



BUILDING A



REVIVAL CULTURE

a guide to leading your church
in seeking spiritual renewal

A **ONECRY** RESOURCE

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Building a Revival Culture by Bill Elliff

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Introduction

“Revival is an extraordinary work of the Spirit of God producing extraordinary results” (Richard Owen Roberts). It is a sovereign manifestation of a merciful God. We cannot manipulate revival, but we can and must prepare for God’s extraordinary movement. In fact, God has made certain astounding promises for those who do:

If My people . . . will humble themselves and pray . . . then I will hear from heaven (2 Chronicles 7:14 NKJV).

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (James 4:8 NASB).

It is our job as spiritual shepherds to make room for God—first in our lives personally and then in the lives of those we oversee. The prophet Isaiah reminds us,

A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 40:3-5).

So how do we prepare this highway in our life, our church, our sphere of influence, our city, our nation? How can we aggressively cooperate with God in developing an environment for revival and awakening, particularly in light of the spiritual emergency that surrounds us?

Suggested resources *highlighted in bold* throughout this booklet may be found by visiting www.OneCry.com/BuildACulture.



1 // START PERSONALLY

When Jesus was calling out His first leaders, He gave us the order in which we are to fulfill our ministry:

He appointed twelve, so that they would [first] **be with Him** and that He could [then] **send them out** to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons (Mark 3:14-15).

Our first calling is to *be with Jesus*—to walk in intimacy with Him, hearing Him, learning from Him, drawing from the vast eternal resource of His life in us. Only intimacy gives us God’s fresh words and power.

Revival returns God to His rightful place, and this must first occur in our own lives if we are to lead others. *Revival starts with you. It starts with me.* It begins when each of us draws a circle, steps inside it, and prays, “Lord, send revival, and begin it in this circle!”

There is no substitute for time with God. We put this off, crowded by the busyness of life, and miss the very pathway that would bring revival to our souls and to the people we shepherd. Here are some ways we can prioritize time with God:

- **Daily time:** Let *nothing* steal daily time in God’s presence. If He awakens you early, get up. Develop this priority appointment with God, and see it as such, with no exceptions. It is here you will encounter the Reviver.
- **Extended time:** Develop a rhythm of regular retreats. Take a day monthly to find a place of solitude and listen long to the Lord. Read large portions of His Word; examine your soul in His presence. Do not crowd Him out with phone calls and e-mails and projects. Be *with Him*.
- **Fasting:** Life is loud. Our mind runs constantly, our emotions drive us, our will is aggressively waging a battle for control. Fasting humbles



the soul (Psalm 35:13). It quiets our mind, will, emotions, and the competing voices around us so that we may give our attention to the Lord God and to seeking Him (Daniel 9:3). Fasting is often tied to revival in the Scriptures.

- **Cultivated communion:** Paul told us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). This must be possible, by God’s grace, or it could not have been commanded. Make it the ambition of your life, above all else, to be in constant communion with God, talking to Him incessantly throughout the day. Let prayer be the air you breathe, the atmosphere in which you live.
- **Spiritual examination:** Revival begins with remembering from where we have fallen and returning to our first Love (Revelation 2:1-5). Take time, with openness, to listen to the Lord regarding your current spiritual condition, and make confession and restitution in every corner that needs cleansing. Let the precious Holy Spirit reveal the condition of your heart.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING THE CULTURE

1. Set aside a day to spend with Jesus. Use the [*Personal Revival Checklist*](#) to do a fresh examination of your heart. Complete the [*Draw a Circle*](#) exercise. Read large portions of God’s Word as He directs. Do not leave until God gives you permission. *Be with Him.*
2. As God directs, share humbly and transparently with other leaders and with your people what God is doing in your life. Ask them to pray that God would send revival to your own heart. Lead the way in humble acknowledgment of your need.
3. Begin to fast one day a week, crying out to God for personal and corporate revival.



2 // REMOVE BARRIERS

Isaiah believed that the preparation of God’s highway began with some roadwork. Obstructions abound. Our job as spiritual foremen is to study the landscape of our church or ministry and discover both the heart and structural barriers.

- **Heart barriers:** Do you know the heart issues that are most prevalent in your church or ministry? Do they include pride, materialism, immorality, unforgiveness, robbing God, quenching or grieving the Spirit? Ask God to help you discern these issues. Then, like the prophets of old, let God fill you with His fresh messages and ideas for the people you shepherd. Deliver God’s Word fearlessly, in grace and truth.

Model a life filled with God’s Spirit, and see problems in the church as opportunities to teach. Such issues are not intrusions—they are opportunities for revival.

Don’t be afraid of fresh voices. Seek wise input to help you discern these heart attitudes and challenge those under your influence.

Flood your small groups and every area of your ministry with materials on reviving the heart. Do everything you can to bring repentance and healing in needed areas.

- **Structural barriers:** We often fail to realize that practices we’ve adopted along the way (our “wineskins”) may actually be hindering the work of the Spirit among us. Are you effectively using multiple “means of grace”—the Lord’s Table, baptism, preaching, worship, confession, testimony, community, solemn assemblies, fasting, witness—to carefully lead your people into the presence of God? Which of these are missing in your ministry? What means of grace has God given you as a leader that you are not utilizing in your circle of influence?



One of the most common barriers is our unwillingness to take the risk of opening up our public gatherings to allow the Body to express itself in testimony, public confession (as needed), and prayer. Change the flow of your gatherings. Allow time for such ministry, shepherding it gracefully. Remove the barrier of a slick, tightly scheduled, programmatic service. God is a wonderful leader when we give Him room.

Finally, seize the moments God gives. When God seems to “settle down” in a worship service or group gathering, and His presence is evident, tarry there. Give God room to do His work without rushing the moment.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING THE CULTURE

1. Take a spiritual inventory of your church or ministry to identify the primary heart issues. Utilize the [*Complete Spiritual*](#). Talk and pray with a select group of key leaders to identify the heart barriers to God’s manifest presence.
2. Schedule a retreat with other key leaders to identify the primary spiritual and methodological barriers to revival in your ministry. What needs to be emphasized? What needs to change?
3. Preach a [*message or series on spiritual awakening*](#). Keep preaching on this theme, as God directs, until He manifests Himself.
4. Provide some room, as God directs, for sharing, prayer, and testimonies. (For help on how to guide these times, read [*Releasing and Shepherding the Microphone in Revival*](#) and [*How to Lead a Testimony Service*](#).)
5. Read the pamphlets [*Come to the Table*](#) and [*Consecrate the People*](#) by Claude King to learn how communion services and periodic solemn assemblies can be powerful times of inviting people to seek God for revival.



3 // DEVELOP INTERCESSORY RHYTHM

When you study the biblical and historical accounts

of revival and spiritual awakening, you will discover some amazing constants. The most prevalent is that every revival has been preceded by prayer. As Matthew Henry observed, “When God intends great mercy for His people, the first thing He does is set them a-praying.”

How can you help develop a culture of revival? *Pray*. Pray personally, pray corporately.

This presents a dilemma for most pastors and ministry leaders, because prayer seems to be our people’s last resort, not their first response. Our self-centered, humanistic Christianity balks at prayer. It seems needless until we’re in crisis.

But we must start somewhere. Most importantly, we must begin in our own closet, and then seek to build concentric circles, pulling people closer and closer to the heart of God. You might be surprised to discover that there are more people interested in the right kind of prayer than you realize.

As spiritual leaders, we should be the greatest experts in our community on prayer. Our job, after all, is to “devote ourselves to **prayer** and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). We will be surprised how much of the other components of our leadership are automatically directed and resolved as we really pray. If you don’t know how to lead a prayer meeting well . . . learn! Ask God to teach you, and study available resources.

The First and Second Great Awakenings were marked by a wonderful and sustainable prayer pattern that would serve us well to study and develop. The people committed themselves to the following rhythm of revival praying:

- A. Weekly Prayer:** One day a week, time was set aside for personal or small group prayer devoted to revival and awakening.



Take time in your worship services to allow breathing room for prayer. Open the altar, filled with leaders who know how to help others, for times of ministering to needs, praying over individuals, and praying for revival and awakening, as God directs.

- B. Monthly Prayer:** First Mondays were given to prayer for revival and awakening by individual churches.

Begin a monthly prayer meeting with your people. Open the doors of the church for people to come and unite in prayer for revival and spiritual awakening.

- C. Quarterly Prayer:** Congregations came together to pray. In fact, often all the churches in a community would sign a covenant for First Monday prayer.

There is really only one church in each city, and we should be acknowledging and praying with each other. “**All** the house of Israel lamented [**cried out**] after the LORD” (1 Samuel 7:2b). This takes time to develop, but it could begin by simply inviting one or two other pastors to combine your congregations in a First Monday prayer meeting on a quarterly basis. How awesome it would be to see, in time, the whole church in the city united in periodic prayer!

- D. Annual Prayer:** They called other churches to join them.

Calling our churches to join with God’s church across the nation in prayer for national spiritual awakening is vital. The first Thursday in May has been wonderfully designated for this very purpose. Currently, over 55,000 prayer events are held on this day.

Duncan Campbell of the Hebrides Revival told a young pastor, Bill McLeod of Canada, that he believed God wanted to use his church in revival, but that it would begin when attendance at his prayer meeting exceeded his Sunday morning attendance. McLeod believed him and began working toward that end. The day came when their prayer meeting did exceed their Sunday morning attendance . . . and God moved in ways that sparked the Canadian Revival in 1971.



SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING THE CULTURE

1. Begin personally praying for revival. Don't expect those you lead to do something you are not doing.
2. Ask the Lord and your co-leaders what steps can be immediately taken to begin developing a rhythm of prayer in your church or ministry. Study the *National Prayer Accord* for helpful ideas. You probably cannot begin all of this at once, but start! It may work best to find the established intercessors within your ministry and mobilize them afresh to ask God to develop a spirit of prayer ministry-wide.
3. Start a revival prayer group that meets weekly or monthly.
4. Institute First Monday prayer. Don't be discouraged by small numbers, but ask God for real intercessors to join you.
5. Study how to build concentric circles of praying relationships, and begin to take the first steps.
6. Jumpstart your church with a *21-day prayer challenge*.



WHAT'S INVOLVED IN A SEEKING-GOD LIFESTYLE?

Virtually every statistic on American Christianity reveals that, on the whole, we have not been seeking God wholeheartedly. Could it be that a primary reason God has been steadily withdrawing His presence and blessing from America is that we have simply failed to develop a truly God-seeking lifestyle?

Principle 1: We seek God wholeheartedly by humbling ourselves, by confessing our pride and acknowledging our dependence on God.

(Isaiah 57:15; James 4:6; 1 Kings 21:27-29; Ezra 8:21-23; Psalm 35:13)

Principle 2: We seek God wholeheartedly by spending significant amounts of time praying fervently.

(Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10; Luke 18:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:5-6; 2 Timothy 1:3; Hebrews 13:15)

Principle 3: We seek God wholeheartedly by prioritizing taking in the Word of God.

(Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3)

Principle 4: We seek God wholeheartedly by being broken over our sins, repenting, and submitting to the lordship of Christ.

(2 Samuel 21:1-14; Jonah 3:10; Joel 2:12-13)

Principle 5: We seek God wholeheartedly by obeying the Lord moment by moment, living a life of holiness.

(Jeremiah 15:1; 1 Peter 4:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; Hebrews 12:14)

Principle 6: We seek God wholeheartedly by persevering in our seeking after Him, day after day, year after year.

(Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8; James 5:16-18)

Principle 7: We seek God wholeheartedly by gathering others to seek Him and by gathering *with* others to seek Him.

(Zechariah 8:20-23; 2 Chronicles 30:1-31:1; Nehemiah 8:13-18)

Adapted from [*A Seeking-God Lifestyle*](#) by Matt Bennett.



4 // LEARN GOD'S WAYS

God can do whatever He desires, whenever He desires, however He desires. His ways are higher than ours. But He has illustrated through our history a pattern of His ways, particularly as it relates to the cycle of revival. We see this pattern of vitality, decline, judgment, crying out, repentance, and revival repeated again and again.

You can learn these ways of God, and you must. Educate yourself and your people to be able to understand and cooperate with God's activity. The best tool for this learning, of course, is His Word. Study the manifold accounts of revival in Scripture.

Read great revival literature—particularly the historical accounts of revival—asking God to open your eyes to His patterns. It is interesting to note that the great Welsh Revival of 1904–1905 was preceded by several conventions and leaders who were teaching and preaching on revival themes. This prepared the soil for the worldwide visitation that was about to occur, as they helped churches and leaders understand God's ways.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING THE CULTURE

1. Study and preach on the *revival accounts in Scripture*. Make your own growing list of the ways of God in revival.
2. Build and study your own *revival library*. Seek to become an expert in your area on God's ways in revival, for the glory of God.
3. Grow in your understanding of revival by listening to *a forum on revival* with Jim Cymbala, Byron Paulus, Erwin Lutzer, Bill Elliff, and Michael Catt.



5 // FIND A FRIEND, BE A FRIEND

Movements are born and history is changed among friends. God's plan of discipleship is non-negotiable and amazingly effective. If you want to grow in your understanding related to revival and spiritual awakening, find someone who is a step ahead of you. Seek them out. Spend a day with them. Call them for advice and counsel. Pursue people in your life who will disciple you in this area.

Also, commit yourself to disciple others around you. If you are a pastor, disciple your staff and key leaders in these truths. When you go to a conference, take them with you. Read books together. Pray together.

If you are a Christian business leader, look for those around you who seem hungry for the things of God, and begin to intentionally develop a friendship that will open opportunities for mentoring them in God's ways of revival. Help them discover the path to personal revival.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING THE CULTURE

1. Ask God to place on your mind the name of a potential mentor. Take them to lunch, spend time with them, and see what God develops. Concentrate on developing a growing friendship.
2. Pray for someone you can connect with and help in this area. Realize that there are many others like you with a longing for more of God in your area. Look on the OneCry website to see people in your area who have also joined OneCry. Call them together to meet for prayer or study.



6 // THINK “KINGDOM”

There is one church in your city. Only one. It is comprised of many expressions and streams, but marked by those who have been saved by God’s grace and who believe His Word. Movements of genuine revival are always marked by cooperation and unity across denominational, ethnic, generational, and cultural lines.

If you think that your church alone possesses the keys to revival, you are not only mistaken, but you are arrogantly aborting the marvelous beauty and diversity of Christ’s kingdom. So think larger.

Oneness (which was Christ’s final prayer in John 17 for His body) is not obtained organizationally but organically; and praying together is the quickest means of unifying pastors, leaders, and ministries. In God’s presence, barriers fall and hearts are united.

It is important to note that unity in a city does not mean we must lay aside our unique doctrinal understandings; it means we must *prioritize* them. There are some issues that we should die for (salvation by faith alone, the authority of Scripture, etc.), but there are other areas that are not central to our unity. We can agree to disagree on peripheral interpretations and practices.

How glorious for the world to see a united church in a city, in love with Christ and each other! How powerful when all the churches in many cities have been joined in prayer and one cry for revival. And how God honors this kingdom-mindedness! It is here that He commands the blessing (Psalm 133).

If we want revival, we must intentionally pursue God *together*. And we must have God’s kingdom movement mentality. The purpose of OneCry is to help us join together, across our nation, in one united cry for awakening.



SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING THE CULTURE

- 1.** Start small, but start. If you are a pastor, invite a small group of pastors to join with you for prayer. Continue this, and let God expand the group. Retreat on a two- or three-day prayer summit. (***International Renewal Ministries***—the genesis of the Pastors' Prayer Summit movement—can help you greatly here.) If you are a Christian business leader, look for like-hearted businessmen, and begin a monthly prayer group for revival in your city.
- 2.** Pray and think of ways, under God's leadership, that the whole church in your city could become a vibrant community of prayer: city-wide quarterly prayer gatherings, National Day of Prayer events, etc.
- 3.** Pray publicly in your services for the other churches in your area. Become their greatest cheerleaders.
- 4.** Join in the OneCry movement by discovering and connecting with other leaders in your area, and invite them to be a part of OneCry. Seek to enlist five to ten leaders in the OneCry movement.



7 // PERSEVERE

Leaders who understand revival know that there are always the common marks of united prayer and persevering leadership in any movement of awakening. You are called to be a persevering leader. You may only see a “cloud as small as a man’s hand” (1 Kings 18:44), but your perseverance in building a culture for revival is the right thing to do in this critical hour.

You may not see the reviving of God in your day, but your cooperation with God’s activity will help those who are willing, and it may prepare the highway on which the Lord manifests His presence in power. God is not limited—national revival could easily start in your church and city!

Make it the ***determined commitment of your life*** that you will seek Him and lead others to seek Him *until He comes in revival.*



TURN//PRAY//UNITE

OneCry is a call for spiritual awakening based on these three key words that summarize our passion for revival. You can learn more about these words and discover tools to help you put them into practice by visiting our web page and signing the Declaration of Spiritual Emergency. From there, you will have access to video, audio, print, and web resources all designed to help you **turn from sin** to pursue a fresh life with God, **pray fervently** for the Holy Spirit to work, and **unite with others** in sharing the hope of Christ-centered revival everywhere.

To learn more about OneCry and to join the movement, visit

