

FRESH REVISED &
EXPANDED
ENCOUNTER
GOD'S PATTERN *for* SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

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NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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CONTENTS

Foreword by Anne Graham Lotz	vii
Preface	ix
Chapter 1: The Normal Christian Life: How Far Have You Fallen?	I
Chapter 2: What Is Revival? Definitions and Misconceptions	13
Chapter 3: Current Status of the Church and the World: Why We Need Revival	28
Chapter 4: God's People Tend to Depart from Him	42
Chapter 5: God's Plumb Line: The Divine Standard for Holy Living	55
Chapter 6: The Biblical Record of Revival	67
Chapter 7: Biblical Foundations for Revival	83
Chapter 8: God's Pattern for Revival: Created for a Love Relationship	94
Chapter 9: God Disciplines His People	104
Chapter 10: God's People Cry Out in Repentance	123
Chapter 11: Responding to Revival	139
Chapter 12: Great Awakenings: The Fruit of Revival	155
Chapter 13: The Role of Prayer in Revival	171
Chapter 14: Corporate Hindrances to Revival	184
Chapter 15: Worship and Revival	193
Chapter 16: Counterfeits to Revival	210
Chapter 17: Why Revival Tarries: Preparing for Revival	225
Chapter 18: Becoming a Catalyst for Revival	232
Chapter 19: Maintaining Revival	242
Appendix A: Spiritual Leaders and Revival	247
Appendix B: Personal Revival for Spiritual Leaders	263
Appendix C: Preparing the Way for the Lord	277
Appendix D: Times for Continuing Renewal	298
Notes	307
Scripture Index	317

FOREWORD

I am a committed Christian, actively involved in serving Christ inside and outside my home, the second daughter of Billy and Ruth Graham. I am not just a nominal churchgoer but am presently engaged in a ministry of my own through which I call others to repentance of sin. Yet I have discovered that this shepherd is also a sheep, this teacher is also a disciple, and this “saint” is also a sinner. Therefore, I know the cross isn’t just for “them”; it’s for me.

The cross is for you, too. Whoever you are—whether your parents were Christians or of some other religion, whether you were raised inside or outside the church, regardless how successful you are or how miserably you’ve failed—I guarantee that you need repentance from sin. You may well be unaware of the specific sin in your life, yet the symptoms are there because sin diminishes your joy, hinders your fellowship with God, dilutes the power of your prayers and witness, and dulls the sharp edge of your commitment. It robs you of the vitality of your Christian faith.

Every time I read *Fresh Encounter*, I am convicted. Some sin that has been lurking in the shadows of my heart is exposed in the light of the truth contained in this volume. As uncomfortable as it makes me, I praise God for the revelation that leads me once again to the foot of the cross, where I repent of that sin in particular and ask for cleansing and a refilling of the Holy Spirit.

The beauty of *Fresh Encounter* is that it will enable you to search your own heart, too, and see if anything there is offensive to God (Ps. 139:23–24). I have found it effective not only in my own life but also in the life of my ministry staff as they delved into this study together. As my staff works with me to bring revival to the hearts of God’s people, they must not miss out on it for themselves. This book has had a crucial role in helping all of us at Angel Ministries maintain revival in our own lives.

Fresh Encounter has also been a strategic tool in preparing for our “Just Give Me Jesus” revivals, which we hold in arenas throughout the world. When a team of women indicates they are praying about inviting me to hold a revival in their area, I ask them to go through this study as a way of preparing their hearts as well as focusing their

FRESH ENCOUNTER

minds on genuine revival. As they complete this book, they understand that real revival includes evangelism but is not limited to it. And as they work for revival, they do so not only with willing hands but also with clean hearts.

In my book *I Saw the LORD*, I describe revival in the following way:

For some, revival provokes images of sawdust trails, emotional outbursts, off-key singing, finger-pointing preaching, and hell-fire praying. But the revival I'm talking about—the revival God is calling you and me to experience—is something completely different. It's authentic, personal revival.

Personal revival is . . .

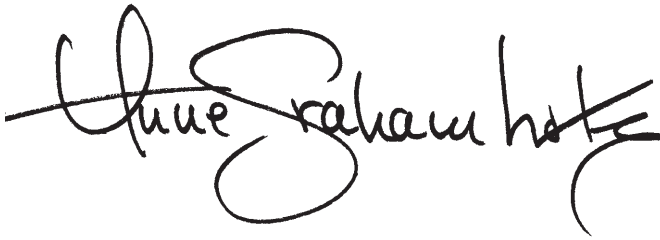
Jesus in you
And Jesus around you
And Jesus through you
And Jesus under you
And Jesus over you
And Jesus before you
And Jesus behind you.

Personal revival is just Jesus . . .

Jesus on your mind,
Jesus filling your heart,
Jesus overflowing from your lips.¹

As you begin this book, my prayer is that you will have a *Fresh Encounter* with Him.

—Anne Graham Lotz

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Graham Lotz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large loops and a long tail on the final letter.

PREFACE

Revival has been one of the most mysterious, compelling, sublime, and desperately needed phenomenon in human history. You cannot remain indifferent to it although it produces a wide variety of responses. Over the centuries revival has produced massive influxes of converts into the churches, yet ecclesiastical leaders are often bewildered at how to respond to it or even whether or not they are in favor of it. Revival quickens the human spirit and enlivens worship. It makes prayer exciting, preaching dynamic, and Christian service fervent. Yet churches are as prone to resist revival when it comes as they are to embrace it. Revival seems to defy a simple explanation, let alone a means to control it.

Revivals are God initiated, and God has laid down explicit prerequisites for them (2 Chron. 7:14). Even when God's people are longing and praying for revival, it comes suddenly and unexpectedly. Just as inexplicably, revival can dissipate or end abruptly.

Revival has always met resistance, even within the church, which may seem surprising since revivals have been responsible for many significant advances for God's kingdom. Yet revival also exposes the sin and morbidity of congregations. Numerous accounts of revival testify to the profound sense of God's presence during worship services. This keen awareness of God's nearness was noticeably missing in services preceding the revival. The dynamic preaching often experienced in revival contrasts the anemic and ineffective exhortation of earlier days. The electric singing during revivals eclipses the lifeless music that was the norm. The testimonies of radically changed lives in revival exposes the absence of personal transformation before revival. The fervent and extended prayer times throughout the day and night replace previously forsaken prayer meetings. Most notable is the profound conviction of sin during revival compared to the heretofore complacent and indulgent attitude toward sin before revival. While this book is intended both to explain and to promote revival, Brian Edwards was correct in claiming: "Revival does not need a defense; it needs to be experienced."¹

Revival amplifies the Christian experience, making the Holy Spirit's work in a person's life unmistakable. Revival demonstrates what is important to God, and it exposes how far God's people have departed from His intention. Revival is not for those who enjoy the status quo. It will disconcert those who rationalize and accommodate their sin. It will unsettle stoic Christians with its fervency. But for those who cannot bear to continue their Christian experience at the same low level to which they have grown accustomed, revival is their deliverance. When churches realize that if the Spirit does not breathe fresh life into their midst they will continue to suffer spiritual powerlessness and cultural irrelevance, then revival is the answer to their desperate prayers.

Contemporary Hearts Cry for Revival

Across America and around the world, God's people are crying out for a fresh encounter with Him. Everywhere we travel we hear churches pleading with God to revive them, their nation, and their world. There is widespread dissatisfaction with today's church. Numerous efforts have been attempted to make the church more relevant, seeker friendly, contemporary, or cutting edge. Yet despite millions of dollars, hundreds of best-selling books, countless church growth conferences, and an endless stream of Christian trends, the church displays a powerlessness that cannot even evangelize people today at the same rate as society's population growth.

Contemporary believers wonder why the mighty movements of God recorded in Scripture and Christian history are noticeably absent today. Modern pastors are burning out at epidemic levels as they experience the demoralizing futility of attempting to lift their church members out of their spiritual lethargy. While some individuals and churches are experiencing a fresh wind of God's Spirit blowing upon them, many others are asking, "Is there a Word from the Lord? What does God want us to do?" Throughout history God has always had a response to those who seek Him (Jer. 33:3).

Just as it was in biblical times, standing in Holy God's presence is an awesome, life-changing experience. While God is always present in a believer's life, revival is a sacred moment when the Holy Spirit draws powerfully, unmistakably near to His people. Revival involves a fresh encounter with Almighty God. Any meeting with God entails a serious, irrevocable accountability. Revival does not merely call for minor adjustments in our schedule. It elicits a humble, on-our-face response to our

PREFACE

Creator. Revival does not result from an encounter with a doctrine but a response to a Person.

This book will examine what Scripture says about Almighty, Hallowed God's requirements for fellowship with Him. As you read Scripture, the Holy Spirit will assist you to understand and apply what it says. You will not merely encounter Bible verses; you will also come face-to-face with the living God because every encounter with God's Word is a meeting with Him.

To obtain the maximum benefit from this book, we encourage you to do the following:

- Take your time. Don't rush through it. God's truths are life-changing and worth time spent meditating on them.
- Expect to encounter God as you read.
- Spend time with God in prayer after you read each chapter.
- Meet together with one or more believers to discuss what God is revealing to you.
- Immediately respond to Him with thorough obedience concerning everything He tells you.
- Encourage others who are seeking revival and share with them what God is teaching you.
- Continue praying, studying, and responding to Him until you and your church experience revival.

This book is designed to help you encounter God through His Word in such a manner that you experience true, deep, and lasting renewal in your life and church. Once God has revived His people, evangelizing others is inevitable.

Warning!

Whenever God speaks, it is never merely for observation or discussion. It is always intended for obedience. God does not make suggestions. He speaks commands. Do you want God to speak to you, your family, and your church? Then be prepared to obey Him. To hear the Creator of the universe communicate with you and then refuse to do what He says is an unmitigated offense. He is your Lord. Christ is Head of the church. He is the sovereign Ruler of the universe. He has every right to ask you whatever He pleases.

Do not read this book unless you mean business with God. If the Holy Spirit takes Scripture and brings you face-to-face with God, you are accountable to respond to what you read. When you hear from God, you must either reject Him or obey Him. To sin in ignorance is one thing, but God holds people accountable who sin with knowledge of the truth (2 Pet. 2:20–21). Jesus asked His followers this troubling question: “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

If you choose to study this material, you will learn what God requires of His people. Then you will face a choice: to do as He says or to carry on business as usual. Be careful to count both costs. Don’t merely evaluate the price to obey what God tells you. Be sure to consider the profound loss in not returning to Him. What will it mean to your family or your church if you refuse to follow God’s directions? What will happen if you fail to do what He says? Moses warned God’s people that the Word of God “is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life” (Deut. 32:47).

Jeremiah and Israel

Jeremiah 41–42 recounts a tragic story from Israel’s history. Jerusalem had fallen to the invincible Babylonian army. The Jewish leaders gathered a remnant of the people and prepared to flee to Egypt for safety. As they prepared to depart, they sought God’s counsel.

Now all the captains of the forces . . . and all the people, from the least to the greatest, came near and said to Jeremiah the prophet, “Please, let our petition be acceptable to you, and pray for us to the LORD your God, for all this remnant (since we are left but a few of many, as you can see), that the LORD your God may show us the way in which we should walk and the thing we should do.”

Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, “I have heard. Indeed, I will pray to the LORD your God according to your words, and it shall be, that whatever the LORD answers you, I will declare it to you. I will keep nothing back from you.”

So they said to Jeremiah, “Let the LORD be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not do according to everything which the LORD your

PREFACE

God sends us by you. Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God to whom we send you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God.” (Jer. 42:1–6)

The people vowed to obey whatever God directed. This moment was critical. It involved life and death. After ten days the Lord sent word that the people were to remain in the land He had given them. God also sent this warning:

“Then hear now the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah! Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘If you wholly set your faces to enter Egypt, and go to dwell there, then it shall be that the sword which you feared shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; the famine of which you were afraid shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there you shall die.’” (Jer. 42:15–16)

The people knew they were in a desperate condition. Their lives were intolerable. But they despised God’s remedy. They heard God’s Word, but they chose to ignore it. God knew the people were bent on going their own way. They went through the obligatory motions of seeking His guidance, but they had already made up their minds to go to Egypt. Jeremiah exhorted the people:

“The LORD has said concerning you, O remnant of Judah, ‘Do not go to Egypt!’ Know certainly that I have admonished you this day. For you were hypocrites in your hearts when you sent me to the LORD your God, saying, ‘Pray for us to the LORD our God, and according to all that the LORD your God says, so declare to us and we will do it.’ And I have this day declared it to you, but you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God, or anything which He has sent you by me. Now therefore, know certainly that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go to dwell.” (Jer. 42:19–22)

The people made a show of asking for God’s directions, but they had no intention of adjusting their plans. That fatal mistake would cost them dearly. Generations of Christians have perpetuated this foolhardy approach to relating to God.

Studying this material will bring you face-to-face with God’s requirements for revival. Make sure you, your family, and your church are prepared to do whatever God tells you. Remember that God will respond to you based on what you do and not merely what you promise to do.

God Is at Work!

When the world seems darkest, God's light shines brightest. God knows how to use people in every age to accomplish His purposes. While the spiritual condition of our world may appear extremely bleak, the reality is we are living in a most exciting time! God is moving mightily worldwide to break down long-standing barriers to the gospel. Modern technology is making the preaching of the gospel to all the nations a real possibility. People worldwide are demonstrating a profound spiritual hunger. Nations once closed to Christian witness are now requesting Bibles and asking people to teach them about Christ. The question is this: Will we submit to God's refining fire so He will purify us and work through us to redeem a lost world? We hope your answer is yes!

Henry Blackaby and Claude King wrote the original version of *Fresh Encounter* in 1995. Since that publication, much has happened in the Christian community and around the world. This new edition is greatly revised and expanded. Richard Blackaby took the lead in revising and expanding the 2009 edition. God has granted each of us the enormous privilege of traveling around the world and visiting Christians and churches that have experienced a fresh touch of the Holy Spirit. We have seen what God can do through one individual or church that is wholly yielded to Him. We believe God has enough Christians and churches on the earth today to reach the world for Christ if only each Christian and every church would surrender themselves fully to God. For that to happen, a mighty revival must sweep through our churches. That is the focus of much of our ministry today, and that is why we wrote this book.

May we continue to tremble with holy fear when God speaks (Isa. 66:2), and may we be filled with hope and anticipation for what God is going to do among His people for His glory.

—Henry and Richard Blackaby, Claude V. King
2009

CHAPTER I

The Normal Christian Life: How Far Have You Fallen?

The aged apostle was banished to the desolate isle of Patmos, exiled for the crime of spreading Christianity. The powerful Roman Empire was seeking to obliterate the Christian movement. The apostles Paul and Peter had already met violent deaths under the sadistic emperor Nero. The seemingly invincible Roman Empire appeared poised to triumph over the fledgling church. Isolated from his fellow believers, hardened convicts his only companions, John prayed for his Christian brethren.

One Lord's Day as he prayed, John heard a loud voice. He turned toward the sound and saw something so terrifying and awesome he fell to the ground as if he were dead. In that moment he beheld the risen Christ standing triumphant among His churches. The book of Revelation relates the details of this transfixing event. Christ revealed His keen awareness of the condition of the churches during John's day. He knew how each congregation was coping with the pressures and temptations the world was pressing upon them. The church at Ephesus enjoyed an especially noble heritage, having been founded by the apostle Paul (Acts 19). The Ephesian church had witnessed amazing miracles. The risen Christ commended them for their discernment and their forbearance: "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary" (Rev. 2:2–3). John wrote to the believers at Ephesus, relaying the Lord's pleasure with them. Surely it encouraged them to know that the Head of the church declared them to be orthodox and discerners of true and false teaching.

But then those unsettling words: “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (Rev. 2:4). The Ephesians were orthodox, but they had neglected their love relationship with their risen Savior. The Lord gave this strong directive: “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent” (Rev. 2:5).

People are generally unaware of how far they have drifted from God. When God told His people to return to Him in the prophet Malachi’s time, they responded by asking, “In what way shall we return?” (Mal. 3:7). They were tragically unaware of how spiritually disoriented they had become. They dutifully performed their religious rituals and regularly attended weekly worship services, assuming this evoked God’s pleasure. But God’s appraisal of such behavior was pronounced by the prophet Isaiah: “Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me” (Isa. 29:13). Allowing your heart to shift from God is dangerous: living in a state of misguided complacency can be fatal. One of the key steps to revival is having your eyes opened to see the spiritual height from which you have fallen.

Martin Lloyd-Jones lamented the fact that “the greatest problem confronting us in the church today is that the vast majority of professing Christians are not convinced of the ‘reality and the desirableness of revivals.’”¹ Church leaders may document their growing attendance and increased contributions. Congregations can point to their spacious modern facilities and a wide array of church programming. Surely God is pleased with them. But God insists we look deeper. He asks us to consider what our walk with Him was once like. We must review what Scripture says pleases God. Looking back over our spiritual pilgrimage will reveal if we have wandered away from a relationship *with* God into service *for* God.

You may feel unsure of how needy you are for renewal or whether your church needs revival. Let’s review what God intends for our walk with Him to be like. Examine your life and your church against the following scriptural backdrop to see if you have departed from God and from His ideal.

Your Personal Walk with God

A believer’s walk with God is multifaceted and constantly susceptible to change. God has the power and intent to radically permeate every aspect of your life. The following eight points are merely a summary of what a Christian should experience.

Words on paper cannot capture the immeasurable essence of a life lived closely to the Creator and Savior. Work prayerfully through these eight characteristics with an attitude of humility and a willingness to acknowledge and repent from any point where you have departed from Him.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

1. Intimate Fellowship with God
2. Joy in God's Presence
3. A Sense of Peace
4. A Holy Life
5. A Spirit-Filled Life
6. Recognizing God's Voice
7. Filled with the Fruit of the Spirit
8. Experiencing God's Power

I. Intimate Fellowship with God

God created you to have a close, personal relationship with Him. Scripture describes God as walking in the garden in the cool of the day seeking Adam and Eve to converse with them (Gen. 3:8). When the first couple hid themselves because of their sin, God called out to them, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9). In this beautiful passage we see God seeking fellowship with His people and pursuing them while they sin and try to avoid Him. Does it matter to God whether we choose to spend time with Him? Through His prophet Jeremiah, the Lord declared: "And I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer" (Jer. 7:13). God did not create people in order to watch us perform religious rituals and scurry busily about accomplishing religious tasks on His behalf. He made us for a relationship, so we could commune with Him and enjoy His presence. As astounding as it may seem, He seeks fellowship with us. When intimate fellowship with God is broken, it is never because He wanted it that way. It is always a result of our choice.

2. Joy in God's Presence

The psalmist declared, "In Your presence is fullness of joy" (Ps. 16:11). To walk closely with God is to experience complete, divine joy. Jesus promised that those

who abide in Him will experience His joy overflowing within them (John 15:11). God is worthy of our fear and our reverence, but He is also someone in whom we delight (Ps. 37:4). The soul that enjoys the Lord's presence will not consider time spent with Him in His Word and prayer to be drudgery or monotonous. Time spent in His presence will be a delight. Communing with God satisfies the soul like no other activity. Many Christians have "quiet times" out of duty, discipline, or guilt. But those who experience true fellowship with God long for those moments of joyful communion with Him.

3. A Sense of Peace

Jesus said that when we walk closely with Him, the concerns of this world will not weigh us down or discourage us (Matt. 11:28–30). Scripture commands us to cast our anxieties upon Christ because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). Everyone experiences trials and hardships, but these adversities should not defeat or derail those walking closely with Christ. We must learn to allow Christ to carry the burden of concern for us (Matt. 11:28–30). To shift the weight of our problems, which is far too heavy for us, onto the shoulders of the One who can decisively deal with them is an incredibly freeing experience. By trusting Christ in all circumstances, we become enveloped in an absolute sense of peace, unexplainable except that the Holy Spirit has set a guard over us (Phil. 4:6–7).

4. A Holy Life

God not only wants His people to be holy; He commands it (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:15–17). To be holy means to be set apart for God's purposes, to be pure and uncontaminated by sin. It includes being thoroughly righteous in thought and action. Holiness never compromises with sin but recoils from it. We align ourselves with either God or sin. Scripture is clear: "Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him" (1 John 3:6). We cannot be in close fellowship with Christ and habitually sin. If you are knowingly sinning yet claiming to abide in Christ, you are lying. God knows it. Others probably see it too.

5. A Spirit-Filled Life

When you became a Christian, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, permanently entered your life (Rom. 8:14–17). The Christian life is not about trying to do your best for God. It is Christ living out His holy life through you (Gal. 2:20). Duncan Campbell said:

“A Christian is a supernatural being who has had a supernatural experience, and that is something more than singing choruses; that is something more than making a decision; that is something more than becoming a member of a church; that is something more than enjoying conventions. It is Christ at the center of my life.”²

While all Christians have the Holy Spirit residing within them, every area of a Christian’s life is not necessarily surrendered to the Spirit’s control. We can restrict the Spirit’s influence in our lives to the smallest corner of our lives. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is never content to be a mute, neglected guest in the upstairs guest room of our lives. He intends to be absolute Lord and to occupy and rule every dimension of our existence. Scripture exhorts believers to be *filled* with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). This means our lives are completely and continually surrendered to Him. Every aspect of our lives is accessible and yielded to Christ. Often during revivals people spoke of God’s presence being “real” to them or of God “entering the room.” In reality this indicates that previously these believers had only yielded a portion of their lives to the Spirit’s control. When they fully surrendered their lives to Christ, they suddenly experienced His presence to a degree they had heretofore never known. These people’s souls had become so barren and parched that when the Holy Spirit filled them, it appeared to them as if Almighty God had walked into the room.

Christians can grow so accustomed to spiritual barrenness that we no longer realize how desperately we need fresh dewdrops from heaven. Octavius Winslow declared: “Oh, it is an alarming condition for a Christian man, when the heart contradicts the judgment, and the life belies the profession! When there is more knowledge of the truth than experience of its power,—more light in the understanding than grace in the affections,—more pretension in the profession than holiness and spirituality in the walk!”³ When the Holy Spirit fills us, it will be obvious to us and to everyone around us.

6. Recognizing God’s Voice

Through His prophet Jeremiah, God offered His people the amazing promise: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer. 33:3). God has countless thoughts toward us (Ps. 40:5). God intends to speak to His people. Moreover, Jesus said that those who were His sheep would recognize His voice (John 10:27). However, Scripture warns that if our heart hardens toward God, we will no longer hear His voice (Deut. 30:17). God intends for us to enjoy a two-way relationship with Him involving both speaking and listening. If you are not hearing from God, could it be you have already braced yourself to

resist what He says? Over time your heart can grow stiffer until you are impervious to God's voice.

7. Filled with the Fruit of the Spirit

When the Holy Spirit is at work in a believer's life, He will produce spiritual fruit. Fundamentally, the fruit of the Spirit are the character traits of Christ. They include "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22–23). Believers who live in the fullness of the Holy Spirit will demonstrate each of these traits in their lives. An absence of any of these traits is a symptom that the believer is in some way quenching the Holy Spirit (I Thess. 5:19). Henry Scougal placed great weight on the reality of a Christlike character in a believer. He said, "I had rather see the real impressions of godlike nature upon my own soul, than have a vision from heaven, or angel sent to tell me that my name were enrolled in the book of life."⁴ One of the greatest assurances you can receive of God's presence in your life is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

8. Experiencing God's Power

Duncan Campbell once asked, "How is it that while we make such great claims for the power of the Gospel, we see so little of the supernatural in operation?"⁵ Orthodox Christians routinely affirm that God is almighty, yet rarely do they experience His powerful presence actively working in their lives. God promised His people in Old Testament times that if they observed His commandments they would regularly defeat their enemies (Deut. 28:7, 28). Likewise in the New Testament, the apostle Paul declared that if God is for us it matters not who is against us (Rom. 8:31). The Bible never promises an absence of opposition, but Scripture does indicate that believers who walk closely with Christ will experience spiritual victory. Just as God achieved triumph out of Jesus' brutal death on a cross, so there is no challenge we will face that can ultimately defeat us when we are experiencing intimate fellowship with our Savior.

Continual Defeat

Henry once met a despondent pastor whose life was in shambles. His wife left him. He was estranged from his two adult children. One daughter was in prison, the other in a drug rehabilitation center. His church released him as a result of the meltdown in his personal life. His health suffered from the constant stress. Without an income and facing bitter divorce proceedings, he reluctantly sold his house. Bills

were mounting, and he felt abandoned by his friends, colleagues, and church. His analysis of his situation? Spiritual warfare. He believed Satan had specifically targeted him, much like Job, and robbed him of everything. Satan is indeed real and malicious, but it appeared to Henry that this man was experiencing humiliating defeat in every battle he entered. There was no victory in any sector of his life. God warned that when a life is displeasing to Him, He will surrender that person to his enemies (Deut. 28:25). Everyone endures hardship, but routine spiritual defeat is a telling sign that your life is displeasing to God.

Conclusion

The preceding is not an exhaustive list of what it means to be a Spirit-filled Christian. It does provide a benchmark, however, to identify what the normal Christian life ought to look like. If these qualities are not prevalent in your life, consider whether you have ever matured in your Christian life to the point you have experienced the life God saved you for. Or perhaps you, too, should consider the heights from which you have fallen.

Walking with God as a Church

Just as believers' lives reflect their intimacy with God, so the church is intended to be the image of the One who founded it. When a congregation pleases God, it will manifest the following characteristics:

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

1. Withstanding the Gates of Hell
2. Having Power to Make Disciples
3. Making a Habit of Praying
4. Accurately Teaching and Preaching God's Word
5. Loving One Another
6. Courageously Confronting Sin
7. Godly Leaders

I. Withstanding the Gates of Hell

Jesus clearly taught that any church He builds and over which He is Head cannot be defeated by Satan (Matt. 16:18). Churches will experience unavoidable hardship and challenges in this imperfect world. The fury of hell is being unleashed against today's churches, attacking marriages, families, teenagers, morality, integrity, and purity. Those congregations walking closely with Christ as their Head will feel the full wrath of our mortal enemy, but Satan's forces *will not* carry the day. What about congregations with a divorce rate that matches secular society or church teenagers who are indulging in drugs and promiscuity? In some churches suicides and corporate scandals and the church's ills occurring with alarming frequency. Is it feasible to blame today's loose morals on the insidious influence of Hollywood, or on the lack of statesmen in government for the church's ills? Jesus guaranteed that any church surrendered to Christ as Head would withstand the fiercest satanic onslaught. Clearly, though outside forces assail the body of Christ, the answer for the church's shortcomings lies within.

2. Having Power to Make Disciples

The risen Christ declared to His followers: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18–19). When churches go in the name and authority of Christ, God's power is fully at their disposal as they share the gospel and make disciples. Churches have experienced that power and witnessed adamant atheists coming to faith in Christ. Hardened convicts have proven no match for God's might. Fractured marriages have been restored by the healing power of God extended through the church. Drug addicts and alcoholics have been marvelously set free. When the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit, the gates of hell tumble down around it.

Conversely, when a church is not experiencing God's power to set people free, it clearly is in need of revival. When congregations go year after year seeing few if any conversions; when they witness marriages dissolving in their midst into acrimonious divorce; when they observe their young people leaving church in droves; when carnality rages throughout the membership as well as the leadership; when they witness their neighborhood sinking into increasing immorality, crime, and brokenness, the church *must* ask itself, "How far have we fallen? Have we left our first love?" Making excuses is easy. The rising influence of secularism, consumerism, pluralism, tolerance, humanism, big government, and corporations can all become scapegoats

for the church's powerlessness. But the truth is that none of these can thwart God's might when the Holy Spirit moves in the midst of a church. Duncan Campbell once observed: "It is fire we want. The best advertising campaign that any church or any mission can put up is fire in the pulpit and a blaze in the pew. Let us be honest. We say 'God send a revival,' but are we prepared for the fire?"⁶

3. Making a Habit of Praying

If there was a defining characteristic of the early church, it is that its people prayed. The book of Acts begins with the risen Christ instructing His followers not to leave Jerusalem or to undertake any ministry until they had been endued with power from on high (Acts 1:4–5). So the members met regularly and "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14). After these believers had prayed extensively, the Spirit fell upon them with such force that three thousand people were immediately converted.

After the early church faced persecution and threats, they met to pray. "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). That's power!

Praying for Revival

When God came in revival at Asbury College in Kentucky, prayer groups had been fervently praying. When God brought revival to Wales, God's people had been praying. When Duncan Campbell arrived in the Hebrides, he found that God's people had been praying. Before Charles Finney went to a city to preach, he would send Father Nash ahead of him to pray for the upcoming meetings. Charles Spurgeon had a large group of people who prayed during every service. In every report from churches who have witnessed the mighty working of God, fervent prayer has always played a key role. Jesus Himself declared that His Father's house was to be a house of prayer (Matt. 21:13). A church that pleases God is a church that habitually and earnestly prays.

4. Accurately Teaching and Preaching God's Word

The Jerusalem church grew so large it required an increasing amount of administration, so the apostles appointed deacons to care for the widows, for they declared, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word"

(Acts 6:4). As new converts entered the church, they “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Christians in the early church were avid students of God’s Word. Church leaders exhibited wholehearted confidence in Scripture, and they preached it boldly and uncompromisingly.

David Matthews insists, “Nothing worthwhile has ever happened in the history of the Church since Pentecost but what is based upon an unshakable belief in the power of the eternal Word.”⁷ Clearly people used powerfully in revival had an unwavering conviction in the words of Scripture, and, though they varied in their oratorical ability, they pronounced biblical truths with a compelling earnestness. A church is never more in need of revival than when it is twisting and compromising God’s Word to satisfy the popular trends and politically correct dogmas of the day. Yet tragically, such churches are also never farther from revival than when they treat God’s Word carelessly or irreverently. To be pleasing to God, a church must teach its people to practice everything Christ commanded (Matt. 28:20).

5. Loving One Another

In a healthy church one member cannot suffer without other members of the body feeling the pain (I Cor. 12:26). The early church was characterized by love and unity. Members freely gave their possessions to assist those in need (Acts 4:32–37). Jesus declared that the unity of His disciples would compel the world to believe in Him (John 17:21). As Christians love one another and carry each other’s burdens, the world is convinced of the validity of the Christian message.

Love and a Theme Park

In a church where Richard was a member, there is a forty-six-year-old woman named Margaret who has an eighteen-year-old daughter named Kristie. Both women suffer from a debilitating condition that has left them mentally and physically impaired. Over the years Margaret’s church has extended many acts of love to her. She regularly receives food supplements and financial gifts and is often invited into homes for meals and fellowship. Margaret cannot drive a car, but she tries to be as independent as possible. Last year her bike, which is her means of transportation, was stolen. The congregation acted immediately, taking up a collection and presenting her with a brand-new bike. Recently associate pastor Jonathan Chisholm and his wife Cathey took Margaret and Kristie with them to Disney World. Members of

the church contributed money to help with the expenses. Margaret claims it was the highlight of her life. The secular paper in town ran a full-page story about the kind way Margaret's church has cared for her over the years. When church bodies are functioning in a healthy manner, no one is overlooked. Everyone is cared for. Everyone is loved.

6. Courageously Confronting Sin

In our efforts to be “tolerant” and our hesitation to be judgmental, today's Christians hardly know how to deal with sin in the church. But the media knows what to do and takes great delight in documenting the moral failures of church leaders. Biblical times were not free from impiety among God's people. However, when it occurred, God led His people to deal with sin immediately and decisively. When Achan sinned, all of God's people were adversely affected (Josh. 7:25). Joshua realized they could not move forward until the sin had been utterly exterminated from the camp.

Jesus gave clear instructions about how to deal with a fellow Christian who was sinning (Matt. 18:15–20). If a Christian sinned against someone, the offended person was to confront the sinner. If the transgressor did not repent, the person returned with one or two witnesses. If the matter remained unresolved, it was brought before the entire church. The final recourse, if the malefactor refused to repent, was for the church to expel that person from its membership. Jesus, who embodied love, understood that unchecked sin was lethal to a church's spiritual vitality. In the early church in Jerusalem, Ananias and Sapphira lied to fellow church members and to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit took dramatic action and immediately put the dishonest couple to death (Acts 5:1–11). As a result, “great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things” (Acts 5:11). Rather than turning people away from the church because of this decisive response to sin, Scripture reports: “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (Acts 5:14). When God and the church dealt forthrightly with sin, God's work was ultimately strengthened and the community felt the impact.

In today's pluralistic age, the popular mantra among God's people has become, “Who am I to judge?” Yet sin is an offense against Holy God. A church cannot tolerate or excuse sin and please God.

7. Godly Leaders

Jesus explained that His disciples had not chosen Him; He had selected them (John 15:16). More specifically, His Father gave them to Him (John 17:12). The heavenly

Father knew each disciple, and He understood how each one could participate in His divine work. Those who led the early church were chosen by God to lead. When the eleven disciples were determining who should replace Judas, they did not take a vote among themselves or place an advertisement on the church bulletin board. They sought the mind of the Lord (Acts 1:15–26). When the church needed people to serve as deacons, its members were told to “seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint” (Acts 6:3). Those selected were not people who held influential positions in the marketplace or who had the largest personal incomes. These were individuals who were filled with the Holy Spirit. They included people like Stephen who was “full of faith and power” (Acts 6:8). They did not attain their ecclesiastical positions through political maneuvering or scheming but by God’s clear appointment. As the church developed certain offices, it upheld strict standards (1 Tim. 3:1–13). The early church understood that as go the leaders so goes the church.

Conclusion

If you are presently experiencing God’s ideal for your life personally and for your church, then you may not feel a need for revival. It could also be that you are not aware of how far you have fallen. If you simply compare yourself with other Christians or churches, you can mistakenly assume you are pleasing God. Always look to God’s ideal. Never water down what God says in His Word. Do not assume revival is impossible in today’s society. With God all things are possible! Refuse to settle for anything less than God’s best for you and your church.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Review the signs of a vibrant walk with God. Are any of these characteristics lacking in your life? How do you sense God wants to draw you closer to Him?
2. Are you currently living a Christian life thoroughly pleasing to God? If not, in what way do you sense you are personally in need of revival?
3. What are you presently doing to prepare your life for revival?
4. What characteristics of God’s ideal do you sense are lacking in your church? What can you do personally to bring needed change?
5. How are you presently praying for your church and its leaders?