

THE THIRD IN A SERIES ON REVIVAL

How to Stop a Revival

BY KEN HORN

Stopping a revival is, unfortunately, a lot easier than getting one started.

Revival, or corporate spiritual awakening, is a work of the Holy Spirit. Though people cannot bring about revival, they can certainly help or hinder it depending on whether the Holy Spirit is made welcome, grieved or quenched.

Revival is a result of spiritual light. Physical light offers a good illustration of how revival can be promoted or prevented. Light is a powerful force. There are two extremes that can have negative effects.

- Etiolation is the effect on a living plant when it is hidden from light. This will usually halt the healthy growth of a plant. This effect can come into play by simple neglect. Something very small can block out the sun and rob the plant of the needed light. Merriam-Webster notes the extended meaning of this is “to make pale, to deprive of natural vigor, make feeble.”

- Light can also be intensified to the point where it is harmful. Spring cleaning provides an illustration of this. Remove a window to wash it and leave it lying on the lawn on a sunny day. Soon you will have a burnt patch of lawn the shape of that window-pane.

Spiritual light that brings revival is subject to the same two extremes. For fear of the “burning” effects of revival, many have virtually blocked the light that is revival’s source. Neither extreme will benefit the church.

Charles G. Finney, one of the greatest revivalists in U.S. history, preached a message entitled “Hindrances to Revivals.” He pointed out that, no matter how bad the world may be, only the church itself can stop revival.

“Christians are more to blame for not being revived,” Finney

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said, “than sinners for not being converted.”

He enumerated several things that would either prevent revivals or shut one down. The following is my list, a sample excerpted and adapted from that source. (Words in quotes are Finney’s unless otherwise noted.)

What will prevent a revival?

- **Lack of preaching/teaching about sin.** Sinners should not be attacked in sermons, but we go too far if we fear to tell them what sin is. A pulpit that never addresses sin will never have to worry about managing a revival.

- **Overly embracing the culture.** “Diverting excitements, if strong and permanent, will prevent a revival. Hence, it has always been the policy of Satan to keep the church and, if possible, the ministry in a state of worldly excitement.” This could have been written in 2009 instead of 1874. It is not a new problem in the church. Simply put, worldliness will successfully keep revival at bay. The church must be careful that, in its attempts to reach the culture, it does not sell out to the culture.

- **Unresolved conflicts or a spirit of controversy among the people of a church.** We all know a spirit of revival can’t thrive when church members can’t get along. In many churches, this is the first thing that needs to be resolved. Revival requires unity. Get right with each other to provide good spiritual soil. “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23,24, NKJV).

- **Pride.** “A proud, ambitious people will build and furnish extravagant churches, lay themselves out to exceed all their neighbors in this respect, get up everything on an extravagant and

worldly scale, endeavor to draw in the wealthy and aristocratic classes, and make a congregation of the élite of the town.”

This is not to say big churches are wrong if the facilities are needed for ministry ... and used for it. But motive is important.

“Build me such a church,” said Joseph Parker to his architect, “that when Queen Victoria drives into the city she will say, ‘Why, what place is that?’ — and she will be told, ‘That is where Joseph Parker preaches!’ ”

Parker was one of the most famous pulpiteers of his day, yet his character showed a disturbing inclination toward pride. When he was invited to pastor a church somewhat smaller than his, he looked down his nose. “An eagle does not roost in a sparrow’s nest!” he said.

If we plan to take credit for what God is doing, we can also plan for our church to be a revival-free zone.

- **A stingy church.** You would be hard-pressed to find a church that could be called spiritually successful that does not give liberally to missions. The more generous the spirit of a church, the more fertile the soil in which revival grows.

- **Failure to care about or address the needs of the surrounding community.** “The Holy Spirit is a reformer,” said Finney, and he practiced what he preached, leading the way in social reforms such as the abolition of slavery and the rights of women.

Churches today seem to be addressing the needs of their communities more than in past decades. But there are still congregations where one can find the we-don’t-want-those-kind-of-people-in-our-church attitude. Those churches can plan to stay tidy and attractive ... and devoid of revival.

What will slow down or shut down a revival?

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Numerous unbelievers and nominal Christians will attend Resurrection Day services on April 12. Jesus’ victory over death provides them hope for eternal life.

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If we plan to take credit for what God is doing, we can also plan for our church to be a revival-free zone.

• **A divisive spirit.** Revival is about building the kingdom of God, not just one church. The prevalent attitude must be: If people get saved here and end up attending somewhere else where the Bible is faithfully preached, praise the Lord!

• **Excess.** “The breaking out of a fanatical spirit in a revival will retard or destroy it.”

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was also a revivalist responsible for multitudes of souls coming to Jesus Christ. He cautioned, “There are different kinds of fire; there is false fire. No one knows this better than we do, but we are not such fools as to refuse good banknotes because there are false ones in circulation; and although we see here and there manifestations of what appears to us to be nothing more

than mere earthly fire, we none the less prize and value, and seek for the genuine fire which comes from the altar of the Lord.”

• **A critical spirit.** A truly discerning spirit is a must in revival. But false fire has led many to replace discernment with cynicism. Finney himself faced this kind of person frequently.

• **Failure to maintain concerted prayer.** The ongoing revivals in places like Korea and Argentina are continually fueled by prayer.

Booth described the kind of prayer necessary to maintain revival: “You must pray with all your might. That does not mean saying your prayers, or sitting gazing about in church or chapel with eyes wide open while someone else says them for you. It means fervent, effectual, untiring wrestling with God. ... This kind

of prayer, be sure, the devil and the world and your own indolent, unbelieving nature will oppose. They will pour water on this flame.”

Brownlow North’s advice was “Oh Christians, go more to the prayer meetings.”

Revivals are precious gifts of the Holy Spirit. Let’s resolve to remove all the obstacles that can stand in the way of God’s move among us. **tpe**

KEN HORN is the editor of *Today’s Pentecostal Evangel* and blogs at Snapshots (khorn.agblogger.org).

This is the third in a series on revival. Part 1, “Stirred Up,” appeared in the Jan. 11 issue. Part 2, “Uncomfortable,” appeared in the Feb. 8 issue.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

Kids page

CAMPOUT!

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JUST FOR laughs

When does a campground offer an all-you-can-eat buffet?

When you’re a mosquito.

Why did the grizzly bear take the camper’s shoes?

He was tired of walking around on his bear feet.



Where is it?

Match the national parks with the correct locations.

- ___ Yellowstone
- ___ Yosemite
- ___ Rocky Mountain
- ___ Great Smoky Mountains
- ___ Everglades
- ___ Grand Canyon

- A. Colorado
- B. Tennessee, North Carolina
- C. Florida
- D. California
- E. Arizona
- F. Wyoming, Montana, Idaho

Answers: F, D, A, B, C, E.

Marshmallows and pharaohs

Summer is the perfect time for pitching a tent, sitting around a crackling campfire with your family and eating marshmallows.

Whether they’re toasted on sticks or melted in s’mores, marshmallows are a favorite camping treat. According to the National Confectioners Association, Americans eat 90 million pounds of them every year. That’s about the weight of 1,286 gray whales!

Did you know marshmallows were also popular in ancient Egypt? Back then they were made from the marsh mallow plant, a flowering plant that grows in swampy areas. (It’s easy to see how the marshmallow got its name.)

The Egyptians squeezed sap from the plant’s roots and mixed it with honey. The treat was so prized only pharaohs and other powerful people could eat it.

Today’s marshmallows are made from gelatin, egg whites and sugar, not plant roots. The goo is piped through tubes and cut into pieces just right for munching around a campfire.

The Israelites did a lot of camping after they left Egypt. In fact, they camped in the wilderness for 40 years. They probably didn’t have any Egyptian marshmallows. But God provided something even better: manna. The Bible says this food from heaven tasted sweet, like honey. It was God’s way of taking care of His people.

Next time you camp under the stars or eat a marshmallow, think about the God who created those stars and fed the Israelites in the wilderness. He cares about you, too, and is able to provide everything you need.

“My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19, NIV).



Did you know?

The world’s largest s’more was made in 2006 at First Landing State Park in Virginia. It contained 8,000 chocolate bars and 40,000 marshmallows.



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