

Prayer That Births Revival

“God doesn’t answer prayer. He answers desperate prayer.” I can still remember my feelings of shock and bewilderment as Leonard Ravenhill, the late church statesman, spoke these difficult words to me.

Of course God answers prayer, I thought. But after much reflection I’ve come to recognize what Ravenhill meant: Often we approach prayer with the wrong attitude.

If we’re honest with ourselves, we must admit that our prayers frequently degenerate into little more than religious incantations and shallow platitudes spoken out of a sense of religious duty. Yet the Bible compares prayer with the travail of childbirth.

It is, in essence, a passionate activity. I have found that it is often in times of desperation that I pray with a genuine passion to the Lord—a passion that allows no room for mediocrity or compromise.

That’s the kind of prayer that God answers.

In November 1996, God led me to organize a time of passionate, citywide prayer that became known as the Houston Prayer Mountain. For 40 days and nights, Christians gathered together across racial and denominational lines to pray, worship, repent and cry out for people to come to Christ.

One night, as men’s ministry leader Ed Cole spoke to the group, he pointed to one of the banners on the platform. It read, “.”— the acronym for “Pray Until Something Happens.” That banner reminded him, he said, of a woman in labor being coached to “push, push, push” during the final stages of delivery.

His comparison rang true to us. We sensed that we were in a

critical stage, pressing heaven for the birth of God's purpose for our city. In fact, the fourth chapter of Micah—which talks about a woman in labor and points to the process of “birthing” revival—was one of our themes.

Birthing Revival

Revival is coming—and it will arrive in one of two ways. It's interesting to note that the first part of Micah 4 is virtually identical to the first part of Isaiah 2, although the two chapters end differently. Micah 4 is a picture of *revival by birth*, while Isaiah 2 shows *revival by judgment*.

I believe it is God's desire to bring revival by birth—by our choosing it and pressing in for it—rather than by judgment—by His strong hand bringing us to our knees. Yet at times it may take a shaking to bring us to a place of genuine passions and intimacy with Him.

God's mercy is present even in His judgments. Better to be judged now than for eternity! For too long the church has tried to compensate on the outside—through programs, formulas and various styles of window dressing—for prayerlessness and a lack of truly changed character on the inside.

But what the Lord wants to do among us in our day is neither fleeting nor shallow; in the words of the children's song we sang often during the Prayer Mountain, it is “deep and wide.” For a move of God to be deep and wide, there must be a revival of prayer and of godly character among believers.

The Lord's desire is that we bear fruit and fulfill His destiny for our lives. This is possible only if we become desperate enough to stop covering up our fears, pains, insecurities and sin and allow Him to replace our compensatory facades with His healing virtue and power.

God wants to take off our “cosmetic Christianity,” our proverbial fig leaves. The first cover-up was not Watergate,

Whitewater or Lewinskygate; it was “Fig-gate,” as recorded in Genesis 3. We have been covering up ever since!

Instead of running to the Lord, our tendency is to cover up and hide from God. But God wants to change all that. He wants to satisfy the deep longing in our souls—in our spiritual wombs, if you will. He wants us to push.

Prayer Brings Intensity

More than 10 years ago, the Lord gave me a prophetic word that seems more appropriate now than when I received it in 1987. He showed me that we were being shaken by church and political scandals and by a constantly eroding foundation of morality and religious freedom.

I was reminded of Hebrews 12:25-29, which talks about a shaking so intense that only those things that cannot be shaken—those things built solidly upon the foundation of Christ’s character and Word—would be left standing. The purpose of this shaking is to purify and mold us, and to cause us to see things from God’s eternal perspective. God so desires that no one perish that He goes to great lengths to get our attention!

The Lord showed me that three things will take place through this shaking:

- He will bring His sheep and shepherds into line—except for those who reject His final call. The shepherds who have been off track will be shaken and brought back through the Lord’s stern, merciful and loving hand.
- Any “mountains” standing in the way of the gospel will be moved aside if they do not repent. Any “fig trees” that are only cosmetic—that fail to produce true fruit—will be removed unless they become productive again.
- The rain of the Holy Spirit will fall on those who, while perhaps feeling forsaken and weary in well doing,

nevertheless persevere through God's refining. Those who have sought to serve the Lord with sincerity and integrity, fighting the good fight with a love for God's people, will begin to receive the abundant resources necessary to perpetuate the gospel.

Having been faithful through all the trials, refusing to be moved from their stand on God's righteousness, they now will have the honor of being a part of a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

We have a great hope! When the children of Israel left Egypt they had a vision of hope, a promised destination. Jesus had a vision of hope that gave Him the determination to look beyond and endure the sufferings of the cross.

Likewise, we can look beyond our circumstances, our Red Sea crossings, our wilderness trials and obstacles. Yes, we can look beyond the Jordan River and the challenges that lie ahead. Our Hope is in God!

We are living in some exciting yet intense times. As we follow the unfolding of world events, we are buffeted by a tidal wave of uncertainties that could cause some to despair. It's as if Luke 21 is happening before our eyes—the prophetic shakings and judgments of famines, pestilence, wars and rumors of wars.

Fortunately, verse 13 jumps out as an encouragement to us: "But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony" (NKJV). The inference is that the challenges and shakings we experience can become an opportunity for us to witness to others. We who have overcome by the blood for the Lamb and the word of our testimony (see Rev. 12:11) can use our trials to point multitudes to Jesus!

Leonard Ravenhill once sent me a note that literally still burns within my spiritual womb. "My dearest brother Doug," he wrote, "let others live on the raw edge or the cutting edge. ... You and should live on the edge of eternity."

After reading his note, I wrote these words as a constant reminder to me: "How can we settle into complacency while multitudes are in the balance of eternity? How can we be so hardened of heart as to sit back on the beach of comfort and apathy while so many are still shipwrecked in the sea of death?"

We hear about the cross so often that the thought of our sins putting Jesus there no longer breaks our hearts or ignites a burning passion of gratitude and service within us!

The fact is, Jesus weeps over the needs of His people that are not being met. He weeps over the weary travelers who are struggling through the wilderness. He weeps over the millions who are lost without hope. It is because of His inestimable love that His ears are always open to our cry (see Ps. 34:19).

We have such a great opportunity before us to see a mighty harvest of changed lives! As Winkie Pratney writes in his book *Revival: Its Principles and Personalities*, "When God finds someone with courage to pray, preach, and live a life before Him of holiness and compassion, He can literally change the face of a nation."

The Lord wants each of us to leave a legacy to His glory. Regardless of our past mistakes or our present circumstances, He wants to birth through us a prophetic generation with a message of consecration, commitment and action.

It is time to cross our Jordans, to possess and occupy the land. God is ready to do His greatest work through each of us. It's time to push!

The Seed of Greatness

I believe the life of Hannah as recorded in 1 Samuel 1 offers a prophetic challenge and encouragement to the church at this time. Hannah was without child; her womb was barren. Yet out of her despair, misery, shame and pain, she cried out to God.

With desperate and passionate prayer she made a vow to the Lord: if He would give her a male child, she would commit her son to Him. God heard the cry of Hannah's heart and turned around what seemed to be an impossible situation. From a barren womb, the Lord brought forth Samuel, the first of a new generation of prophets.

God wants to turn crisis to victory, barrenness to greatness, in our lives too. Regardless of our circumstances, the Lord wants to satisfy the longing in our souls. Though we may seem barren, with great odds stacked against us, He has placed His seed of greatness in every one of us who has called upon His name.

Discouragement, disappointments and distractions have caused some of us to forget the Lord's visions and dreams for us. But in each of our spiritual wombs is a seed of destiny waiting to be born.

There may be times of weeping and travailing between the porch and the altar (see Joel 2:17) prior to an outpouring or birthing of revival in our lives, but the Lord's promises are a sure foundation. A woman forgets her labor pains at the joy of holding her new child in her arms. Even as the prophet Eli spoke these words to Hannah as a promise to her, may each of us receive them as a promise of great things ahead: "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him'" (1 Sam. 1:17). May we go from wilderness to victory, from crisis to revival, from emptiness to greatness, from despair to joy. The time is *now*. Let's pray until something happens.

Want to know more about the next great move of God? Click here to see Jennifer LeClaire's new book, featuring Dutch Sheets, Reinhard Bonnke, Jonathan Cahn, Billy Graham and others.

Doug Stringer is an internationally known conference speaker,

the founder of Somebody Cares and Turning Point Ministries International, and the author of several books, including Somebody Cares: A Guide to Living Out Your Faith.

Did you like this article? You'll enjoy Jonathan Cahn's book, *The Harbinger*