

STUDY 4

THE SPREADING FIRE

“God is a God of mission. He sends revival not only to awaken us to Himself, but to awaken us to the needs of a lost and dying world.”

Read: Acts 2:14-24, 36-41

Revival is like a grass fire. Once it catches, it quickly spreads and nothing can stop it. We see this in the next four marks of revival:

8. Revival inspires powerful preaching

In the climate of revival, preaching that before was weak or ordinary, can become dynamic and powerful. The preacher himself finds he is quickened and energised by the Spirit in an extraordinary way, and the hearers are wakened to listen and respond in an extraordinary way. One Spirit-anointed sermon preached by Peter resulted in 3,000 people being brought into the Kingdom! *(In contrast, someone has suggested that today it usually takes 3,000 sermons to bring one person into the Kingdom!).* During the Welsh revival of 1904, many of the ministers of Wales experienced a new authority and power which quite astonished those who had heard their preaching before. Preachers who are touched by revival experience a strange and extraordinary power pulsing through their sermons. Simple statements bristle with power and come with an unusual authority and conviction. The reason is, this preaching is now coming from preachers whose hearts are set on fire.

9. Revival brings an extraordinary harvest

True revival does not stay within the church; it bursts out into the world. For part of God's purpose in pouring out His Spirit upon His people is to mobilise them for evangelism and mission (Acts 1:8). Through revival He empowers and compels His people to get on with their primary task to *'seek and to save the lost'*. The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost resulted in a mighty harvest. The number of converts increased so rapidly that the writer of Acts (*Luke*), soon gave up trying to record the estimated numbers.

The ploughman overtakes the reaper

Amos 9:13 gives a picture of what happens in times of revival:

“The days are coming”, declares the Lord, “when the reaper will be overtaken by the ploughman and the planter by the one treading grapes.”

In this picture given by Amos, the seed which was sown has resulted in such an abundant and supernatural harvest, that the ploughman who normally comes in to plough up the field again after the harvest is over, has to wait, because the reaper is still trying to reap the enormous harvest! An ordinary sowing has resulted in an extraordinary reaping!

The Welsh revival (1904-5) Before the revival in Wales began one church, for example, would see an increase of about 15 in its membership in one year. But in 1905 this same church had an increase of 318 (over 20 times as many!). Across Wales it is estimated that 20,000 people joined the churches during the first five weeks of the revival, and during the next two months, over 80,000 responded to the gospel. Within 2 years, as the revival spread to new areas, almost five million people were touched by it!

In revival the harvest reaches such overwhelming proportions that churches and Christian organisations are often unable to cope with the large numbers of people flooding in. One minister during revival said, "God has accomplished more in a single day of revival than I have accomplished during the whole of my ministry!" We must still faithfully sow the seed, nurture, and expect some kind of harvest under normal conditions. But in times of revival God sends an extraordinary and overwhelming harvest far beyond the normal.

10. Revival brings disturbance and opposition

The results of revival are not all positive. When God begins to work in revival there will always be resistance and opposition. People will try to put the fire out. The history of revival shows that the strongest opposition to revival is not from outside the church, but from within. Often the greatest opponents of revival are ministers and leaders within the church! This should not surprise us! It happened to Jesus. The religious leaders and theologians of Jesus' day opposed Him strongly. It happened to the early disciples (Acts 4:1-7). The same religious leaders persecuted them too. And it has happened to revivals down through history.

Revival leaders in the past - like Jonathon Edwards, Charles Wesley, Charles Finney, Evan Roberts, and others - all experienced great opposition and criticism mainly from within the Church. Why? For usually the same reasons as in the first century - first, theological ("How can this be of God? According to our understanding, the Holy Spirit does not work in this way!"). And second, political or personal ("This new movement is undermining our influence and control! People are leaving our churches to go to the revival meetings!"). Not all will accept revival gladly, and some will even oppose it.

11. Revival brings a new thrust into mission

True revival empowers us to fulfil the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). True revival results in mission (Acts 1:8). In fact, if revival is kept within the church, it will die. God is a God of mission. He sends revival not only to awaken us to Himself, but to awaken us to the needs of a lost and dying world. Keep revival to yourself and you will lose it; give it away and you will continue to enjoy it.

The Moravian revival: When revival began in a Moravian community in Germany (1727) through a man called Zinzendorf, this resulted in the longest prayer meeting ever recorded in history - a prayer meeting that lasted 100 years, with people praying around the clock 24 hours a day! Even children wept and prayed with power before God. Out of this burden to pray came a burden for mission. As a result, within 5 years these Moravians sent out their first missionaries. Two kinds of teams left - some to win the lost and others to win the church. Over the next 50 years over 300 such missionaries were sent out. This was the beginning of the modern missionary movement.

Prayer and *mission* are two important results of revival and always go together. Through prayer revived Christians feel the heart of God for a lost and broken world. And their response is to obey Christ's call to go into all the world with the message of His love. This results in a new thrust into evangelism and mission. It also brings a new concern to deal with the injustices and needs of society with ministries of compassion and care to the lonely, despised, the orphans, the sick and the hungry. True revival will always give you (and your church) a new burden for evangelism and mission, and a heart of compassion for needy people around you.

Explore further:

1. **Revival inspires powerful preaching:** The apostle Peter had not been a preacher before the Day of Pentecost. He was just a fisherman. But what words would summarise his preaching after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? (Read Acts 2:14-40).
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- *Features of revival preaching:* There are four strong features seen in revival preaching:
 - spontaneous preaching;
 - anointed preaching;
 - fearless preaching; and
 - Christ-centred preaching.
 - How many of the above four qualities were seen in Peter's preaching on the Day of Pentecost and in Acts 4:8-13? (*Put a tick next to any of the above features*).
 - What was the response and result of this one sermon Peter preached? (Acts 2:37, 41)
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The Welsh revival (1904): *During the Welsh revival of 1904, many of the ministers of Wales experienced a new authority and power during the days of revival which quite astonished those who had heard their preaching before.*

- Why do you think revival made this difference to their preaching?
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2. **Revival brings an extraordinary harvest:** What details does Acts record of the extent of this harvest? How many believed and were saved on each of the following occasions?

Act 2:41 _____

Acts 4:4 _____

Acts 5:14 _____

Acts 6:7 _____

Amos 9:13 gives a picture of what happens in times of revival:

“The days are coming”, declares the Lord, “when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes.”

- What do you think this verse means? What kind of harvest is it describing?

- The harvest we normally experience is usually slow to ripen and small in quantity. Think about your own church. What kind of increase did you see over the past year?

- *New converts last year:* _____

- *Increase in membership:* _____

- Look at the example of what happened in the Welsh revival of 1904 (under point 9 in the study). Imagine the same thing happening in your church and other churches in your community. How well would your church would cope with this?

3. **Revival brings disturbance and opposition:** There have always been those who oppose revival. Where does the greatest opposition come from? (See Acts 4:1-22).

(choose)

From outside the church;

From inside the church.

- What do you think are the main reasons for this opposition?

4. **Revival brings a new thrust into mission:** According to Acts 1:8 what is the final purpose and end result of revival?

- Look again at the story of the Moravian revival (under point 11 in the study). What important things is this example illustrating?

- At a personal level, how active are you (and your church) in the areas of evangelism, mission, and ministering to needy people around you now? What is the quote at the start of the study saying to you personally?
