

SUSTAINED PRAYER FOR SUSTAINED REVIVAL

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Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest (Matthew 9:37–38).

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matthew 28:18–20).

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

There are 6.8 billion people alive today. There are approximately two billion people who in some way are counted as Christians. It would be naive to believe that a majority of them could articulate the biblical account of what constitutes the way of salvation. They are **Christians by default**. But there are no Christians by default.

At least six billion of these people are running out of time to choose eternal life. Over 50 million people die each year, a figure that will increase because of rising birthrates in the past. Only one thing can save most of them: **mass revival, beginning soon**.

Let me give you a few statistics on the challenge the Christian Church faces. If 300,000 people were converted to saving faith in Jesus Christ every day, it would take almost 55 years to see six billion people brought to saving faith. Problem: world population is expected to grow to nine billion by 2050. So, it would require **almost 550,000 conversions a day**, and no backsliding. (The latest statistics are here: www.bit.ly/RevivalClock.) This is a huge challenge. The problem is so big that almost no one thinks about it. It is just too depressing.

Problem #1: if the only people who can solve a problem refuse to think about it, the problem will not get solved.

Problem #2: Jesus told His disciples to solve this problem.

If there is no change in today's evangelism strategies (which are minimal, as church budgets reveal for accountants to see), then hell will continue to fill up. All people are born into Satan's kingdom: **original sin**. They must be dragged out of it. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). The Greek word translated here as "draw" can be translated "drag."

The costs of implementing a successful evangelism strategy are very high. I do not just mean monetary costs. Let me explain. Let us begin with the costs, should the strategy work.

PRACTICAL PROBLEMS OF MASS REVIVAL

A successful mass revival would offer a series of at-present unsolvable problems. The first problem has to do with space. **Where will visitors sit?**

If every family in a congregation invites just one family to attend next week, and the invitation is accepted, there will be insufficient room for the attendees. What if each of new family were to invite another family, and that family also attends the following week? Repeat weekly.

Beginning in week three, there would be an institutional crisis. The church would have to go to two morning services. In week four, it would have to go to three morning services. Repeat weekly.

The modern Church operates on this assumption: "Hardly anyone will ever ask a friend to church. Hardly any friend will accept." If the Holy Spirit were to upset these two assumptions for just one month, it would force a transformation of the churches. What if He did it for a two months? The prayers would go up: "Stop! Stop! You're killing us!"

The second problem is pastoral. **Who will minister to the new converts? Who will disciple them?**

With respect to the institutional requirements for truly successful worldwide evangelism -- discipling 550,000 new Christians a day for the next four decades (one generation) -- they say, "That's not the way we do things around here." They

are correct. It isn't the way the church does things.

I have six billion reasons why the churches should do things differently. Third-world birth rates being what they are, I will soon have six billion reasons. And so on, year by year.

“But this program is impossible,” a critic says. “All these people cannot be brought to saving faith in a mere 40 years.” All right, then how about 80 years? “It’s still too much to ask.” Ask of God? “No, ask of the church.”

Christians have re-defined **The Great Commission** (Matthew 28:18–20) to be *The Challenging but Institutionally Unsolvable Commission*.

Formerly Christian societies in the West need a revival. They need a revival like no other in church history. They need a sustained revival. This is also what never-Christian Asian societies need. The Church has yet to see one.

Revival takes planning. But there is no planning. So, there is no revival, sustained or otherwise. If we are going to prepare for a great revival, why not a sustained revival?

PREVIOUS REVIVALS HAVE NOT BEEN SUSTAINED

The last nationwide revival in the United States took place in 1858–59, when the country had about 30 million people. About a million new converts professed faith in Jesus Christ. There was a later revival among Confederate troops, 1861–65. Its effects disappeared after 1865.

The 1858 revival, which began in 1857 in Ontario, Canada, was followed within months by revivals in Northern Ireland, Wales, South Africa, Scotland, and England. The main institutional legacy of the English revival of 1859 was William Booth's Salvation Army, which is not a church. There is no ecclesiastical trace of the other revivals.

The last great Protestant revival began in Wales in 1904. It lasted a year. Its effects were extinguished by World War I (1914–18).

By *revival*, I do not mean the steady progress of normal evangelism, such as what is taking place today in China and sub-Saharan Africa. I mean a tidal wave of

unprecedented spiritual transformation that seems to come out of nowhere and then departs, community by community, leaving behind what has been referred to as burned-over districts. Western New York state was such a place by 1830. Read about it here: www.bit.ly/BurnedOver

Then there is the problem of **legacy**. The legacy of previous revivals in America has been the extension of Unitarianism.

America's First Great Awakening began in the early 1720s, became institutionally visible in the mid-1730s, spread across the colonies in the 1740s, and then faded. Over the next two decades, the burned-over aftermath and then the American Revolution transferred national political power to unitarians (small "u"): Jefferson, John Adams, Franklin, Hamilton, and Christians who never turned to the Bible for guidance in matters political.

The Second Great Awakening, which began no later than 1790 in the South and accelerated rapidly in 1801 at the famous Cane Ridge revival in Kentucky, lasted for at least 50 years, moving like a forest fire from community to community. It had ended by 1850, replaced by the Abolitionist crusade in the North. The Civil War led to the political triumph nationally of Abolitionist New England Unitarians, not Christian revivalists in the North, who had been the shock troops of the Abolitionist crusade.

It is safe to say that **Christianity has not profited *culturally* by past revivals**. To ease their consciences regarding this failure some Christians have said that "the gospel changes hearts, not cultures." But would they also say that conversion allows drunks remain drunks, wife-beaters to remain wife-beaters? No? Would they say that sobriety and stable families have no effect on culture? No? Then why have revivals failed to change cultures? My answer: they were not sustained. They faded.

PRAYER PRECEDES REVIVAL

Studies of the two Great Awakenings in America have revealed a pattern. Prior to the first wave of a local revival, a handful of church members would meet together for fervent prayer. All-night prayer sessions were common.

Then a revival hit, with its unordained itinerant preachers -- some good (the Salvation Army's William Booth), others not so good. There would be wild

meetings, with people on their knees, barking like dogs, and other manifestations of emotional chaos. This chaos was explained by revivalist preachers as manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

For over five decades, I have heard repeated calls for national revival by Christian leaders. Yet I have never seen any systematic attempts on the part of these leaders to organize programs of local prayer and discipleship in preparation for this revival. I have also never heard of a local congregation that has called on its members and then other local churches to conduct the kind of intense prayer meetings that have always preceded revivals.

Why not? Maybe because pastors who know the history of revivals know what a traditional revival brings.

- More attendees (temporary)
- Unruly children of visitors
- An extra morning worship service -- maybe two
- Extra mid-week services
- Parking problems
- Free-riders (few tithers)
- Greater teaching responsibilities
- Extra spiritual counselling (unpaid)
- Church splits
- New-member attrition after one year
- A burned-over district for 30 years

Preparations for a national revival? Not so far in my lifetime. There is no demand for it.

I concluded decades ago that calls for revival are perfunctory. The cost of preparing for such a revival is high -- organized prayer -- and the results are frightening for Trinitarian pastors: filled-up churches, with lines of would-be members outside the church door, all of them with lifestyle problems, many with emotional and financial problems, and none of them ready to tithe. So, I learned many years ago not to take seriously calls for national revival by famous evangelists. Such calls are the social equivalent of "Have a nice day."

There are about six billion covenant-breakers out there. There will soon be more. Time is running out for them. Eternity beckons. If the churches do nothing new, these people will surely be lost.

We need effective evangelism. But we don't need a revival like all those that have occurred in the past. We need one that will provide a new life for huge numbers of new converts. We need a different kind of revival.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF REVIVAL

Here is what I would like to see in a revival: **sustainability**. To deal effectively with nine billion people, here are the minimum requirements:

- 550,000 conversions a day, worldwide, for 40 years
- No attrition ("backsliding")
- Church buildings rented all day on Sundays to four congregations
- 4,000 new church buildings completed each day, worldwide
(Alternatively: very large congregations
by American Protestant standards)
- Crash programs for recruiting/training pastors
- Lifetime discipling
- Local lay leaders as disciplers
- Service opportunities accepted by volunteers
- Social welfare: from the state to churches
- Christian influence at every level of society
- Lower crime rates
- Foreign missions
- Interchurch cooperation among evangelicals
- More effective church programs
- Tithing -- soon: there are no free lunches

Now, that's a revival! Praying for anything less is a waste of valuable prayer time. If we are going to ask God to do something big, why not something really big: God-sized?

Praying should be systematic, perpetual, and above all, **routine**. We should not expect or insist on forms of prayer that require a non-routine commitment. **Non-routine commitments cannot be sustained.**

The all-night prayer vigils of pre-revival fame invariably produced all-night revivals and then spiritual burn-out -- for pastors, laymen, and new members. These revivals were not sustained by routine prayer.

What we need is sustainable prayer for a sustainable revival. No other kind of revival is worth praying for.

We need 20% of the members of every congregation agreeing to pray for an hour a day. Most of the other 80% must pray, too, but we had better not count on this. They need to do this until Christ returns. To get them to do this will take constant reminders and constant follow-up. It will take mutual support. It will take . . . dare I say it? . . . **self-discipline**.

If 20% of a congregation will do this systematically, that should be sufficient. Don't expect more than 20%. Breaking Vilfredo Pareto's 20/80 law requires a miracle. Miracles are not sustained. That's why we call them miracles.

Evangelical churches will need separate prayer meetings that pray for only one thing: **daily, sustained, individual prayers**. That's what Alcoholics Anonymous offers: nightly meetings to help its members get through the day. That's what Weight-Watchers offers. **Routine self-discipline requires organized institutional support in order to remain routine.**

People can start with five-minute prayers. Pray while ironing, driving to work, mowing the lawn. Then, when this commitment becomes routine, they should add another five minutes. Month by month, add five minutes -- not necessarily sequential. In one year, people are praying **an hour a day**. That's plenty, on average. Some will pray more; others will pray less.

When revival hits, people might increase this to 90 minutes, just for the honeymoon's sake. Then, when the revival becomes routinized, it's back to an hour a day. Sweet hour of prayer is enough.

If the prayers stop, the revival will stop. We need an unprecedented mass revival, followed by permanent prayer to sustain it.

The churches today are unwilling to turn a traditional revival into a sustained revival: not enough room, not enough discipling, not enough volunteers, and not enough self-discipline.

WHAT KIND OF PRAYERS ARE NEEDED?

What should local church members pray for? Here, I offer a completely different strategy. They should not ask merely for successful revival meetings.

There have never been any successful stand-alone revival meetings. That's because the work of the Church is much broader than revival meetings.

One set of prayers within a congregation should be for the work of its overall ministry. But revival/transformation prayers should not be limited to just one church's ministry. There must be ***cross-congregational prayer***.

The cutting edge of a sustainable community revival is each congregation's unique public ministry to the lost. "Ministry" means "service." Each congregation should identify one ministerial service that it does well and is equipped institutionally to do on a larger scale locally. The congregation should start this ministry. If it has no such ministry, then its plans for revival must start here. It must get one.

Each community should have a **multitude of specialized ministries**, each provided by a church that is fully committed to sustaining its unique public ministry. I have in mind assistance to the poor, job training, financial budgeting, marital counselling, parenting, day care, k-12 education, door-to-door evangelism, university evangelism, and a hundred other services.

Once the ministry is up and running, the pastor should ask other pastors to begin congregational prayers supporting his church's service ministry. Every pastor in town should publicly ask his congregation and prayer meetings for prayers for specialized ministries. These prayers must be repeated, week by week. There must be so many ministries that there must be specialized prayers. No church can pray for all of them. We need too many of them.

No church can do everything well. There is specialization **inside** a church: members (Romans 12; I Corinthians 12). There is also specialization within the **broader Church**: postal service zip code by zip code.

These ministries must be run by laymen. This is the key to sustainable revival. A revival puts enormous pressure on pastors. They cannot handle it alone. They must be supported by trained, dedicated, self-sacrificing laymen.

So, the pre-revival prayer program must be aimed at building up local church ministries that are run by laymen. Prayer should be focused on recruiting volunteers, training them, and then bringing the walking wounded under their care.

Organized congregational prayer begins with the central ministry of a local

congregation. First things first. Then it spreads outward, five minutes of prayer per ministry per day per church member, to other congregations' unique ministries.

This is a form of sustainable prayer for sustainable worldwide revival. Sustainable worldwide revival is not what pastors have ever attempted to organize.

Prayer must call the Holy Spirit to intervene in history to produce a revival. But this supernatural intervention must make use of a structured institutional program of discipling. Discipling is what the Great Commission explicitly requires. This is what no previous revival has offered. By the time rudimentary discipling programs were in place, the districts were burned over. **The revivals always got ahead of the institutional means of discipleship.** Then they faded, leaving Unitarians in power.

All-night prayer vigils? To prepare for the initial outbreak of a well-planned local revival, maybe. Long term? No, thank you. This cannot be sustained. It is abnormal. We need a new normal: systematic permanent prayers for revival.

Should you start praying now, all by yourself -- praying for coordinated prayer that is needed to launch a revival? For an extra five minutes a day? Yes, please. Make it ten. Increase this in response to answers to your prayers.

When revival starts in a congregation, more people will join in. People will sacrifice if there are prospects of success. Success is imitated.

The magnitude of this task is so great that only mass systematic prayer can work: intervention from on high. No institutional re-structuring can work without a change in prayer habits. **Prayer is the missing link, the missing catalyst.** Revival must start with systematic prayer. Once started, it must be maintained. Otherwise, the revival will fade and unitarians (or worse) will inherit.

PASTORAL COOPERATION

Part of a program of sustainable prayer must be cross-congregational prayer. Members in one congregation must pray for the specialized service ministries in the other congregations. By focusing on church-operated service ministries to the lost, this prayer program breaks down resistance to praying for "one of those churches." The prayers are for church B's institutional efforts to deal with a

specific local problem that church A has chosen to ignore or deal with halfheartedly. When a Christian thinks, “I sure don’t want to deal with *that* problem,” he/she can more systematically pray for some other local congregation’s team of laymen that is willing to work with that problem.

Everyone wants institutional back-up. When a pastor is sure that members of other congregations will be asked to pray systematically for his local congregation’s specialized ministry, he may start cooperating.

The congregations’ local service ministries will start building strength. More of the community’s walking wounded will walk through the door. This is what sustainable revival is all about: the walking wounded walking through many doors, day after day, year after year, in ever-greater numbers. No barking required!

A sustained revival must be service-based. It must offer help to the lost, followed by training. Then the new converts must be sent back to their circle of friends to bring the good news. In Web marketing, this is called viral marketing. This is how a seller gains a large audience fast.

Laymen must staff and administer these service ministries. They must do most of the training. Pastors do not have enough time. There are not enough of them. They must provide leadership, motivation, and direction. They will have their hands exceedingly full.

A DECENTRALIZED INTERNATIONAL WEBSITE NETWORK

We need an international website that is broken down into these categories: nation, state/province, zip code/post code. The final entry, **zip code**, would provide a link to a locally managed website. This international network system would preserve **local control over the websites**, including the local data bases. The main goal for the **international website** is to serve as a **clearing house**, not to become one gigantic data base, which would be too tempting to steal, misuse, or hack.

The international site would provide free downloadable software and an on-line training program for running a local website. The **local ministerial association** would fund the local website and take responsibility for it, especially for any mailing lists generated by the site.

Each local website would allow a local pastor to go on-line, create an

www.SustainedRevival.com

account and password, and then enter his church's name, address, and denomination. There would be a line to identify his **congregation's #1 ministry to the lost**. There would be a link to a page on his church's site, describing this service ministry in greater detail.

This program forces a pastor to work with his elders/deacons beforehand in order to identify what this primary area of church service is. **This identification, congregation by congregation, is crucial for sustained local revival.**

A local layman who is seeking to serve in a specific way first goes to the ministerial association's site to see what each congregation specializes in regarding the kingdom of God. If he wants more information, he clicks a ministry's link to its service page. This takes him to a longer description of this congregation's ministry. He is encouraged to commit to spending five minutes/day for prayer for the particular ministry that appeals to him. Or he can volunteer as a non-member of the congregation.

There should be a weekly email newsletter to sign up for on each congregation's service ministry page. This will mobilize the volunteers.

Some members in one congregation will transfer their memberships based on commitment to another congregation's specific service ministry. So what? Win some, lose some. This is a win-win deal for the kingdom of God.

Evangelical pastors must take the lead in organizing such a prayer program. They must hand out the website's address for members to visit. Each pastor must tell his congregation that other churches' members will be praying for the local congregation's #1 service ministry. He must make it clear that **this is a joint effort of local congregations**.

Who is an evangelical pastor? Someone who still preaches about hell and deliverance from hell by grace through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ in history: His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension. (We tend to ignore His ascension to the right hand of God, where He serves as the corporate Church's High Priest. The Epistle to the Hebrews is not preached through often enough.)

The international website would compile a series of links arranged by **service topics**. These are links to local church service ministries that have set up a page offering a free how-to manual in PDF, plus MP3 audio files and training videos. Non-profit audio and video and audio files can be posted for free on Blip.tv

and other video sharing sites -- sites without third-party ads. The on-line videos can then be embedded (posted) on any website's page. This way, other churches around the world can set up similar ministries. (English as a second language is a gift of God to this generation. It is like Latin and Koine Greek in Paul's day. The Internet is like Rome's roads.)

CONCLUSION

When churches begin organizing sustained prayer for a decentralized cooperative effort to extend the kingdom of God, they will be in a position to experience a sustained revival. Until such time, Christians will continue to sit as bystanders, while billions of lost souls march down the road to perdition.

Laymen must do most of the grunt work, but pastoral leadership is crucial. The sheep need shepherds. Local evangelical pastors must organize this effort, zip code by zip code, church by church. This will take leadership.

If local evangelical pastors refuse to cooperate with each other, this plan cannot work. The division of labor alone can work (Romans 12; I Corinthians 12). The Great Commission is too great for one congregation.

Conceptually, my plan is simple. The international website would be cheap to create and run. So would the local sites of ministerial associations. By decentralizing the program, the revival can be sustained. It will spread. Districts will not wind up burned over.

Do pastors want the added responsibility of mass revival that continues for two generations or more? Do laymen? Will churches cooperate in order to gain local specialization in service? So far, "that's not the way we do things around here." So far, there is no planning for revival. There is not even any awareness that such a revival is possible, let alone obligatory.

How do Christians think that the world's billions of lost souls will be brought to saving faith in time? They don't think about it. It is comforting not to think about it. A sustained revival would take so much time, so much effort, so much money, and so much pastoral cooperation. It is easier not to think about it.

Think about it.

For more details about what must be done to implement such a program, go here: www.SustainedRevival.com.

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