

Sunday 29th October & 5th November 2023 9.00 am and 10.30 am

WINTER IS APPROACHING AND OUR OPPORTUNITIES TO KNOW GOD MAY BE DISAPPEARING

Sermon preached by The Revd Dr Tony Martin delivered at Cromwell
Presbyterian Church

SOME IMMEDIATE PRACTICAL STEPS¹

The various chapters of this book have suggested a number of practical matters which can be pursued by anyone who is sufficiently desirous of seeing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in New Zealand, or in any other part of the world where you may happen to be at present. Such practical suggestions can arise from the story of what God has done in the past, or from considering the principles of revival which have been raised here. Perhaps, even, other principles of revival, which have not been mentioned here, have come to your mind as you have read and prayed, and might suggest to you what you could do.

¹ EVANGELICAL REVIVALS IN NEW ZEALAND: A History of Evangelical Revivals in New Zealand, and an Outline of Some Basic Principles of Revivals, by Robert Evans and Roy McKenzie, pp36-38

ON A PURELY PERSONAL LEVEL

(a.) Christian Character Development

By a prolonged study of the Scriptures, linked to much private prayer, and using suitable other publications, growth in each of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5), or of Christ bearing His own fruit in and through us (John 15), should be earnestly sought. It is those who hunger and thirst after righteousness who will be filled. Saint Paul told us that full-bodied Christian maturity should be our goal, actively pursued. This is only to be achieved, however, through faith in Jesus Christ, and through the power of His blood, shed on the Cross. It is by trusting in Jesus Christ, the true vine, to produce His fruit in us, that such fruitfulness becomes possible. It is by trusting the Heavenly Father, the Gardener, to make our lives into the fruit-bearing garden of His choice, to glorify Himself. In such obedience God's goal for our lives will be realised. Our own determination, ideas, theories, efforts and plans will not achieve it.

Christian maturity has many aspects and facets. Only a small number of these aspects or facets have been mentioned in our chapters on the principles of revival. So, in reminding ourselves of those aspects which we have already mentioned, it must not be thought that we are belittling the many other aspects.

Carefully go over what you have already gathered about the need to have a VISION as to who God is, what God can do, and as to what God wants to do, in us, and in this country. Work over this whole area carefully and fully, asking the Spirit to give you a vision of His work, according to His own will and power.

Carefully go over the need for repentance that continually exists in our own lives. Do not be critical about the many shortcomings of others. Look carefully and fully in a mirror, at yourself, in the mirror provided by the Scriptures. Look at each sin, and the way it flourishes in your life. Repent. Make restitution where possible. Ask God so to live His life within you that you will be free from each and all of these sins.

If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all iniquities.

After cleansing, seek the fulness of the Holy Spirit, to purify you further, and to lead and use you in the ways that He has chosen, as the Lord of the harvest. Remember the wonderful promise we have from the Lord Himself in Luke 11:13.

(b.) Prayer for Revival

Commence work on the project of praying for revival, in a way which reflects the value of what you are asking for. The backbone of all such prayer work has to be done in private, as Jesus described in Matthew 6.

God may lead you to make a promise or covenant to spend certain times in private prayer for revival, or in prayer and fasting. These periods can be times of great blessing. They can be special one-off occasions, or can follow a regular pattern.

Pray also for God's guidance as to whether He would have you do this alone, or in company with other like-minded people. It is usually both desirable and encouraging if you can find others to join with in this work. You may already know people like this. Or, it may be necessary to ask God to create a little group for you to be part of, and dedicated to this prayer project.

It may not be enough simply to be part of a general Bible study group, or general prayer group. General groups like this, of course, are of basic importance both in Christian living and service, and deserve our support. Prayer for revival, as a special need, can normally only be approached as a specialised target, requiring special and dedicated attention.

Talk to the minister, pastor, elders or other leaders in your church fellowship about these matters. Work through your church fellowship, under the umbrella, authority and discipline of your church leadership meetings, as much as you possibly can.

POSSIBLE WIDER JOINT ACTIVITY

(a.) Intercessors For New Zealand

Several organisations already exist in New Zealand to further the kind of aims we have been talking about. In some instances, these may be denominationally based. Others are inter-denominational.

One of these is "Intercessors for New Zealand." Currently, their address is Box 3399. Wellington, New Zealand. While this organisation has definite interests in revival, prayer is also encouraged about a wide range of other national issues, and interests.

(b.) A Suggestion for Specially Designed Revival Prayer Groups

The Lord may lead you to make, lead, or be otherwise involved in a Revival Prayer Group which has been specially designed in the following way.

* The group should decide to meet regularly, preferably weekly, primarily to pray earnestly for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the churches in your area, and throughout the nation, and for conversions. Prayer about any other matters should be viewed as strictly secondary in importance, and in the time given to them.

The outpouring of the Spirit being sought in prayer should be basically through the NORMAL CHURCH ACTIVITIES. The vision should be that God would use the regular services in this way,

the regular pastoral work, the prayer meetings, children's and youth outreach, or whatever are the normal things being done by the existing congregations. The key to the future lies with the people who presently comprise the work-force of any congregation.

Pray that the Spirit will cause people to have deep and serious thoughts, so that they will ask "How can I be right with God?", or "Where will I spend eternity?" or "How can my sins be forgiven?" or "What is the meaning of my life?" Pray that they will have no peace of mind until they find forgiveness through the blood of Christ, and join a Christian fellowship.

It is possible, of course, to direct the prayers of such a group toward the success of special meetings, evangelistic crusades or inter-denominational activities of many kinds. But, it is a serious mistake to make these special efforts into the primary focus.

* One person in the group might appear as naturally the leader, but the group should decide who is leader, and this should be reviewed regularly. No leadership decision should be made without sufficient prayer for guidance. The leader should serve the others, taking more care of them

spiritually. The leader should be very mature in the Christian spiritual life.

* A time should be set aside at each weekly meeting for members to pray in some depth for each other. To this end, members should be ready to tell the rest of the group what spiritual problems and temptations they are currently facing, and what their besetting sins are. This is a thoroughly Scriptural practice (James 5:16), being one of the main factors which made early Methodism so powerful in holiness. Each member must therefore view everything that is said in the group as strictly confidential, and members who continue to gossip, after being admonished, should be quietly asked to leave. It is very important for each member to feel that he or she has a responsibility to answer to the others for what one does.

* A main purpose in this form of Christian character development is so that members of the prayer group can help each other ACTUALLY TO PRACTISE what is involved in such Bible verses as Second Chronicles 7:14, "If My People....." The aim is for the group members actually to see God at work in many conversions, and the outpouring

of the Spirit of God, in answer to the prayers of the group members.

* The group should pray for new members, including new converts, to be added to the group, as the Lord leads. When the group becomes larger than twelve, on a regular basis, it should choose a second leader, and divide.

* The so-called "prayer triplets" system of praying for the conversion of others, or some similar pattern which might seem suitable, may be seen as a good method to use.

* If more than one such group exists within a reasonable area, joint prayer activities may be arranged, from time to time.

* The authors would like to hear about any such group. We could offer help in the form of prayer bulletin information dealing with prayer for revival. One of us might be able to visit the group sometimes, with the group's permission, of course.

Some Dangers to Avoid in Such a Group

A leader should not be a new convert, and should be experienced in the Christian life. The leader should have a good knowledge of the Bible, and a general knowledge of basic Christian teaching, and church history, and be eager to learn more. Even more important, however, is that the leader should be a good listener, should understand people, should be strong, but also humble, wise, teachable, meek and open to negotiation.

Members should NOT choose a leader with a dominating and aggressive personality, or who uses the force of their personality to control or manipulate other people, especially if this person has visions, hears voices, or claims to be inspired with any messages straight from God about what others should do or believe. Beware especially of any new teaching which purports to come from visions, or from direct revelation.

Groups should learn to recognise anyone who practices magic, or who uses psychological or psychic pressures or tricks.

Any speaker who appears to use the power of his own personality, or who uses the impact of psychological phenomena, to sway or manipulate an audience, should be noted. That person should NOT be asked to speak again. Anything which even looks like personality control, brainwashing or the imposition of rigid beliefs or practices on others, should be completely avoided.

Remember that in every spiritual movement there is a mixture of good and bad, human and divine, flesh and spirit. Great wisdom is needed in seeking to test the spirits without quenching the Holy Spirit, and in keeping the work of God as purely the work of the Spirit as possible.

In all their personal activities, and group activities, all group members should avoid every appearance of evil, especially regarding the use of money, and in all relationships between the sexes.

All group members should develop a taste for good reading, and for wide reading. Steps should be taken to avoid reading only those books which reflect views which one happens to like, or agree with.

(c.) Bible Study Materials.

The authors of this present book have prepared Bible study materials for the use of prayer groups specialising in prayer for revival, such as has been described above.

The main booklet of this kind is a simple study on the revivals in the Bible.

Another booklet for similar purposes, but containing more "meat", is entitled "If My People....". Its main purpose is to explore aspects of the subject of revivals, as raised through the various themes in Second Chronicles 7:14. Both of these booklets are available from the authors at the address given below, or at a Christian book store.

There are many other suitable Bible studies about Christian Holiness, the Holy Spirit and His fruit, the nature and Names of God, Prayer, and other relevant subjects, which have been produced and published by others.

LEARN MORE ABOUT REVIVALS.

If people wish to be used by God in times of revival, knowing as much as one can about the subject is a definite advantage, and can only

increase one's usefulness. The authors of this present book offer some resources for further study, learning and growth in these matters, on the key issues, or about a wide range of related matters.

(a.) Special Study and Research Materials about Revivals

An option to increase knowledge about the whole subject is that the authors are offering leaflets and booklets containing short courses of studies about the outpourings of the Holy Spirit, mainly using as reference material various books which are currently available on the book market. These leaflets and booklets are of minimal cost. But to become properly informed about the subjects it will be necessary to borrow or purchase varying numbers of books which are recommended in the study materials.

Naturally, the further one goes into the subject, the more benefit can be gained from it. But, the expense on books will increase, while the time needed to profit from the exercise will grow. Anyone deeply interested in revival should build their own little collection of books on the subject.

The courses of study are designed to be done by anyone who can read a reasonable book and think about what has been read. It does not require a high academic standard. Naturally, a person with better practice at study will make better progress.

Subjects which can be studied further in this way include:

- * Revivals in the Bible.
- * The Nature of Revival Movements.
- * Revivals as the Transformer of Society.
- * History and impact of the Great Awakenings.
- * The History of Modern Revivals.
- * Important Lessons to be Learned from this History.
- * Revivals and the Missionary Enterprise.
- * Overall Literature about Revivals.
- * Library Possibilities.
- * What Literature is Currently Available.
- * Theological Issues Involved.
- * Psychological Issues.
- * Deceptions and Practical Problems in Revivals.

* Lateral Thinking about Revivals.

It should also be added that, while the authors are able to help people to obtain some books for study, and other materials, we do not have any financial stake in the matter. We do not profit from it. We try to cover our costs. It is not a means for us to make any money. Our addresses appear below the Preface, in the front of this book. The main address in New Zealand, at the time of publication, is:- 10 Naumai Street, Gore. Southland. New Zealand.