

# 10 Ways the Church Can Experience Revival Now

Most Christians I know want the church to experience revival. We just don't all agree on what revival looks like.

Back in the old days (the mid-1990s), I preached a few times at a small church (averaging 12 each Sunday) in eastern Arkansas. They had a rotation system that determined who would take the visiting speaker home for lunch, and one day my lot fell to two elderly ladies who made awesome roast beef.

As I sat in their living room visiting after lunch, they brought out some photo albums from the church's history. I was amazed to see crowds of people stuffed so tightly into the little white clapboard building that they were spilling out into the yard around the church, with small groups gathered around each window leaning in to hear an evangelist thunder forth the gospel.

The next few photos were of the mass baptisms they conducted in the White River—dozens had come to claim Jesus Christ.

Some argue that “revival” isn't about people being saved but about the church coming back to life. I agree, but the byproduct of the church coming to life is nearly always lost people knowing and claiming Christ as Savior, to the glory of God.

I had grown up in a similar tradition with loud evangelists, standing-room only crowds and mass baptisms in Clear Fork Creek in southern Kentucky (although when I was baptized as a kid, we had already installed one of those fancy new indoor baptistries).

I'll never forget those two ladies' question to me. “Pastor, why don't we see revivals like these anymore?”

My heart has hurt over their question since the day they posed it for at least two reasons.

First, I, too, hunger for a fresh, massive, community-shaking movement of the Holy Spirit of God.

But second, my heart hurts over their question because they weren't really asking, "Why doesn't God move like this anymore?" Whether they realized it or not, they were actually wondering, *Why doesn't a movement of God look like that anymore?* The difference is subtle, but worth exploring.

A similar experience happened to me when I was serving a church in Kentucky as pastor. A guest speaker and I made a short road trip to visit the old Red River Meeting House in Logan County, Kentucky.

In the year 1800, a Methodist preacher named James McGready began asking his three small congregations scattered along the Gasper River to fast every third Saturday and pray for revival. And their prayers were answered.

The open-air meetings drew thousands of seekers and worshippers who camped out across the rolling pasture land. McGready preached against the sins of his times and pointed people to the saving work of Jesus. That meeting spread to other places and became known as The Second Great Awakening.

Especially amazing is the fact that the location is quite remote. It's out in the country outside Russellville, the largest town nearby. And the Red River meeting house might hold a hundred people if they all inhaled. But thousands had once gathered in that spot to find life in Jesus.

As my friend and I explored the property a bit, we were joined by a small group of ladies who were gathering there for the purpose of praying every week for revival. Which is awesome! But as they expressed the sincere desire of their hearts, they kept asking an erroneous question: "Why can't we

have revival like that again today?"

## **Chasing the Wild Goose**

These questions, sincere but misguided, remind me of Mark Batterson's excellent book, *Wild Goose Chase*, in which Mark appeals to an old Celtic term for the Holy Spirit—"wild goose." The Celts believed the Holy Spirit was slightly elusive—not because He wishes to lose us, but because He wishes for us to seek and to find Him.

The problem is, the Holy Spirit sovereignly works when and where He wills. He is under no obligation at all to show up when and where we want Him to and work in the way we prescribe.

To put it another way, if revival happens, defined as God's Spirit sweeping through a community to draw people back to Himself to passionately live for Him, it probably won't look like it did before.

That's just the way of God. He does old things in new ways. This is why I don't ever expect to hear from a donkey, to see the Buffalo River part or to see a duplication of the events of the Day of Pentecost.

But I do expect God to move in response to the pleading of His people for revival.

In fact, I believe we've seen massive revival in our generation. We just haven't necessarily noticed it because we've been looking for the wrong signs of its coming.

## **God is Doing a New Thing**

Isaiah 43 is a message to the suffering people of Israel, and it presents a big "if." Isaiah is essentially telling the people,

*You've sinned. You've missed the point. You've turned away*

*from me. So I'm about to allow you to go through punishment, but ... Just as I delivered you as a nation before, I will do it again, if you will repent and return to me ..."*

God reminds the people of his previous works of deliverance.

"Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the mighty men (they shall lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick" (Is. 43:16-17).

But just as they begin to reminisce about the way things used to be, he interrupts their thoughts.

"But forget all that!" (Isa. 43:19).

Forget all that? But we need that kind of deliverance again! Forget all that? We want a repeat of those miracles. We desire a duplication of the great things previous generations experienced.

But really, forget all of that. Why? The prophecy continues.

"Do not remember the former things nor consider the things of old. See, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not be aware of it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert" (Is. 43:18-19).

Or, in a sense, God is doing an old thing (reviving His people) in a way we've not witnessed before. And rather than embrace it, we keep searching for the kind of revival we want to experience.

### **What Revival Might Look Like Today**

In 1980, Pastor Rick Warren and his wife, Kay, started a little church in their small apartment in Orange County, California with a small handful of people. On Easter Sunday

that year, a couple hundred people gathered for their big launch. Now, nearly thirty thousand gather at Saddleback Church.

And Saddleback has planted tons of churches, seen thousands of small groups form, thousands of people sent on mission trips to literally every nation on earth and has started over a dozen campuses in neighboring communities.

I'd say that's revival.

Around the same time, Bill Hybels assumed the leadership reins of a struggling church in Chicagoland and today, tens of thousands call Willow Creek home.

In the year 2000, eight pastors—Greg Surratt, Rick Bezet, John Siebeling, Stovall Weems, Chris Hodges, Billy Hornsby, Scott Hornsby, and Dino Rizzo—began to pray for a church-planting movement to be birthed. Greg was asking God to allow Seacoast Church to plant 2,000 churches while Chris Hodges and Rick Bezet were heading out to start the first two.

Now, the Association of Related Churches is hundreds of multiplying churches strong, representing tens of thousands of believers whose eternities have been secured by a massive gospel-sharing, life-giving movement of God.

But ... most ARC churches have drums. And stage lighting. And the feel is both casual and electric. And this scares us.

If it's loud and exciting, it must be manufactured, right? If it's large and growing, it must be because of an abandonment of biblical preaching for something more watered down, right?

People, We. Are. Missing. Out!

It isn't just Saddleback and Willow Creek and ARC. It isn't just megachurches and church planting networks.

Across America are hundreds of churches that are vibrant and

growing, life-giving, grace-saturated, truth-teaching and Spirit-filled. But their services are uncomfortable for so many of us who are still hanging out at the old log meeting house, waiting for God to do an old thing in an old way.

I refuse to be so attached the way things used to be culturally that I miss out on what God is currently doing spiritually.

And I hope that you refuse that way of thinking as well.

### **How to Experience Revival Now**

If you're a follower of Jesus, you likely crave a nation-sweeping, culture-changing revival as I do. And it's not only possible, it's happening all around us.

God's Spirit is moving. He's showing up and pouring out His power on His people.

How do we get in on what God is doing? Here are my suggestions. And as I'm sure you'll notice, they're not anything new:

1. Let go of our preconceived parameters for what is an acceptable movement of God.
2. Pray with an open heart, asking God to point out our sin and our shame.
3. Repent, confessing our sins to God and asking forgiveness in Jesus' name.
4. Fast, as a declaration of a "drop your fork" moment to recognize the God who can revive.
5. Seek Him. Not just an experience of Him, but Him. This is worship.
6. Watch for God to show up and work. It is, after all, His desire to save as many as will hear.

7. Practice discernment and guard against emotional but spiritually empty counterfeit revival.
8. Embrace churches and movements that don't look like yours, celebrating your differences.
9. Love the lost, the least and the last and adopt a Jesus-style ministry to the broken.
10. Grow broader, deeper, closer and stronger even as we grow larger.

God is absolutely doing an amazing work in the earth. He is empowering his people by His Spirit to share the gospel with this generation in sometimes surprisingly innovative ways.

Don't fight it or become consumed with the kind of pride that leads to nothing but criticism of everything God is doing.

Let's seek real revival together, now, shall we? {eoa}

*Along with his wife, Angie, **Brandon Cox** is planting Grace Hills Church in Bentonville, Arkansas, which has grown from a couple of families in July of 2011 to an average attendance of around 400 while sending people to plant locally and abroad. Brandon and Angie were sent out by Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, where Brandon served as a pastor while redeveloping the online, global community of .*

*For the original article, visit .*