthing process.

Travail is linked with wrestling, warring to birth the purposes of God. It’s radical, intense, loud, messy. It can even be physical, rolling on the floor, bending over in agonizing pain, intensely crying out. It can also be a silent burden we carry for days, even months. Several times I’ve carried an ongoing burden for America that required continued fervent prayer until the release came, months later.

Travail is also persevering and unrelenting. It’s linked with

the hope and expectation that releases faith. Love is the overarching motivation (1 Cor 13:13). Hebrews 11:6 (MEV) says, "without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

The widow in Luke 18 refused to let the judge sleep. He was cold-hearted, uncaring and godless, but she relentlessly pounded on his door until he responded. What a picture of persevering, determined persistence!

Years ago, I heard Kenneth Hagin speak of a woman in the church he pastored. At the end of each service, she would go to the altar, crying out and carrying on. His first thought was to stop her because she was disturbing the peace. However, he realized she was travailing in prayer to birth babies into the kingdom. If he ended her work, there would be no new spiritual births in the church.

Biblical Prayer

Scripture contains additional examples of travailing prayer. The apostle Paul mentioned travailing prayer in Romans 8:26b (TPT): "The Holy Spirit rises up within us to super-intercede on our behalf, pleading to God with emotional sighs too deep for words."

The Message Bible expresses it this way: "The moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He ... knows our pregnant condition."

Paul himself travailed, agonizing that Christ be formed in the Galatian believers. He groaned in prayer that they would be brought to maturity (see Gal. 4:19-20).

Jesus travailed in the Garden of Gethsemane over yielding to

His Father's will to drink the cup that meant death on the cross. He sweat great drops of blood as he agonized, begging God, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39b). But God's will was that He drink the cup of suffering to birth an eternal reward: salvation, deliverance, healing and life for all who would come to Him and accept Him.

Isaiah 53:11-12 (MSG) states: "Out of that terrible travail of soul, he'll see that it's worth it and be glad he did it. Through what he experienced, my righteous one, my servant, will make many 'righteous ones,' as he himself carries the burden of their sins. Therefore I'll reward him extravagantly—the best of everything, the highest honors—Because he looked death in the face and didn't flinch, because he embraced the company of the lowest ... took up the cause of all the black sheep."

Birthing is a painful process that can only be initiated by the Holy Spirit and completed by His power and presence. Travailing prayer's agonizing burden is only relieved by seeing the assignment through to birth.

With the birth comes great joy. John 16:21 declares that when a woman has finally delivered her child, she no longer remembers her anguish. Joy breaks forth to completion. Revivals are birthed by travailing prayer.

Prayer That Brings Revival

This is a historic time, a history-changing season. Many credible prophets and leaders are declaring we are entering the greatest harvest of souls mankind has known. We are in the God-zone of the second coming of the New Testament church. The first coming birthed the church from Pentecost to the ends of the earth through apostolic delivery, penetration and breakthrough to advancement.

We are now in a similar time, destined to be much greater than the first. Haggai 2:9 speaks about the glory of the latter

house as greater than the former. Revival and awakening—resulting in transformed people and nations—happen now.

Every significant revival and awakening in history was marked by a significant decline in morality, justice and godliness prior to the revival. That moral depravity gripped the hearts of godly men and women until they were deeply grieved, heartsick, burdened and even tormented, agonizing over the spiritual condition of the church and nation. Their discomfort drove them to travailing prayer, initiating fervent, heartfelt intercession that was both effective and unrelenting (James 5:16b).

Intense prayer led to the great Korean revival of 1907 that transformed the nation from Buddhist to Christian. Korea is now second only to the U.S. in mission-sending and has the largest church in the world, Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul.

Hearing the reports of the Welsh revival, missionaries in Korea began daily noon prayer for one hour a day. One man said, “We’ve been praying a month and nothing happened. So stop the praying. Go back to work.” Instead, the leaders lengthened the time to four hours, praying until revival broke out. That revival transformed a nation and brought multitudes to Jesus.

Evan Roberts prayed for at least 11 years before the revival that transformed Wales broke out. His brother said Roberts would groan and moan, crying out in his sleep for revival and refusing to give up. Through his travailing prayer, people wept agonizingly over their sin and confessed it, and coal mines became houses of glory. People went to the entryways of the coal mines, crying out because of the glory rising. They were saved, slain in the Spirit, healed, delivered and overcome with joy. Within one year, 90% of Wales was attending church.

The Scottish Hebrides revival started because two elderly, homebound women (ages 82 and 84) became so burdened by the state of the church that they began to travail. No young people attended the local church anymore, but the elders caught their burden and joined them in prayer. They travailed for weeks, then months, even throughout the night with no visible results.

One night in a barn, a young man stood up and read Psalm 24: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" (). Those present immediately fell to the floor under the power of God. In God's presence, they found themselves wanting, were broken, repented and saw revival break out. Duncan Campbell, the great preacher of this revival, said, "Revival is a community saturated by God."

Travailing births revival; without it, revivals won't erupt. Conviction spreads, triggering more intense prayer, confessing, restitution and reconciliation. Holiness breaks out. The fear of God is restored. Salvation, restoration, transformation and reformation roll like a tsunami across the land, going beyond revival to yield awakening.

Prayer That Yields Awakening

The Second Great Awakening changed America. Charles Finney, the revivalist God used to transform the northeast U.S. through revivals, fueled the fire of awakening through prayer. Rev. Daniel Nash, along with many others, prayed day and night for Finney and the revival, groaning and making all kinds of sounds as he travailed.

Finney and the Cane Ridge Revival kickstarted the Second Great Awakening, but travailing prayer birthed the movement. In the fields of Kentucky, 20,000 people would gather at a time, falling out under the power of God, confessing sin, crying, weeping, shaking and laughing. Multitudes were saved and transformed because people were burdened to travail until

revival burst forth. The Second Great Awakening renewed and transformed the nation.

We are now in another such time. God is calling forth travailing men and women to birth the greatest revival and awakening in history: the Third Great Awakening. Multitudes are lined up to find salvation, restoration, healing and deliverance. Our nation is waiting. Other nations are waiting. There has never been a day like this day.

Lamentations 3:12 (KJV) declares: "He hath bent His bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins." God is shooting out his travailing arrows to penetrate the hearts of men and women across the nations of the earth. He is capturing them to travail until revival and awakening are birthed in America and beyond. Reins speak of a directing force. Horses are broken so that the rider directs them by their reins.

God is looking to us. He wants to shoot His arrow into our hearts and direct us through His reins, leading us into life-changing travail. God is apprehending many in this hour to travail for the restoration of wholeness, holiness, righteousness, the fear of the Lord and the harvesting of multitudes.

Will you be one of those who yield to the call to travail?

Barbara J. Yoder *is the founding and overseeing apostle of Shekinah Regional Apostolic Center, a racially and culturally diverse church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She leads Breakthrough Apostolic Ministries Network and Global Legacy. She is the author of five books and has been featured on the cover of Charisma magazine.*