

GOD'S ANSWER - REVIVAL (written by Andrew Hurren)

INTRODUCTION

I remember viewing some 'Transformation' videos back in 2001. These videos showed a number of real situations throughout the world where God had moved mightily seeing great change amongst God's people. Also many souls were saved, and in some cases, there was significant societal change for the better. In some situations such as Almolonga in Guatemala, virtually complete societal transformation took place. Some of the blessing of this great change was the closing of four jails, a society once dogged by alcoholism and drugs became all but drug and alcohol abuse free, and many were delivered. The land once barren and unproductive had become fertile and richly productive. A poverty stricken city had now become wealthy.

From 2001 until 2008 I was in pastoral ministry in North Eastern New South Wales (Australia). I regarded myself fortunate to have been called to a church that was mission minded.

THE CHURCH TO THE UNCHURCHED

This church considered itself to be the 'Church to the Unchurched'. Its philosophy of ministry had a strong emphasis on 'one to one' evangelism and it also held a number of events with the specific intention of building bridges, and witnessing to the unsaved. Sadly though the mission of the church was more at a philosophical level despite at times practical, but certainly lacked something, as we were not seeing results. Apart from the Biblical promise that God's Word does not return void (*Isaiah 55:11*) (and we cannot know what seeds were sown), we were just not seeing any significant spiritual change and certainly very few souls won to Christ. My first four years in ministry in this church saw only 1 or 2 extra numbers per year. This was as a result of, in the main, transfers. Our outreach events and 'one to one friendship' evangelism had only seen one person come and occasionally join church fellowship. That person never made a full commitment to God in the entire seven years I was at the church.

After 4 years of 'ineffectual' evangelism, and despite our mission being specifically to the 'unchurched', I asked the question of the congregation one Sunday morning, 'Who is here as a result of our evangelistic events and programs including one to one evangelism?'. Not one hand being raised was quite a graphic wake up call for the church.

TRANSFORMATION

The situation motivated me to think again of those 'Transformation' video scenarios and I began to study them more closely. I discovered in these revival situations, it was not God pouring out His Spirit indiscriminately but rather where there was significant heart felt response to God personally by His people, God then blessed. As I also studied the scriptures for answers, I found that same message.

REVIVAL AND THE BIBLE

The nation Israel is a stark example to us of God's blessing being bestowed upon His people while their hearts and lives responded to Him. When their hearts grew cold towards God, and they worshipped everything else but God either inadvertently or directly, His blessing dried up.

I was drawn to several verses that highlighted clear direction as to when and why God blessed. The first of these and perhaps the most significant is 2 Chronicles 7:14 which states that *'if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land'*. (NIV).

In the New Testament Jesus spoke in John 13:35 of the oneness (unity) and love of believers in Christ which was not only God's command to us, and His will for us, but also that which would demonstrate to the world, Christians were indeed Jesus disciples. Given much division and many denominations in Christendom, is it any wonder so often unbelievers just don't 'get it'. They just don't see Him in His people?

DECISION TO CHANGE

I shared my discovery with the church leaders and also the church body. As a result we made some changes. We brought our pre-service prayer meeting into the church which included the congregation as they came in. Our Home Group decided to start every second week with prayer. These prayer meetings continued on for an hour or more sometimes. Previously we had begun with a brief prayer, and concluded with a prayer often brief because we had gone on too long with the study part. The change was heart felt sustained prayer in the presence of God.

We showed 'Transformation' videos to the church and encouraged prayer for revival. The result was amazing. Whilst our numbers were small we all but doubled those numbers within months. Admittedly some of these folk came to us from other fellowships, but there were also new disciples being made, both young and older. The Christians who came in were drawn by something special that was happening beyond any human endeavour. There was a wonderful spirit around the church.

Our scheduled worship times were spiritually richer. After the formal service it was not uncommon to see people laying hands on each other praying together for each other's needs. Sadly this beginnings of 'revival' only continued a short time as there were leadership issues, which shaped the decline in the health of the church.

Despite only having seen a glimpse of what I saw in the Transformation videos and what was spoken of in the Scriptures, I had made a discovery that was like a light coming on, and has shaped ministry for me ever since.

'PROGRAM CHRISTIANITY' (not really Christianity at all)

I have observed that for the last forty years or so, the western world church has been in a period I would describe as 'program Christianity'. To solve a situation or a problem, a program was created to speak into and address that situation. Many many books have been written on many and varied Christian subjects. We also have videos and DVDs, and the internet which can supply us with seemingly endless information very quickly, and much of that detail is religious and spiritual. We also now have around the clock Christian Television. Let me quickly point out that all of this is great. As a pastor I have used programs from time to time, I buy and watch Christian DVDs, and I have many Christian books in my office and home.

Where God is moving significantly in the world in current times however, is in the developing world, which has considerably less by way of aids and resources. Whilst there are pockets of revival in the western world, there are amazing things happening in places like India, China, Africa, South and Central America, etc. These are places that have far less Christian resources and wealth and yet God is moving mightily. We have been in a period of history in the western world where there has been a great emphasis on information. The Internet demonstrates this reality, yet this greater information does not appear to be translating into real eternal results other than giving people more and greater knowledge. This emphasis is also not necessarily creating more effective disciples and generally speaking, is not winning souls.

I am reminded of the words of Jesus in the gospel of John 5:39-40 where He said to the Jews and most likely the Pharisees, *'You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life'*. Have we been like the Pharisees? So focused on literature and information, head knowledge but not really engaging with God? Perhaps our focus and emphasis has been on the written word, the scriptures, and not the living word, the one true living personal God Himself, who desires not just that we know a whole lot about Him, but desires that we respond to His love by loving Him back whole heartedly, entering into right relationship with Him and obeying Him. He desires that we gain intimate 'experiential' personal knowledge of Him as opposed to just knowing detail about Him.

SO WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

HUMILITY *'will humble themselves'*.

Perhaps the call upon all and particularly the western world church at the moment is to return again to its first love (Revelation 2:4). 2 Chronicles 7:14 tells us a lot about what should be happening to see God bless, beginning with *'if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves'*. All blessing appears to hinge on this line. Man has always had a propensity to be pride filled and self centred, and consequently God's blessing can become severely diminished and even blocked by humanity's pride. God requires that

we whole heartedly accept, worship, and obey Him. This means totally engaging with the living and personal God. Humility, which is a total whole hearted surrendering to God, is where our trust, and faith begins, and indeed our lives are revived.

Our preparedness to connect and communicate with the Living Eternal God in prayer depends on us humbling ourselves and submitting whole heartedly to Him.

God is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Alpha and Omega, the First the Last, the Beginning & the End. He is all powerful, all knowing and everywhere, He is love, merciful and gracious and at the same time utterly holy, righteous, and just. Surely we would not want a supreme being who is over all & in all any other way. We would not want a 'shonky' God to have such power over us. Thank God that God is who He is. Surely knowing who He really is causes us to submit our lives totally and utterly to Him.

PRAYER *'and pray'*

Given that God is who He is, the One True Eternal God, Holy, Just and the very essence of Love, it is absolutely paramount therefore that we connect intimately and communicate with Him. We need to go much deeper than just saying nice 'religious' prayers. We need to intimately and passionately connect and communicate with God, who is not just a memory of someone who lived in the past, but indeed the One True Living and personal God very much alive today. We are called as God's people to *'pray in the Spirit on all occasions'* (Ephesians 6:18), and praying in the Spirit would mean that God inhabits our prayers. Therefore we would pray 'God's desire' in seeing His people devoted to Him and winning lost souls, so they may receive His saving grace. This passion and desire is at the heart of prayer for revival. History demonstrates that when God's people join together with lives that are seeking the heart and will of God, He pours out His blessing, often not just on His people, but also on the very land and society around them.

SEEKING *'and seek my face'*

In recent decades we have seen an emphasis on 'seeker sensitive' church services. In other words church services that endeavour to show sensitivity towards the unbeliever who may come in and join Christians as they meet together. This would mean that there is an effort to make the unbelieving seeker feel relaxed and even entertained in a non threatening environment.

Then through this 'seeker sensitive' experience, the person would hopefully eventually come to a relationship with Christ. Much good could be said regarding this emphasis, but as I studied the scriptures regarding revival, I discovered that when the word 'seek' was used in the scriptures, it was not in reference to the seeking unbeliever, but rather in reference to the call upon the believer. Biblically, God's people are to be ever seeking God Himself and His ways. Our propensity and position to seek Him with all our hearts and minds, and indeed our whole being and lives is the flow on of our humble total

submission to God, and engaging with Him in constant prayer. I was amazed when doing a bible search just how often the word 'seek' came up referring to God's people seeking after Him. This is consistent with where we see revival. When God's people hunger and thirst for God, He pours out His blessing.

REPENTANCE *'and turn from their wicked ways'*

Repentance results when a person submits humbly and totally to God, intimately communicates with Him, and has a genuine thirst for more of God. One becomes more aware of sin, when we open our lives to the Holy and Righteous God, We begin to see ourselves as we really are, that is unholy and comprehensively in need of saving from our unrighteous and sinful state.

The opposite is true when we act out of pride. We are distant from the Holy God and often compare ourselves to others to justify our own self-righteousness. We can always find someone who may have acted more sinfully than us (e.g. criminals etc.). So the flow on of humility before God is a deep awareness of our sinful state, a feeling of guilt for that sin and a desire to confess and repent. That is, being honest before Him for our sin and being truly sorry that we have acted in disobedience toward our Heavenly Father. This only truly happens when we draw near to God. Whilst there are many biblical examples of this happening, the one I would point towards is Isaiah (Is 6:5), who, when catching a vision of the King, the Lord God Almighty, Isaiah declared with great self awareness in the presence of Holy God, ⁵*"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."*

Genuine humility before God will result in repentance and that repentance is totally necessary to see God bless.

GOD only then pours out BLESSING

Dare I suggest much of 'church life process' (programs, methodology, strategies, literature, books etc.), which I spoke of previously, indirectly treats God like He is a 'wimp'. Perhaps our underlying philosophy is that God either cannot, or is not going to do much, so we need to come up with our plan to get the job done for Him, and then perhaps ask if our efforts are okay with Him. Noble and from a good motive sure enough, but have we missed the point all but completely? I was disappointed to hear a church leader, 'with whom I have great respect', some years ago say something like, 'we got sick of waiting around for revival so we started a care program instead'. This Senior pastor set about developing learning and programs aimed at helping people in their life struggles. Let me say that these programs and teaching did do much good, and far be it for me to suggest God was not in it, but as Dion Dimucci's song says 'Only God can change a heart'.

I believe we miss so much of God's blessing because we are so into our stuff and have little 'belief' that God Himself can actually do mighty things

(ultimately unbelief), and particularly regarding opening of peoples hearts towards Him and bringing about spiritual healing.

The Scriptures and history would unequivocally testify that God's people, humbly and submissively positioned in regards to Almighty God, results in God unleashing enormous blessing far beyond mere human endeavour. God is not primarily 'informational', He is primarily 'relational'. He does not require of us that we develop programs and impart information as an end in itself, but rather that we enter into a deep and abiding relationship with Him, and that we do not just impart information to others regarding God, but we first of all pray that God would open peoples hearts to an 'encounter' with the Living and Eternal God. The gospel does need to be both demonstrated and proclaimed, but we need to develop a strong belief that God is 'all powerful' and that which is impossible for humanity is more than possible for God (Luke 18:27).

It is He, and only He, that changes hearts and draws people unto Himself. I have heard recently stories where Christians have endeavoured to witness to others and the gospel message has been treated with contempt and completely dismissed by most. I believe there is a great spiritual coldness in our time towards God. What is needed is passionate heart felt prayer asking that God will move by His Spirit to soften and open people's hearts to His truths and indeed the gospel. There needs to be a change in the spiritual nature of society. Then and only then, when the gospel is lived and proclaimed, will it be received by the unbeliever. Now that's revival.

The testimony of those who have witnessed revival and have even been a part of a great move of God is they have no time to organise or strategise, for people were coming to Christ at such a quick rate. This is when it is not as a result of 'human endeavour', but rather God in the spiritual realm bringing about change in the hearts of people and pouring out His blessing.

When God's people have humbled themselves before God. When they walk in intimacy with Him praying and seeking Him with a passion, and are totally honest and sorry regarding sin, the great news is God blesses mightily. As per 2 Chronicles 7:14, He promises to bless first of all by actually hearing from us (which suggests He has chosen not to hear from us until we submit totally to Him). He promises also to appropriate forgiveness (once again suggesting He has not forgiven us until we utterly submit to Him), and then He promises to *'heal our land'*. Who would not want that? The original context was in regards to the natural land condition but this truth also applies regarding the Spiritual state of God's people and society (as demonstrated by Israel and every move of God down through history that I have studied).

THE POWER OF UNITY

I love those passages that suggest when we do something, God in turn does something mighty and blesses. 2 Chronicles 7:14 is one such passage. God's blessing is always very significant because He is eternal, all loving and all powerful.

Jesus also told us that 'Christian unity' would have great power because it would result in the world knowing that we are His disciples (John 13:35). This truth is expressed in the line of that well known chorus 'and they'll know we are Christians by our love...'. I believe this is a very powerful truth and one Christians have not rated highly enough for centuries, evidenced by the considerable degree of division across Christendom. The old saying is very very true, 'united we stand and divided we fall'. If the world gets the message because of Christian oneness, unity and great love for each other, then the witness of the church is dramatically reduced when there is division and a lack of love and unity. Division biblically is as a result of carnality (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). It is the result of Christians living uncommitted pride filled lives. Often carnality (man's ways, pride etc.), butts up against Spirituality in the church causing division, and severely compromises the love and power of God, and hence reduces blessing.

Revival, however, results when God's people maintain an intimate loving relationship with Him and as a result, His love flows through them to other believers and also unbelievers. A lack of love, apart from demonstrating disobedience and a lack of God (because God is Love), results in diminished blessing.

In my observation, unity is a major factor in a great move of the Spirit. Sometimes we see God move in one particular local church, and it is confined to just that fellowship and immediate influence of those folk. The blessing however seems to broaden out across society when there is unity across most denominations, and this often results in, at least some degree of societal transformation. This transformation often is evidenced by significantly greater church attendance, crime rate diminishing, less alcohol and drug abuse, and sometimes God even blessing the productivity of the land. (e.g. Almolonga)

Unity seems to happen between believers more readily when there is an increased thirst and hunger for God. Apart from these folk desiring to live truly Godly lives hence love God and their neighbour, they also have God's heart which is to have compassion for the state of society and great compassion for lost souls. They desire to fulfil His great commission of making disciples of every land (Matthew 28:16-20). God's purposes therefore often drives unity amongst Christians. It is like when there is a war. Men and women who may not necessarily even like each other, or may have little to do with each other will join together to fight the common enemy. They have a **unity and oneness of 'purpose'** which focuses and unites them to fight the common enemy together.

Christians have but one enemy, the 'devil', it is not each other. Although we may have great doctrinal differences, Christians are all on the same side. It is therefore of major importance that we are God's agents of unity, which results in blessing, and not the devil's agents of division which results in ineffectual witness to the world, defeat and ultimately death.

OPENNESS TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is one thing to empty ourselves before God in humbly submitting to Him, and even desiring to love each other and be united, but we need also to be filled again, and not just with anything, but with the very person of God via the Holy Spirit. When there is revival, renewal, or transformation, it is always a move of the Spirit of God.

One of the problems I have encountered, having grown up and been around, and even ministered in what I would call 'middle evangelical' churches (Churches of Christ, Baptist etc. Australia), is that there is often an unspoken, and sometimes spoken opposition to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. There is often great teaching and acceptance of the fruit of the Spirit, but for possibly a number of reasons, there is a problem for many accepting tangible manifestations of the Spirit. I find this a really strange phenomenon because such manifestations were very prevalent with Jesus ministry as seen graphically in the gospels, and also with the apostle's ministry documented biblically in the Acts of the Apostles.

If we are to see a move of God, we will need to be open to the very agent of that move which is God's Spirit Himself, and not reject the way He chooses to do things. Sadly many Christians do reject His ways and the result is reduced blessing. Let me hastily say though this does not mean anyone is less of a Christian or not saved. Lack of accepting the Spirit of God who is theologically 100% God will simply mean not having total faith, belief and trust in God and hence reduced blessing.

So I encourage us to look at the Bible and simply 'receive' what it says and clearly demonstrates through Jesus and the Apostles. Interestingly, the same evangelical churches that often either reject or diminish the role of the Holy Spirit will claim to be Bible believing, and yet have little acceptance of what the scriptures actually say, or demonstrate regarding the Holy Spirit.

We need also to accept the period of history in which we live. From Christ's ascension back to God the Father until His return again one day, is the 'ministry period' of the Holy Spirit. It was Jesus Himself who informed us of the Spirit's ministry and role particularly documented in the gospel of John. All that needed to be done in the first century still needs to be done until Christ returns. That is, convicting the world of sin, glorifying and drawing souls unto Christ, revealing the Kingdom etc.

Jesus handed His work on to the first disciples (Matthew 28:16-20), and that work is in turn handed down through the centuries and eventually to the disciples of today. Christians today need to fully embrace the very powerful and very personal resource God has ordained for us, namely the Spirit of Christ and Spirit of God the Father, that of the Holy Spirit. What makes us think we don't need full acceptance of God today? Do we think we are somehow more equipped and better today than the first disciples?, that we don't need to fully appropriate the Holy Spirit and all He is today? Surely that kind

of position is pride filled and a marked restriction of a move of God. We need to humble ourselves and thus fully accept our total dependence on that which Christ Himself ordained, being filled with the Holy Spirit. Only then will we see revival.

CONCLUSION

Biblically, and the witness of history is clear, in that we need to humble ourselves before God, pray earnestly, have lives that passionately seek after Him, and be blatantly honest, transparent, and repentant regarding sin. Then we will see God hear from us, forgive us, heal us, and bless mightily. Add then the great power of love resulting in a unity of purpose amongst Christians, which further 'prepares the soil' for a visitation of Divine outpouring. Of course we need to be utterly open and eager to totally receive and be filled with the very agent of revival and transformation, the person of the Holy Spirit Himself who by His very nature through His fruit, work and ministry point us to Jesus Christ.

The question is, do we want to see a move of the Spirit where our lives are spiritually enriched, souls are won to Christ and we see societal transformation? We know the answer is not on a continued dogma level. We don't necessarily need more books, films, strategies, methodologies and even social programs etc. Surely we have seen enough of that in our time and witness the generally ineffectual result across the western world in not growing the church and not bringing lives to Christ. The answer is to humbly place ourselves in a position to bring about promised blessing, that which is utterly of God and not human endeavour. Surely we are past the point of even thinking we can solve the worlds problems ourselves, and surely only the 'all things possible' one true God can do that.

What we need is to 'fuel the flame' of revival itself by a total priority, not on religion, philosophy, doctrine, process, or programs, but rather priority on our personal relationship with the one true living God, manifest to the world through Jesus Christ and evident today in His people by the Holy Spirit.

The call is upon us to return again to our 'First Love' with a greater passion and dedication than ever before, and the result I am sure will be great Divine blessing.

(written by Andrew Hurren)