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LESSON 1

Revival: WHO NEEDS IT?

The revival we will be talking about in this study is for God's people—those who by faith in Jesus Christ have received salvation and belong to Him. (People who do not belong to God cannot be “revived”; they first must be regenerated!) Since the days of Adam and Eve, God's people have often chosen to resist His will and rebel. Because of His great love, God keeps calling them back to intimate fellowship with Him. God's grace—the desire and power He gives us to return to Him—always accompanies His call to revival.

Memory verse

*“Break up your
fallow ground,
For it is time to
seek the LORD,
Till He comes and rains
righteousness on you.”*

(Hosea 10:12 NKJV)

Going Deeper in the Word

- 2 Kings 22:8-13, 18-20
- Ezra 10:1-12
- Jeremiah 3:19-4:4
- James 4:4-10

Day 1: Faith-Builder Story

- 1 Why did you decide to do this study? As you begin to seek God in a fresh way, what are some of your hopes? Your fears?

Read the following story of one self-made man's realization. Then answer the questions that follow.

I was a man who truly had everything I ever wanted—a beautiful family, a lovely home, several successful business ventures, and respect in my community and church. Like the foolish rich man in the parable Jesus told, my “barns” were full and overflowing (see Proverbs 3:10), and I felt pretty good. I certainly didn't see any need for “revival” in my life.

But God knew my true condition, and He loved me enough to do something about it. I attended an extended series of special services held at my church. Through the Bible teaching, God began to show me how blind and spiritually bankrupt I was. I was being confronted with truth from God's Word, and the Holy Spirit was convicting me. I found this really uncomfortable. In fact, when I had to go on a business trip for three days in the middle of the summit, I was relieved; I thought I was going to get away from the Lord! But wouldn't you know, the Spirit of God went right along with me. Those were three miserable days of conviction.

The next Sunday morning, the speaker shared the Bible story of Naaman, the commander-in-chief of the Syrian army. He was a wealthy leader who had it all together—except that he had leprosy. Naaman wanted to be healed, but he didn't want to do it God's way. So he approached it the way I would have; he loaded up six hundred shekels of gold and ten talents of silver and went down to buy his way out of his problem. Right in the middle of this story, God's Spirit spoke to my heart: “You're just like Naaman! You've got spiritual leprosy, and you need to be healed. You can be restored, but you're going to have to do it My way.”

“I thought I was going to get away from the Lord! But wouldn't you know, the Spirit of God went right along with me.”

I realized that I was proud, rebellious, ungrateful, and unyielded. I fell on my knees and cried out to God as best I knew how, asking what He wanted me to do. I sensed Him saying to me, “I want two things: submission and obedience.” Those were strange words to me, but I put myself at His mercy, confessed my sin, and repented.

God slowly showed me that I was trying to hang on to all the “things” I was accumulating instead of trusting Him to provide for us. He began to deal with me about my business and financial affairs, which resulted in a freeing, radical change of values for my family.

- 2** Identify some of the outer and inner factors that brought about spiritual change in this man’s life.

- 3** Have you ever experienced the kind of encounter with God that he described? What was the message you needed to hear?

We are hardly the first human beings to discover our need for personal revival. Listen to the cry of the psalmist’s heart many generations ago:

⁶ Will you not revive us again,
that your people may rejoice in you?

⁷ Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,
and grant us your salvation.

⁸ Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints;
but let them not turn back to folly.

⁹ Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,
that glory may dwell in our land. (Psalm 85:6-9)

“I sensed Him saying to me, ‘I want two things: submission and obedience.’”

Key Point !

Revival is for God's people who have drifted spiritually.

Tip +

If you haven't already done so, be sure to read the Introduction on pages viii-xii. It helps define what revival is.

4 According to these verses, who needs revival?

5 What are some of the results of revival among God's people?

Day 2: Truth Encounter

BREAKING GROUND

To begin our study, let's look at the Old Testament, where we clearly see God's desire to restore His wayward people. Consider, for example, the prophet Hosea.

God sent Hosea to prophesy to the nation of Israel. Though they were God's chosen people, the nation was in a sad state of spiritual and moral decline. For years they had enjoyed God's blessings—material bounty, military strength, peaceful relations with neighboring nations—yet they still turned away from Him. They stopped viewing God as the source of their blessings and chose instead to credit themselves. They put off worshiping God. They ceased loving Him. They replaced Him with idols, trivial pursuits, and earthly wealth.

It was to these confused fellow countrymen that Hosea delivered repeated rebukes and appeals. If they did not return to the Lord, he warned, judgment would surely come. Here is the essence of Hosea's message:

*¹² Sow for yourselves righteousness;
Reap in mercy;
Break up your fallow ground,
For it is time to seek the LORD,
Till He comes and rains righteousness on you.*

*¹³ You have plowed wickedness;
You have reaped iniquity.
You have eaten the fruit of lies,
Because you trusted in your own way,
In the multitude of your mighty men. (Hosea 10:12-13 NKJV)*

6 What was Hosea's charge against the Israelites?

Insight

Hosea prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel during a period of rapid moral decline ending in destruction by Assyria in 722 B.C. Hosea's family was a symbol of God's relationship with His people. His wife was a prostitute (representing spiritual adultery), and his children had prophetic names.

Key Point

If we want to return to God, we must be prepared to break up the hard, barren ground of our spiritual lives.

Insight

Old Testament prophets confronted sin, warned of God's judgment, and urged people to repent.

Insight 

Fallow ground—once plowed, but now lying waste—must be tilled (broken up) with a sharp plow in order to make the soil ready for seed and, ultimately, fruitful and productive.

7 What do you think it means to “break up your fallow ground”?

The condition of many present-day churches is remarkably similar to that of the nation of Israel. In many ways, we too have forsaken God and attempted to replace Him with other gods (idols). If Hosea were preaching now, he would scarcely need to alter his words! He might tell God’s people today:

- Return to your former lifestyle of righteousness, to a time when you were close to God and obeyed His Word.
- Accept God’s mercy and forgive those who have wronged you.
- Allow God to “plow up” the hardened ground of your hearts, especially in those areas where you have long neglected His will.
- Grieve over your sins.
- Ponder the consequences of sin that you are experiencing.
- Accept responsibility by admitting you have brought these consequences upon yourself.
- Make seeking God your highest pursuit.

8 With the above message in mind, has there ever been a time in your Christian life when you walked more closely with God than you are walking right now? If yes, what are some consequences you have experienced as a result of this loss of spiritual intimacy?

Day 3: Truth Encounter

GOD'S LOVE DRAWS US

Why does God want to revive our hearts and restore us to a closer relationship with Him? One major reason is that He loves us!

We need to beware of misunderstanding (or misrepresenting) the heart and ways of God when we study His dealings with His people, especially in the Old Testament. Due to the numerous accounts of God's judgment recorded there, we might get the impression that God was eager to punish or that He is harsh, demanding, and impatient. But really, the opposite is true. Times of judgment usually came after many *years* of pleading repeatedly with His people to come back to Him.

Look again at the book of Hosea. God said:

¹ *When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.*

² *The more they were called,
the more they went away;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals
and burning offerings to idols.*

³ *Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk;
I took them up by their arms,
but they did not know that I healed them.*

⁴ *I led them with cords of kindness,
with the bands of love,
and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on
their jaws,
and I bent down to them and fed them. (Hosea 11:1-4)*

Then, after taking His people through a time of discipline and correction, God urged them once again:

¹ *Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,
for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.*

² *Take with you words
and return to the LORD;
say to him,*

*"Take away all iniquity;
accept what is good,
and we will pay with bulls
the vows of our lips.*

! Key Point

God's unfathomable love for us moves Him to draw us back to Him when we've strayed.

³ *Assyria shall not save us;
we will not ride on horses;
and we will say no more, 'Our God,'
to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy."*

⁴ *I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them. (Hosea 14:1-4)*

- 9** When did God start loving His people?
- After they "cleaned up their act."
 - After He vented His anger on them.
 - When they were young, at the beginning of their existence.
- 10** Do you think God ever stopped loving them?
- Yes, at least for a while.
 - No. God always loved them, even when they needed discipline.

Explain your answer:

The passages from Hosea 11 and 14 provide “before,” “during,” and “after” snapshots of how and why God revives and renews His people. The constant in all three stages is His love. God loved them when they were newborns (“child” in Hosea 11:1 literally means “infant”); He loved them after they returned to Him from a season of rebellion; and He loved them throughout the whole process of correcting them.

It was His love for them, in fact, that caused them to want to return to Him. It wasn’t that they suddenly “felt” love for Him again, nor that they somehow remembered how wonderful it was to live with an awareness of God’s love. It was that God *caused* them to desire that love relationship again. He enabled His people to see not only how wrong they had been and why His discipline was necessary, but also that He would welcome their return because He had never ceased loving them.

Perhaps your own heart is hungering for intimacy with God—an intimacy that you haven’t enjoyed for a long time or perhaps have never known. That very desire is God-initiated. He wants you back! Why? Because He loves you and knows that you cannot experience all He has for you in your present condition.

- 11 Write a prayer thanking God for His faithful love and for His desire to restore His people when they have wandered away from Him.

“Was there a time in your Christian life when your passion for Christ was stronger? If so, you may need a spiritual revival. Before there can be a revival in the church, there must first be a revival in you.”

—Greg Laurie

Day 4: Truth Encounter

RETURNING TO OUR FIRST LOVE

The need for believers to return wholeheartedly to God—to be revived—is also addressed in the New Testament. The book of Revelation records the apostle John’s vision. In this vision, Jesus speaks to seven churches. The church at Ephesus had once been a vibrant group of believers, deeply in love with Jesus. They had maintained their doctrinal purity and avoided sinful practices. They had worked hard and persevered, and they were all about service. Yet something was wrong. After commending their strengths, Jesus addressed a matter of grave concern to Him:

⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. (Revelation 2:4-5)

Key Point !

We can get back our “first love” for the Lord.

- 12** What had the church at Ephesus done that so displeased the Lord? Put into your own words what it means to leave “the love you had at first.”

- 13** What three verbs do you see in Jesus’ command? What light does this shed on the process of revival?

Over the years, the Christians at Ephesus had somehow lost sight of Jesus. Their love for Him had lost its fervor. They had transferred their affection elsewhere, which would cost them dearly if something didn't change. God wants us to love Him first and foremost. When we find ourselves trusting in people instead of the Lord, this indicates that our heart's focus has shifted from Him (Jeremiah 17:5). Love for people—friends, family members, or even ourselves—can compete with our love for Him (Matthew 10:37). Other substitutes for a God-centered love relationship might include money, pleasure, friends, work, religious rituals, the teachings of respected leaders, or Bible knowledge without a relationship with Christ.

Revival does not begin when a struggling, wayward person decides to return to the Lord but rather when the loving heavenly Father, wanting His people to enjoy the safety and security of His love, calls him or her back to Himself. God is the initiator; the call to revival is a plea of love from the heart of God.

14 Have you transferred your love for God to some other place? Can you identify any rivals that could be competing with your love for Him?

 **Insight**

A major city in western Asia Minor (now Turkey), Ephesus was a center of early Christianity. Paul based his operations there for three years, and the apostle John is believed to have spent his final years as bishop of Ephesus.

“As long as we are content to live without revival, we will.”

—Leonard Ravenill

Tip +

Before you begin working through the checklist, pray the prayer of Psalm 139:23–24: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

Day 5: Making It Personal

Revival is the sovereign work of God. He chooses when and to whom He sends it. It is also true, however, that there are things we can do to prepare for revival in our lives. Being prepared for what God has determined to do is a pattern we see throughout Scripture. For example, on the eve of their entrance into the Promised Land, Joshua charged the children of Israel, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you” (Joshua 3:5). In the same way, we can prepare our hearts for spiritual renewal.

The following questions are designed to reveal specific areas to consider as you prepare for personal (as well as corporate) revival. They are not meant to be guilt-producers, just a helpful tool. Answer each question as honestly as possible—not as it once was in your life or as others think of you, but based on what the Spirit reveals to be the current condition of your heart.

Read the Bible passages if time allows. Agree with God about each need He reveals. Confess any sin that He shows you. Praise Him for His awesome love and power to forgive. Don’t be in a hurry; give God time to show you your heart and take whatever time you need to respond.

Preparing My Heart for Revival

1. Genuine Salvation (2 Corinthians 5:17)
 - a. Was there a time in my life when I genuinely repented of (was aware of and turned away from) my sin?
 - b. Was there a time when I placed all my trust in Jesus Christ alone to save me?
 - c. Was there ever a time when I completely surrendered to Jesus Christ as the Master and Lord of my life?
2. God’s Word (Psalm 119:97, 140)
 - a. Do I have a desire to read and meditate on the Word of God?
 - b. Is my personal devotional life consistent and meaningful?
 - c. Do I seek to apply God’s Word to my everyday life?

3. Humility (Isaiah 57:15)

- a. Am I quick to recognize and agree with God in confession when I have sinned?
- b. Am I quick to admit to others when I am wrong?
- c. Do I count others and their interests to be more significant than myself and my interests?

4. Obedience (1 Samuel 15:22; Hebrews 13:17)

- a. Am I quick to obey when God shows me something in His Word that pleases (or displeases) Him?
- b. Do I obey the human authorities God has placed over my life?

5. Pure Heart (1 John 1:9)

- a. Do I keep short sin accounts with God by confessing and forsaking all known sin as He convicts?
- b. Am I willing to give up all sin for God?
- c. Do I love and dwell on things that are true, pure, and good?

6. Clear Conscience (Acts 24:16)

- a. Do I seek forgiveness from those I wrong or offend?
- b. Is my conscience clear with every person? (Can I honestly say, "There is no one I have ever wronged or offended in any way and not gone back to that person and sought his or her forgiveness and made it right"?)

7. Priorities (Matthew 6:33)

- a. Does my schedule reveal that God is first in my life?
- b. Do my spending habits reveal that God is first in my life?

8. Values (Colossians 3:12)

- a. Do I love what God loves and hate what God hates?
- b. Do I value the things that please God (for example: studying His Word, praying, giving, sharing the gospel with others, acts of mercy)?
- c. Are my affections and goals fixed on eternal values?

“Revival awakens in our hearts an increased awareness of the presence of God, a new love for God, a new hatred for sin, and a hunger for His Word.”

—Del Fehsenfeld Jr.

“Revival is not some emotion or worked up excitement; it is rather an invasion from heaven which brings to man a conscious awareness of God.”

—Stephen Olford

9. Sacrifice (Philippians 3:7–8)

- a. Am I willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary to see God move in my life and church (time, convenience, comfort, reputation, pleasure, habits, and so on)?
- b. Is my life characterized by generosity and sacrifice for the sake of Jesus and others?

10. Spirit Control (Galatians 5:22–25; Ephesians 5:18–21)

- a. Am I allowing Jesus to be Lord of every area of my life?
- b. Am I allowing the Holy Spirit to fill (control) my life each day?
- c. Is there growing evidence of the fruit of the Spirit being produced in my life?

11. “First Love” (Philippians 1:21, 23)

- a. Am I as devoted to Jesus as I have been in the past?
- b. Am I attentive to Jesus, filled with His joy and peace, and making Him the object of my affection?

12. Motives (Matthew 10:28; Acts 5:29)

- a. Am I more concerned with what God thinks about my life than with what others think?
- b. Would I pray, read my Bible, give, and serve as much if nobody but God ever noticed?
- c. Am I more concerned about pleasing God than I am about being accepted and appreciated by others?

13. Moral Purity (Ephesians 5:3–4)

- a. Do I keep my mind free from entertainment or input that could stimulate fantasizing or thoughts that are not morally pure?
- b. Are my conversation and behavior pure and in accordance with God’s Word?

14. Forgiveness (Colossians 3:12–13)

- a. Do I seek to resolve relational conflicts as soon as possible?
- b. Am I quick to bear with and forgive those who wrong or hurt me?

15. Evangelism (Luke 24:47–48; Romans 9:3)

- a. Do I have a burden for those who do not know or follow Jesus?
- b. Am I alert to opportunities to share the gospel with nonbelievers?

16. Prayer (1 Timothy 2:1)

- a. Am I faithful in praying for the needs of others?
- b. Do I pray for true revival in my life, my church, my nation, and our world?

17. Genuine love (1 Corinthians 13:1–8)

- a. Do I exhibit the characteristics of true love in my relationships with others?
- b. Do I seek the good of others above my own interests?
- c. Do I treat all others as valuable image bearers of God?

18. Compassion and kindness (Colossians 3:12)

- a. Do I demonstrate a heart for those who are needy, vulnerable, or disenfranchised?
- b. Do I reach out to minister in practical ways to meet those needs, even if it is costly or those in need are in a different demographic or socio-economic status than I?

Seeking Him *Together*

Use these questions and activities each week for group discussion of the material each member has completed during the week. Remember that any personal sharing should be held in confidence. This is a valuable opportunity to learn from one another and encourage each other to seek the Lord more intentionally.

Opening It Up

1. Why have you chosen to participate in this study on seeking God and personal revival?

Talking It Over

2. Before beginning this study, did you have any negative conceptions about “revival”? How would you summarize the concept of revival described in this study?

3. If you read the passages in “Going Deeper in the Word,” what parts encouraged you? What, if any, questions did they raise?

4. What did you learn from the Faith-Builder story of the self-made man? What things do you tend to hold onto for security, even though they could be easily taken away?

5. The prophet Hosea was sent to the nation of Israel. They had turned away from God and replaced Him with other things. What are some ways that Christians today replace God with other things?

6. Read Hosea 10:12–13 aloud. Review the seven-point summary of Hosea’s message on page 6. If you’re willing, explain to the group how a particular point applies to you personally.

7. Tell the group about someone you know or have heard about who has unselfishly loved another person, even though that person was not worthy of it. How does this real-life example help you understand God’s love for His wayward children?

8. What does the idea that God initiates revival in His people tell you about God? What does it tell you about yourself?

+ Tip

Do not hastily pass over this Scripture or the summary points. Allow God to speak to your heart. Listen and respond as the Holy Spirit examines you.

Seeking Him *Together*

9. “Preparing My Heart for Revival” (Day 5) was intended to help you assess your need for personal revival. If you feel comfortable, share a specific way God used this exercise to reveal an area of need in your life.

Praying for Revival

There are countless joys and rewards of walking closely with and seeking God. Below are eight specific benefits or results of personal revival. Have one person or several people read these aloud.

1. **Revival restores first love.** In times of revival, the love we once had for God is rekindled.
2. **Revival rekindles a desire for God’s Word, prayer, praise, and obedience.** As we experience greater intimacy with God, those spiritual disciplines and activities we once dreaded become a delight.
3. **Revival resolves conflicts.** God’s grace enables us to humble ourselves, admit our sinful attitudes, forgive those who have hurt us, and seek the forgiveness of those we have offended. Reconciliation—with God and others—is a mark of true revival.
4. **Revival repairs broken marriages.** Do you know any “hopeless” family situations, such as couples on the brink of divorce or perhaps deeply embittered toward one another yet staying together for the sake of appearance? When real revival comes, no situation is hopeless.

“Revival is not just an emotional touch; it is a complete takeover!”

—A newly revived believer

5. Revival removes bitterness, fear, and worry. “We have seen more take place in her life in four days than we have in four years of counseling.” This is how a father and mother described the drastic change in their formerly rebellious and sexually promiscuous teenage daughter. This young woman came under deep conviction regarding bitterness that she held toward someone who had wounded her. The reasons for her rebellious behavior became obvious as she began to acknowledge her hurts and accept responsibility for her wrong responses and actions. Anger and bitterness soon lost their grip, and she was set free.

6. Revival refreshes the spirit. Do you experience frequent pressure and anxiety? Have you discovered that the things you tend to turn to for relief do not satisfy you or remove the stress? According to Acts 3:20, “times of refreshing” come from “the presence of the Lord.” What a beautiful description of revival! God invites us to come to His presence. There—and only there—will we find genuine rest.

7. Revival renews the mind. A revived life is marked by God-centered thinking. We begin to view things from His perspective rather than from our own limited vantage point.

8. Revival reforms the life. Someone has described revival as a “complete takeover” in which God is returned to His rightful place as Lord of our lives. Old habits are put away and new ones are established. Resentment and despair are replaced with contentment and hope. Forgiveness flows freely.

Which result(s) of revival do you particularly need and desire to see in your own life?

“Revival in the church is the greatest need in the world today.”

—John Piper

Seeking Him *Together*

Break into groups of three or four, and take time to pray for each other in one or more of these areas:

- **PRAY** that Jesus Christ will become the first love in each heart.
- **PRAY** that you will have an increased desire to read and obey God's Word and to worship Him.
- **PRAY** that any outstanding conflicts would be resolved.
- **PRAY** that any family conflicts represented in your group will be reconciled.
- **PRAY** that you would be set free from any bitterness, anger, and worry, and that each life would be characterized by love, forgiveness, and God-centered trust.
- **PRAY** that each one will cultivate a habit of turning to God when faced with any kind of trial.
- **PRAY** that God will renew your mind.
- **PRAY** that each member of your group would experience true revival as you seek Him together in the days ahead.

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