

Outpouring versus Revival

Pastor E. Keith Hassell

Outpourings: An outpouring is a sovereign visitation from heaven. It is a sovereign increase of the Holy Spirit's activity in our lives—wind, rain, increase of the river providing abundantly for the offering of the Lord—the sacrifice of cattle, wheat, oil, and wine—offerings that are difficult in times of spiritual drought (Joel 2:21-27). Outpourings produce an increased season of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit such as dreams, visions, prophecy, and miracles. The rain of God's outpouring, an expression of His goodness, comes upon all flesh—the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). Because outpourings are sovereign, man cannot make them happen. The manifestations of the Holy Spirit come and go as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11). Outpourings usually come from God to man suddenly, unexpected, and unannounced. Outpourings are generally popular. They get people's attention and usually draw a crowd. When it is overwhelmingly clear that God is at work, even the lost and backslidden take notice. People's faith is heightened so that God is able to do greater things. We too have experienced outpourings or visitations on different occasions. The blessing I and others received causes me to cry out for another genuine outpouring or visitation. However, I understand that outpourings do not last—no matter how much we would like them to continue. If we do not understand that, our confusion, disappointment, and frustration will set us up for a wilderness experience.

Outpourings—at least the modern idea of outpourings—are not normal and do not represent the normal Christian life. In an outpouring, normal life is usually interrupted and put on hold for a season as God seeks our undivided attention. It would be impossible to fulfill other equally valid Biblical responsibilities of life in family, work, and church if the demands of an outpouring were sustained over long periods of time. God moves in cycles of work and rest. In the wilderness the people moved when the cloud moved and camped when the cloud rested. God is a good Shepherd. He knows how to lead His sheep without destroying them in the process! If we could accept God's cycles or seasons of outpouring, then we could better move with them when the cloud moves and then rest and establish the new ground when it rests. Sadly the cloud moves and rests and we keep going only to find ourselves in the wilderness without Him! Churches that sincerely but mistakenly discontinue normal New Testament church life in favor of hosting continual outpouring meetings end up driving the flock and later discover to their disbelief after the outpouring has subsided—and Bible and church history show us that it will—that the flock has become severely weakened or sometimes lost in the drive. This happens when we seek outpouring over the Lord of the outpouring. By not understanding the purpose and seasonal nature of an outpouring they can feel that the end signals failure. Many who sacrifice the

most to “keep” the outpouring from ending become disillusioned and bitter. By not understanding the nature and purpose of an outpouring, people often focus inward to blame one another. Sometimes the ones most blamed are the very ones who were used by God to usher in the outpouring to begin with! Disillusioned and hurt, some choose to leave the church because it is now unloving and “dead”. Some of these spend the rest of their life looking for an outpouring rather than for a church. Others never want to be a part of an outpouring again. What a tragedy! So, how can we allow an outpouring to end graciously? We can offer up a memorial of thanksgiving to God for the lives changed and the things received. We can become good stewards of what we have received, and live our lives in greater commitment to God and to the work of the Great Commission.

Tragically, in an attempt to cut losses and maintain the momentum of an outpouring, some resort to using manipulation and hype to keep it alive or to bring it back to life again. The idea is close to this: “If we are willing to become more and more extreme, we will prove to God we are serious, and then things will continue as they were!” It is beating a dead horse. It ignores the sovereign nature of the outpouring. The pressure to “produce” the same manifestations of God through the flesh can cause things to get weird. Genuine spiritual seekers become spooked, leave, and never come back. They are not rejecting a move of God. Manifestations from the Holy Spirit are real, but they don’t need to be showcased as the main attraction. If manifestations draw attention to people and away from the Lord or if they stop bringing edification to the meeting, then the Biblical guideline is that they do not need to be allowed (1 Corinthians 14). Christians need to repent of defending and showcasing weirdness. Through hype and manipulation, what begins as something pure often drifts into something defiled. It takes a courageous and faithful minister to resist the temptation to “manufacture” a move of God in order to maintain an audience or to draw a crowd. Outpourings should be celebrated with a holy regard. Unfortunately, defilement causes the last savor of some outpourings to be tainted with the repulsive odor of flesh. God will not bless or honor the work of the flesh. The spiritually discerning will stay far from such environments. Unfortunately, the most vulnerable are not able to discern the difference between flesh and spirit. Worst of all, false outpourings dull our appetite for the real.

Outpourings come to awaken backsliders and lost people to their need for God and His desire to save them and deliver them. Some have referred to this type of visitation as a “revival outpouring”. Revival outpourings are usually God's response to the cries of His faithful people to mercifully awaken backslidden Christians and lost loved ones to their sinful condition. God activates in these sinners the awareness of holiness, righteousness, and the fear of the Lord.

A revival outpouring is beneficial when it marks the time when we turned back to God. However, it is an indictment when we seek another revival

outpouring because we ignore the commitments we made during the last revival outpouring. How many revival outpourings do we *need* before we will begin living in obedience to God? How many revival outpourings do we really *deserve* when God has already given us one? After all, some have not received *one*! Although many believe our spiritual survival depends on another outpouring, I think that is misguided. Granted, it will help! But the power of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit being expressed through normal church life caused early New Testament believers to turn the world upside down.

Outpourings do not automatically change people's lives. It is not seeing and experiencing miracles, signs, and wonders that produce change in people's lives. Rather it is their obedience to what God demands of them (Luke 16:27-31). For instance, the outpouring of miracles, signs, and wonders in the days of Moses brought deliverance to Israel but it did not change their stubborn hearts. In the wilderness they cried out in their need and God gave them what they needed. Regrettably, they gave God nothing in return. The outpouring in Moses' day was for a purpose—to bring Israel to Mt. Sinai so they might enter into covenant so that He might be their God and dwell among them. The miracles of Moses' day have not been repeated. Israel's stubbornness to obey caused them to end up worse than before. Those twenty years old and above who had experienced God's outpouring and danced in celebration died in the wilderness.

In some cases, outpouring comes through a revived remnant who prepares the way for it. In Elijah's day, Israel had departed from God and served Baal. Elijah called for a show down between the prophets of Baal and himself. The people stood by callous and unmoved. Elijah, a prophet of revival, rebuilt the altar of the Lord and restored the daily offering. He called on the Lord—not for his sake—but for the people's sake. God answered by fire from heaven. That was an outpouring. But if the story had ended there, the people would have experienced an outpouring but remained in their idolatry. It wasn't until the people fell on their faces, repented, and killed the prophets of Baal that the drought was broken off of the land. In this case revival and restoration *prepared the way* for the outpouring.

Jesus visited Israel during His earthly ministry and preached the promised kingdom. His visitation came with an outpouring of signs and wonders. Many enjoyed the blessings of this outpouring but He could not stay because they refused to submit to His lordship and follow His commands. The remnant of eleven disciples who remained committed to Him was the ones who He used to build His covenant community called the church. They had weren't following Jesus because of the miracles but because they believed that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God, and because He alone had the words of eternal life (John 6:68-69). They had come to know Jesus. Unlike the crowds who left Jesus, they weren't following a miracle but the Son of God.

One of the most famous and unique outpourings is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This outpouring has lasted for two thousand years! In fact, we are still in it! This outpouring is for the entire season called “the last days” (Acts 2:17). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was foretold by the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32) and is the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36:25-27 and Jeremiah 31:31-34. During the Old Testament Pentecost at Mt. Sinai, God wrote His laws on tablets of stone but during the New Testament Pentecost God wrote His laws on our hearts and gave us His Spirit to help us keep them! There was only one Mt. Sinai and there was only one Upper Room. It is really unscriptural to ask for another Pentecost. There is no need for another. God has not taken back His Spirit who He poured out. Our awareness of His presence and power does not alter that reality. This outpouring has taken place *inside* of every true believer. The reality of this outpouring is accepted and experienced as we walk by faith in obedience. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit can be experienced by every last days believer and becomes in them a holy river of anointing that can impact any person in any place in any generation (Acts 2:17).

Revival: Whereas outpourings are a sovereign increase of the Holy Spirit’s activity in our lives, revival is the return of God’s people to the Word of God and covenant life. Whereas outpourings are popular and usually attract a crowd, genuine revival is not always that way. Revivals, like outpourings, are not normal but for a different reason. They are not normal because few accept the conditions. Revival sifts through the masses to find a remnant whose heart is loyal to God. Remnants can be small and remain small or they can grow large depending on the level of people’s response. In every outpouring people are awakened to God. In every outpouring there is usually a remnant that moves on into revival. Outpourings often draw people with faddish excitement that soon fades away. Then like spiritual junkies they are off looking for another high. True revival, on the other hand, produces a heart change that is produced by a genuine encounter and relationship with God.

Whereas outpourings do not reflect normal church life, revival restores the church back to healthy normal New Testament life. (Unfortunately, New Testament life is not very normal today!) We need God’s outpourings! But I have grown weary of outpourings on fields (hearts) that do not produce lasting fruit. The problem is not the outpouring but how the field was prepared before the outpouring came. It is not enough for God just to come. I want Him to stay! I don’t want to say, “Thanks for the visit, but unfortunately we are not prepared for You to live here!” Imagine the steward telling the owner of the house that there is no room for him in his own house! Therefore, through the work of revival, I have committed myself to seeking and meeting the conditions necessary to find a resting place for the Lord in His own house (Psalm 132:1-5).

While visitations come suddenly and unannounced to the unprepared, His abiding presence is no accident. It comes to those who prepare a place for Him to dwell (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). I am convinced that God's best is not to give us another visitation. He has already done that more often than we deserve. What He really desires is to dwell among us. It is okay to cry out for visitation but only as long as we are busy preparing a place of habitation for His presence when He arrives! Are we longing for His abiding Presence? If yes, then what are we doing right now to prepare a place for Him in our lives, in our homes, and in the church? Like it was with Moses who built the Tabernacle and Solomon who built the Temple and like the baseball player in the movie "Field of Dreams", the following is the Biblical pattern: "If we build it, He will come!" It is not God's pattern to say, "If He comes, we will build it!"

Yes, revival has often been initiated with an outpouring when people responded to God in true repentance and obedience. However, an outpouring does not guarantee revival will occur. Revival can only occur when a humble people (with or without an outpouring) begin to pray, seek God's face, and turn from their wicked ways and then seek to be obedient to God in every aspect of their lives. We should pray for a revival outpouring. Why? Not because revival depends upon it, but because we want the backslider and the lost to be awakened by God's mercy rather than by His wrath!

The spiritual survival of a faithful believer does not depend on another outpouring. When God supernaturally lit the fire on the altar in the Tabernacle and Temple, it was a one time event. He didn't plan to light it again supernaturally every day. We must avoid the immature response that says, "That was neat God. Do it again!" From then on it was the responsibility of the priests to keep the fire going. As God's priesthood, we are responsible to keep the fire going on the altar of our own hearts.

Why do we insist on another outpouring as the only means to revival? Is it possible that we want God to light the fire in our heart because we fail to maintain the fire daily? Is it possible that our desire for God to move is because we are unwilling to move? That is, are we unwilling to do what God has already told us to do? Is it possible that in our stubbornness to obey God that we now expect God to give us another "kick in the pants" to get us moving again? How can this attitude be pleasing to God? Why would God want to reward that kind of laziness? Is that what God wants His people to model to the world as normal Christian living? Doesn't it bring more glory to God when we live our lives faithfully to Him in obedience everyday enjoying the promise of His abiding presence from the time we get up to the time we go to bed? That is what I am currently experiencing and that is what I believe God wants every one of His people to experience. The "kick in the pants" approach is not a sign of a healthy child! Unfortunately, many can't seem to get things going. That is why God in His faithful love and mercy sometimes sends another awakening when faithful

believers pray. Thank God for faithful believers who pray! Praise God for His longsuffering with us!

Unlike sovereign outpourings, revival is available to us at any time. Revival is God's promise to those who meet His conditions. How does revival come? It comes when God's people humble themselves, pray, seek God's face, and turn from their wicked ways (2 Chronicles 7:14). There is nothing in this list that depends on another anointed outpouring from heaven. These are all things we are required to do. In fact, revival will tarry until we do what He has told us to do. Are we doing what He has told us to do? It doesn't require another outpouring to usher His presence into our lives. It is our sin and iniquity (habits of sin) that separates His presence from us (Isaiah 59:1-2). What are we doing about the sin in our lives? Do we want the sin more than His presence? Jesus told the church at Ephesus to repent and return to their first love (Revelation 2:4). When we do this, our first love will return to us.

It is not someone else's fault that we are not revived. It is not someone else's fault that we continue in our pride and refuse to humble ourselves. It is not someone else's fault that we refuse to pray. It is not someone else's fault that we do not read and study God's Word. It is not someone else's fault that we continue in our wicked ways and refuse to repent. It is not someone else's fault that we are living in a wilderness. Charles Finney once said, "Christians are more to blame for not being revived than sinners are for not being converted." Personal revival is a personal responsibility. Corporate revival is a corporate responsibility. We are as close to God right now as we want to be. If we will draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8). The first step of revival is humility where we stop blaming things and other people and accept responsibility for the state of our own condition and relationship with God.

I acknowledge that revival outpourings have come to me and to this church on different occasions and at different levels of intensity. I thank God for that! He is good and His mercy endures forever! Revival has changed me and it has changed many in our church. It has impacted the expectations we have for ourselves in light of what God has shown us. The reality is that the revival changes that have taken place in our lives continues to impact the next generation of family and the lives of those we touch. The revival we have experienced, however, is like a plant whose roots are confined in a little pot. We need to allow the work of revival to find more room in our lives to grow and then to spread it to others. If the work of revival has grown cold in our heart it doesn't have to stay that way. We must God's conditions by faith—not feelings—and the fire in those ashes will burst once again into flame!

It is easy to spot a person who is walking in revival. They are members of a holy remnant. Revived people are hungry for the Word of God. They long to spend time in His presence in worship and prayer. They want to live holy lives. They walk in the fear of the Lord. They do what is right. They are faithful and

active in the local church. They are submitted to their leaders. They want to be a blessing in serving others. They take seriously the work of the Great Commission. They feel a great responsibility to witness to others both in word and in deed. They intercede for the lost and for the backslider. They proclaim and teach God's truth. They tear down and dismantle idolatrous structures. They stand firm against the rebellious. They restore the broken. They seek to rediscover and build according to biblical patterns. They worship of God in spirit and truth. They are committed to kingdom covenant community. Revived people are growing in the Lord.

Let's not have an outpouring that stops short of revival. In fact, let's initiate a revival that brings in an outpouring! An outpouring is up to God. But revival is up to us. While some wait for change to come, why not prepare the soil for change? We can do that by breaking up the hard soil of our hearts, seeking the Lord, and planting seeds of revival until He rains down righteousness upon us (Hosea 10:12). Those seeds are for this and following generations. We do not need to wait for another outpouring to do that. We do not need another visitation before we can be obedient to fulfill the Great Commission. God has given us what we need. The real question is, "What are we doing to fulfill the Great Commission with the revival outpouring God has already given us?" Will He find us faithful when He comes?

I am convinced that the spirit of revival continues in our hearts and in our church. The level of its manifestation rises and falls based on our level of obedience. That cannot be denied. Sometimes revival fire may seem to be gone, but I believe there are coals still under the ash heap! We must stir them up. We must become fuel for the fire. We must become God's living sacrifice. The flame of His presence and passion for God will burst forth again!

We must face reality if we are going to walk strong in revival. It is true that while revival is taking place among God's remnant, darkness is also at work around us. That should not unsettle our hearts or cause us to believe that we are not making an impact. People are watching those who are walking in revival. The prophet Isaiah tells us, "*Darkness shall cover the earth and deep darkness the people, but the Lord will arise upon you and His glory will be seen upon you.*" (Isaiah 60:2). While darkness is increasing in the lives of sinners, God's light is increasing even more in us! The darker the world gets the brighter God's light shines and the more desperate the lost are to come to that light! Don't be discouraged by the darkness. It only causes God's people to stand out more! That is great advertising!

We must not grow weary in well doing. We will reap in due season if we do not quit (Galatians 6:9). Seedtime and harvest is always at work. We must continue planting the seeds of revival and watering them. It is foolish and irresponsible to wait for the rain of outpouring before we get serious about planting because there will be nothing to harvest. The rain blesses the farmer

who has prepared. We must remain committed to the current work of revival that we see taking place in our church and in our region. We must continue to pray for another revival outpouring that will water the seeds planted in the harvest fields and refresh the souls of the laborers. Revival is more than what I once envisioned. Outpourings, like the rain, depend upon God. Revival, like salvation, depends upon our faith and obedience. In this sense, I guess I am beginning to see the work of revival through His eyes.