

2. God Uses Ordinary Believers

Carrying God's Heart for Revival

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? (Psalm 85:6).

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14).

An Example of God Using Everyday Ordinary Believers.

¹³Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴He appointed twelve--designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵and to have authority to drive out demons (Mark 3:13-15).

The Lord calls His people into an intimate relationship with Himself that they might be with Him (v. 14), then sends them out to touch others. We can impress people from a distance, but to have a profound impact on a person, we need to get close and personal. This is what Jesus did with His 12 disciples. The twelve saw the real Jesus as they ate, slept, and lived together for approximately three years. They were real with one another. It is still the most effective way to train people, i.e., to “do life together.” We can have the best training courses, effective programs, and proven techniques, but nothing replaces the power of being together and modeling what we *are*, as well as what we want to impart and teach. Relationship and friendship give us the right to speak into another person's life. It provides us with the room and opportunity to share things that they have not seen about themselves.

Why did Jesus choose these twelve? What stands out about them? Not a lot when you read through the Gospels. Robert Coleman, in his book, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, says:

For the most part, they were ordinary laboring men, probably having no professional training beyond the rudiments of knowledge necessary for their vocation. Perhaps a few of them came from notable families, such as the sons of Zebedee, but none of them could have been considered wealthy. They had no academic degrees in the arts and philosophies of their day. By any standard of sophisticated culture then and now they would surely be considered as a somewhat ragged aggregation of souls. One might wonder how Jesus could ever use them. They were impulsive, temperamental, easily offended, and had all the prejudices of their environment, not the kind of group one would expect to win the world for Christ.

The Lord sees the heart of each of us and He saw their availability. The Father spoke to Christ about each one for He knew what qualities were needed to multiply the mission of preaching the gospel. Their education in the things of God was taught and received as they lived and walked with Jesus. We call this on-the-job training in our day, to learn as we go. Sometimes this method of training people is Ready, Fire, Aim, kind of training, needing a mentor to give aiming advice in training as you go. The Lord did not go to the Yeshivas or Bible schools of the day to find the

twelve. He chose ordinary everyday people so that none of them could boast of their exceptional intellect or qualities. One person has said, "God must like common people because all that He called to the ministry were of common stuff." Paul, the apostle, wrote about God's way of calling unprofessional and uneducated people, and those least able to boast of their qualities to impress people when he said:

²⁶For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷but **God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,** ²⁸and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that **no man may boast before God** (1 Corinthians 1:26- 29).

The Lord calls and uses people from all walks of life and social standings. It does not matter if you are rich or poor, young or old, from a college background, or if you have not had formal training. Charles Spurgeon, England's greatest preacher, had no formal training for the ministry whatsoever. In training and equipping people for leadership over the years, there are two qualities I look for in considering whether or not a person can be a leader:

- 1) Does this person love God with all his or her heart?
- 2) Does this person love people with a desire to serve them?

Skills and character qualities can be taught, but if a person does not have the above two fundamental qualities, it is not wise to consider them for a leadership position (1 Timothy 5:22). God's training, molding, and shaping are in character development more than skills. Think about what Peter went through with his three-time denial; he had to be broken of his self-reliance, his strength and impulsiveness before he could be restored with Jesus asking him three times as to whether or not he loved Him (John 21:15-17). We need all types of people to reach out into every people group, and every nation, but the main thing Jesus looks for in dedicated servants is love for Christ and people. A person's age and level of maturity do not matter; God can and does use new believers very powerfully if they simply obey the promptings and leadership of the Holy Spirit. This is not to decry education or Bible training if you can get it, we are simply saying that God can use anyone for His glory.

Carl Lawrence related one remarkable story of how God is using humble, simple-hearted Christians to build His kingdom on Hainan Island, China. I quote from his book, *The Coming Influence of China*. Lawrence recounts how, in the mid-1990s, two young women came to faith in Christ in another Chinese province after hearing the Gospel *via* shortwave radio broadcasts. The two new believers received Bibles and immediately wanted to serve God with all their hearts. A Hong Kong-based pastor met with the two and tried to teach them that they should remain where they were and minister to their neighbors. The girls protested, "No! The Bible you gave us says Jesus told us to go into all the world. We want to go." Finally, the pastor, feeling ashamed at his comparative lack of zeal, relented and told the girls there was a need for workers on Hainan Island. The duo had never heard of Hainan Island before, but they were sure God wanted them to preach the Gospel there.

Two years later, the girls returned to the Chinese mainland, where the pastor met with them. He had not heard any news since their departure. The Hong Kong pastor used the meeting to introduce the girls to several visiting Western church leaders. After introductions, the girls were asked how their work had been and whether or not they were able to start any churches. Lawrence explains: "The women put their heads down and answered, 'Oh pastor, we have only been there two years...yea, two years. Not many. Not very many.' Their voices were apologetic. 'We have been there only a short time. The people were not very friendly, and sometimes they became vicious. Sometimes they told us they were going to drown us in the ocean. Several men threatened us, and because we were so young, some of the ladies did not like us and called us terrible names...so not many churches...no, not many.'" Finally, after being asked again by the frustrated pastor, the girls apologized that they had been only able to start 30 churches since their arrival on Hainan Island!

The pastor and his Western friends were taken aback by the news. They asked how many people attended their new churches. After again going through a process of apologies and self-effacing comments, they answered, "Two hundred and twenty." The listeners presumed that meant the girls had won a total of 220 converts in their 30 churches, but 220 was the number of members in the smallest of their churches! "How many people do you have in the largest of your churches," the pastor demanded to know. "Oh, ...not many...Less than five thousand. Only four thousand nine hundred. Yes, less than five thousand. We have just started."

The Western visitors were so touched by the humility and zeal of the two young ladies that they began to weep. One of the visitors told the pastor to ask the two ladies how they managed to achieve such great results. "What did we do? Why nothing. Yes, we did nothing, nothing." The amazed onlookers protested, "You did nothing? You have thirty churches – the smallest with two hundred and twenty people, the largest with almost five thousand new Christians! And you did nothing?" The two evangelists simply said, "We just prayed, and after we prayed, the Holy Spirit would tell us exactly what to do. We would keep praying, and He would tell us what to do, we would then do it. Then, we would pray again, and he would tell us what to do again."

Note: When we first read this story of the two faithful girls, we were not sure of the story's accuracy, as it almost sounded too good to be true. We sent the story to a friend who is an expert on the church in Hainan Island. Somewhat surprisingly, our informant responded that indeed the story is true. These two young women had done great exploits and planted many churches in the face of considerable opposition and struggle. They primarily worked in southern Hainan Island, including several counties around Sanya City. However, our friend also added that because of a lack of follow up and discipleship, much of the fruit was lost to cults and that by 1999 perhaps "only" 5,000 of the duo's converts remained true believers.¹

When the Spirit Moves in Revival

God doesn't just use young people who don't have a college education and four years of Bible school. Let's talk now about how God also uses the old and infirm. For that, let's look at the revival in the Islands of the Hebrides, Scotland.

¹ Taken from the website of Asia Harvest: <http://asiaharvest.org/testimonies/#13>

In our day, many people are so resigned to the evil that so permeates our society that they believe that there is now no hope and we should wait for Jesus to come because, after all, what can we do? That was not the case with two senior ladies on the Islands of the Hebrides just off the northern coast of Scotland:

Between 1949 and 1952 a revival swept through these islands in answer to the prayers of Peggy and Christine Smith. At that time, they were 84 and 82 years of age, and Peggy, the eldest, was completely blind. After hearing an update about the low spiritual state of the Hebrides, there being no young person attending church services, Peggy and Christine began to pray and ask God to change the situation in their church. Unable to participate in public worship, their humble cottage became a sanctuary where they met with God. To them came the promise: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground" (Isaiah 44:3). They took this scripture and made it their prayer, pleading God day and night in prayer. One night Peggy had a revelation from God. She felt that God had answered her prayer and given her assurance that revival was coming, a revival that would cause the church of her fathers to be crowded again with young people!

The evangelist, Duncan Campbell, was asked if he would come to the Islands and preach. When he declined because of previous commitments elsewhere, God rearranged his schedule, and he was able to attend this small church in the Hebrides. Here in his own words is Duncan's testimony of what happened:

They had arranged for me to address the church at a short meeting beginning at nine o'clock that night. It was an extraordinary meeting. God sovereignly moved, and there was an awareness of God, which was beautiful. The meeting lasted until four o'clock in the morning, and I had not witnessed anything to compare with it at any other time during my ministry. Around midnight, a group of young people left a dance and crowded into the church. Some people couldn't go to sleep because God so gripped them.

Although there was an awareness of God and a spirit of conviction at this initial meeting, the real breakthrough came a few days later on Sunday night in the parish church. The church was full, and the Spirit of God was moving in such a way that I couldn't preach. I just stood still and gazed upon the wondrous moving of God. Men and women were crying out to God for mercy all over the church. There was no appeal made whatsoever. After meeting for over three hours, I pronounced the benediction and told the people to go out but mentioned that any who wanted to continue the meeting could come back later. A young deacon came to me and said, "Mr. Campbell, God is hovering over us."

About that time, the clerk of the session asked me to come to the back door. There was a crowd of at least 600 people gathered in the yard outside the church. Someone gave out Psalm 102, and the crowd streamed back into the church, which could no longer hold the number of people. A young schoolteacher came down front crying out, "O God, is there nothing left for me?" She was a missionary in Nigeria at the time when this was written. Then there was the story of a busload of people coming to the meeting from sixty miles away. The power of God came into the bus so that some could not even enter the church when the bus arrived. People were swooning all over the church, and I cannot remember

one single person who was moved on by God that night who was not gloriously born again. When I went out of the church at four o'clock in the morning, there were a significant number of people praying alongside the road. In addition to the schoolteacher, several of those born again that night is in foreign mission work today.

From Barvas, the move of God spread to the neighboring districts. I received a message that a nearby church was crowded at one o'clock in the morning and wanted me to come. When I arrived, the church was full, and there were crowds outside. Coming out of the church two hours later, I found a group of 300 people, unable to get into the church, praying in a nearby field. One older woman complained about the noise of the meetings because she could not get to sleep. A deacon grabbed her and shook her, saying, "Woman, you have been asleep long enough!"

There was one area of the islands, which wanted me to come, but I didn't feel any leading to accept the invitation. The blind sister encouraged me to go and told me, "If you were living as near to God as you ought to be, He would reveal His secrets to you." I agreed to spend a morning in prayer with her in the cottage. As we prayed, the sister said, "Lord, you remember what you told me today that you were going to save seven men in this church. I just gave your message to Mr. Campbell, and please give him wisdom because he badly needs it." She told me if I would go to the village, God would provide a congregation. I agreed to go, and when I arrived at seven o'clock, there were approximately 400 people at the church. The people could not tell what it was that had brought them; the Spirit of God had directed it. I spoke for a few minutes on the text: **"In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent"** (Acts 17:30). One of the ministers stopped me and said, "Come see this." At one end of the meetinghouse, the most notorious characters in the community were on their faces crying out to God.

On a trip to a neighboring island, I found the people were very cold and stiff. Calling for some men to come over and pray, I particularly requested that a young man named Donald accompany them. Donald, who was seventeen years old, had been recently saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit about two weeks later on a hillside. As we were in the church that night, Donald sat toward the front with tears falling off his face onto the floor. I knew Donald was in touch with God in a way that I was not. So I stopped preaching and asked him to pray. Donald rose to his feet and prayed, "I seem to be gazing into an open door and see the Lamb in the midst of the throne and the keys of death and hell on his waist." Then he stopped and began to sob. After he composed himself, he lifted his eyes toward heaven, raised his hands, and said, "God, there is power there. Let it loose!" And at that moment the power of God fell upon the congregation. On one side of the room, the people threw up their hands, put their heads back, and kept them in that position for two hours. It is hard to do this for ten minutes, much less two hours. On the other side, the people were slumped over, crying out for mercy. In a village five miles away, the power of God swept through the town, and there was hardly a house in that village that didn't have someone saved in it that night."²

² <http://www.revival-library.org/> *When the Mountains Flowed Down* by Duncan Campbell.

Never let the enemy con you into believing that you don't have a part in this end-time revival that will take place.

When the Spirit Moves in Revival

What can happen when a group of people, filled with the Spirit of God, begin to listen and obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit? After Charles Finney came to Christ and was filled with the Spirit, he resolved to give up his law practice to the essential thing in the world, the salvation of those that do not yet know God. The Spirit of God seemed to stay with him in great power as he went from village to village, preaching the Word of God. When Finney spoke about Christ, people would fall on the floor under a great conviction of spirit, crying for God to have mercy on their souls. There seemed to be a unique presence over the area where he would be preaching. He says of one time:

"The state of things in the village and the surrounding area was such that no one could come into the village without feeling awestruck with the impression that God was there in a peculiar way. As an example of this, I will relate to a particular incident. The sheriff of the county resided in Utica. There were two courthouses in the county, one in Rome and the other in Utica (New York State).

Consequently, the sheriff, Bryant by name, came to Rome quite frequently. He later told me that he had heard of the state of things at Rome, and he, together with many others in Utica, had laughed a great deal about it. One day it was necessary for him to come to Rome. He said that he was glad to have business there, for he wanted to see for himself what things were happening. He was driving his one-horse sleigh, without any particular impression in his mind at all, until he crossed what was called the old canal, a place about a mile from the town. He said as soon as he passed over the canal, a strange impression came over him, awe so deep that he could not shake it. He felt as if God permeated the whole atmosphere. He said that this feeling increased the entire way until he came into the village.

Bryant stopped at Mr. Franklin's hotel, and the stable-man came and took his horse. He observed that the stable-man looked just like he felt—as if he were afraid to speak. He went into the hotel and found the gentleman there with whom he had business. He said that they were both so obviously shaken that they could hardly attend to business. He reported that several times in the course of the short time he was there, he had to rise from the table abruptly and go to the window and look away, trying to divert his attention to keep from weeping. He saw that everyone else appeared to feel just as he did. Such awe, such solemnness, such a state of things he had never had any conception of before. He quickly concluded his business and returned to Utica—but (as he said later) never to speak lightly of the Spirit's work in Rome again. A few weeks later in Utica, when Finney traveled to that town, he himself was converted."³

God hasn't changed; He's the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He wants to do the same today. The Holy Spirit filled Charles Finney in a powerful way than what many people experience; I think because he was so thirsty and repented sincerely of his previous life apart from God. The Lord will come in different ways to different people. He will not ask or

³ Autobiography of Charles G. Finney, published by Fleming H. Revel Company.

require the same thing of everyone. We need this same power of the Holy Spirit more than ever in the days we live. When our hearts overflow with the presence of Christ, others around us will observe the power of God and become spiritually hungry themselves. When we hunger and thirst for God Himself, this causes a chain reaction in those around us. This unique presence of God is what revival is. He is looking for people who are committed and open to His Spirit moving in the midst.

For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Business, as usual, is not enough for the multitudes that do not have a relationship with God. I am convinced that God is looking for whole congregations to pour out their lives in dedication for the salvation of those that have yet to find Christ. Do you know that it was not until 1830 that the population of the earth grew to reach 1 billion people? From that point, it took only 130 years, the year 1960, before the population grew to two billion people on planet Earth. The population is now well over a population of 7.4 Billion here in 2019 and increasing by a billion approximately every eight years. If God would visit in revival in the days of Charles Finney, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and George Whitfield, why would He not visit us in power in our day? More than half the amount of people who have ever lived are now alive.⁴ Because of the population increase, if we don't have a move of the Spirit and a visitation of God in our day, more people will go to a lost eternity without God than in all previous generations put together. I can't see God allowing that to happen.

Do we believe what the Bible tells us about eternal life, and about heaven and hell? Do we care if people around us go to a Christ less eternity? If whole communities can be brought to Christ in the 1830s, why would God not do the same now with your city? If God so loved the eastern United States that he would visit in power in the 1830s, why not now when there are 6 billion more people than in Finney's day?

Our faith and expectation of God's power at work through us needs to be strengthened and exercised. Faith is like a muscle; it needs to be fed and exercised. The key to being powerfully filled and used by God, I'm convinced, is to deeply dig up the roots of the sin that so entangles and binds us:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us (Hebrews 12:1).

The big question before us is how do we throw off every weight and the sin that entangles us within?

The Call for Repentance

What is repentance? George Kurian, the Christian scholar, and historian, defines repentance as, "contrition, the acknowledgment, and condemnation of one's own sins together with a turning

⁴ John Dawson, *Taking Your Cities for God*, Word Publishing, Page 65.

back toward God... it includes sorrow, confession, and a determination not to sin again" (Nelsons New Christian Dictionary, p. 654).⁵

Most people are familiar with the powerful move and filling of the disciples when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. Peter stood up and preached the Gospel, and the Word of God cut 3000 people to the heart to the point where they believed the Gospel and repented of their rejection of the Messiah. They responded, "'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, **'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'**" (Acts 2:38). Mark records Jesus' first words of ministry this way; "'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. **Repent and believe the good news!**'" (Mark 1:15). The only way into the kingdom of God is repentance toward God and to receive the substitutionary death of Christ as God's payment for your sin. Charles Spurgeon said, "Sin and Hell are married unless repentance proclaims the divorce." Do not allow yourselves a false repentance for many people who appear to repent are like sailors who throw their goods overboard in a storm, and wish for them again in a calm.⁶ The Jews in Jesus' day didn't have to ask what the Lord meant by calling for repentance, for before Jesus came on the scene, the forerunner, John the Baptist, had been calling for the nation's repentance.

John preached a baptism of repentance, and he urged people to turn their hearts to God. In times of revival, when the Spirit of God is moving powerfully, people will go miles to hear true biblical teaching from a man of God with integrity. John the Baptist roots his ministry in God's prophetic word through Isaiah:

³And he came into all the district around the Jordan, **preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**; ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, **'Prepare the way** for the Lord, make straight paths for him. ⁵Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. ⁶And all people will see God's salvation."⁷ ⁷So he *began* saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ "Therefore **bear fruits in keeping with repentance**, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹" Indeed **the axe is already laid at the root** of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:3-9 Emphasis mine).

In those days, when a king was coming to a particular land, his servants would arrive first and command the roads repaired so that there were no potholes, fallen rocks on the road, or if the road needed to be widened for the king's chariot to get through. The highways were to be straight, and the way was to be made smooth. John preached that the way must be prepared for the Messiah. Luke 3:3 tells us that his ministry was one of a baptism of repentance.

Why was John's ministry of a baptism of repentance so essential? How do you think this prepared the way for the ministry of Christ?

⁵ <https://www.jimfeeney.org/repentancechecklist.html>

⁶ Compiled by John Blanchard, *Gathered Gold*, Published by Evangelical Press, 1984, Page 262.

John was talking about the roadblocks in people's hearts. Not only can our inner mind and spirit become corrupted by images we have seen and felt from the media, but also from the outflow of the sinful life we inherited from Adam. Jesus warned that spiritual defilement was within the core of a man's being. He said, ¹⁸"But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. ²⁰These are the things which defile the man..." (Matthew 15:18-20). This message of repentance offended the Pharisees and Israel's leaders—they didn't see their need for sorrow and turning from sin.

In verse eight, John told us that there should be fruits of repentance. Being water baptized does not change our hearts; it is just an outward symbol of an inward change. The inner change will have a lifestyle change accompanying it. Things will be different on the outside because of the change that has occurred on the inside! True repentance will bring sorrow over sin. Our desires are changed when we receive new life in Christ. Why would we want to stay chained to our sin that destroys when we are set free to live in the freedom that Christ died to give us?

What is meant by the term "**the axe is already laid at the root of the trees?**" (v. 9).

John gave a vivid picture of a man about to cut down a tree. To aim his ax, a man will lay his ax blade on the root to be cut and steadies his footing before swinging the ax over his head to get a sharp blow to the root. There are two ways of looking at this picture. 1) The image is of a man or a nation (a nation is a collection of people with their corporate identity). If there is no repentance, the tree will be cut down and thrown into the fire as worthless. 2) The ax laid at the root could also be a picture of the work of Messiah, who, through our repentance and trust in Him, will put His ax at the heart of our sin problem, our root that we inherited from Adam. Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, "**For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin**" (Romans 6:6).

When we come to Christ, we are born-again or born from above, and receive new life in Christ. The ax laid at the root could also speak of cutting ourselves off from that which has fed our physical lusts and passions. True repentance is cutting the cords of our sin and depending on resources from above rather than the roots of the life we inherited from Adam—our flesh nature.

For a country to be revived, a state has to be revived.
 For a state to be revived, a city has to be revived.
 For a city to be revived, a church has to be revived.
 For my church to be revived, I must be revived.
 Revival starts with me.⁷

Repentance implies the involvement of our will in changing one's life. In all the categories of life—as a spouse, parent, roommate, employee, or boss—we are to practice our Christian beliefs, not just give verbal consent to them. If our repentance is true, then it will impact our lives in our giving of ourselves, our attitudes, and our treatment of others.

⁷ <https://pastors.com/revival-starts-with-me/>

It may begin with a sorrowful heart, but it must end with determined action; otherwise, it is not true biblical repentance and faith in Christ. As new life comes from a father and a mother, so repentance and faith in Christ bring about new life from above, it takes both.

For what things are we to repent?

1. Repent and cut the root of images in your mind left from past sins. These are hooks that at times of temptation, the enemy will repeat those images that he may have you go back to do something similar.
2. Repent and cut the root of movies you have watched that have stimulated or sexually excited you. Ask the Holy Spirit to throw away that videotape so that it does not keep replaying any more
3. Repent and cut the root of horror movies that the enemy uses to bring fear to your soul.
4. Repent and cut the root of old relationships to what was past and what is now. Some things of your past might need the help of a counselor.
5. Repent of any involvement in the occult, séances, horoscopes and New Age books, mantras and material.
6. We must repent of our culture's redefining of marriage, sexuality and gender.
7. Paul the apostle wrote that we are not our own, we were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19), so we must repent of the way we have spent our time and God's money on entertainment instead of our service to God. We don't belong to ourselves.
8. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you anything in your life that has grieved Him (Ephesians 4:30. Confess and cut the root.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, thank you for your presence and your power. Please open my eyes to see new ways that you want to manifest Jesus to this world through me. Amen.

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