

Is This Real Revival?

What's happening in Lakeland, Florida, is exciting. Any time thousands of people who are hungry for God gather together nonstop night after night to worship Him, it's something to shout about. But in 32 years of covering the charismatic movement, I've never seen any meetings get so much attention so fast. Everyone, it seems, is talking about them, and Christians from around the world have attended the meetings seeking more of God. Some—including a number of respected leaders—have referred to them as “revival.”

Others are cautious about endorsing the events as a genuine move of God. I believe it's too soon to tell—but history can give us an idea of what to expect.

Many revivals from former times have had long-term effects on American culture. The First and Second Great awakenings in the 1700s and 1800s had an enormous impact—one we are still experiencing. They began a cycle of revivals in this country that continues today. And the Azusa Street Revival in the early 1900s gave impetus to the Pentecostal movement, which has spread around the world.

In my own career I've covered several famous revivals, including those that began in the 1990s in Toronto; Pensacola, Florida; Smithton, Missouri; and Lakeland, Florida (led by evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne). Those were great moves of God.

Yet not all “revivals” have a lasting positive effect. One that didn't broke out in the Dallas area in the mid-1980s when some services with a well-known charismatic preacher turned into extended meetings. Those who were healed lined up their crutches and other medical paraphernalia against the walls of the church.

The ministry sponsoring the meetings requested coverage in Charisma, saying that the revival was the “greatest revival since Azusa Street.” I attended and could tell there was excitement. But eventually the revival died down, the pastor of the church was involved in a scandal, and the property where the church building once stood was purchased by the city.

One revival that took place during the 1970s actually had a negative effect on the major Pentecostal church in San Jose, California, where it started. Though it was hosted by a young evangelist I have long admired, and lasted for many months, the revival created a major church split and the original church disbanded.

I cite these two examples as a word of caution about what’s happening in Lakeland. The fact that people are excited doesn’t mean it’s the greatest move of God since Azusa Street. The meetings may be short-lived or the long-term effects not so pleasant.

I’m especially concerned when I hear people compare the Lakeland outpouring with the healing revivals of the 1940s and 1950s that involved A.A. Allen and William Branham. Those revivals failed to touch the mainstream of America, and both ministers fell into disrepute before they died.

What is happening in Lakeland is so wonderful that I believe we must help it avoid pitfalls that could cause its demise. One way to do that is to remember that the focus must be on more than just the events in that city. What we need is a move of God that will impact the entire body of Christ and our culture as well.

Thankfully Todd Bentley, the evangelist leading the meetings, is urging those who attend to “take the revival to the world.” As a result, we’re hearing reports of meetings taking place outside Lakeland that were initiated by those who took the

fire home.

Also, the focus of any revival or ministry must be on Jesus and on changed lives, not on revival itself or on the ministries involved. I was glad to hear an emphasis on Jesus when I was in Lakeland. (Go to to read the reports of my visits.)

However, after only a few months, the revival is still vulnerable, similar to the tiny flame mentioned in Isaiah 42:3, and some Christian leaders believe certain extremes could quench it. How sad it would be if the flame were snuffed out before it had the opportunity to grow into a raging fire!

I hope the meetings in Lakeland continue because I believe they may be the beginning of a fresh move of God. Please join me in praying that they will spark real revival—and bring lasting change to our nation.

Stephen Strang is the founder and publisher of Charisma. He invites you to read comments others have posted about Lakeland, and to post your own, on our Web site. Go to and click on “Forums.”