

Evangelists as Ministers of Revival

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*The evangelist [patriarch] is an evangelical minister. The duties of this office are to be an evangelical minister; to preach, teach, expound, exhort, **to be a revivalist**, and to visit branches and districts as wisdom may direct, invitation, request, or the Spirit of God determine and require;*

—Doctrine and Covenants 125:3a, emphasis added

Revival Is Not a Comfortable Word

Revival is not a comfortable word. It is colored by dated perceptions and narrow understandings. Revival summons up images of tent meetings and altar calls. We envision the charismatic pulpit-pounding preacher—hanky in one hand, Bible in the other—his high-pitched evangelical voice rasping like a rusty hinge squealing in the night. Revival! Sweat and sawdust! Hellfire and brimstone! Tears and confessions! And most of us would roll our eyes and quickly say, “No thanks, that’s *not* me! I’m not a revivalist!” But the fact remains, evangelists *are called* to be revivalist—and revival ministry is much broader and deeper than that of a stereotypical tent preacher. The ministry of revival is many faceted. Revival means:

- to *activate*, to set in motion, or take up again; renew
- to *make operative* or *valid* again
- to *bring back* into notice, use, or currency
- to *restore* to life or consciousness, vigor, strength—a flourishing condition
- to *quicken* or *renew* in the mind
- to restore or reduce to its natural uncombined state
- to *recover* from financial depression
- to be quickened, restored, or renewed as hope, confidence, etc.
- *a new production of an old play*

We Need “a New Production of an Old Play”

People are searching for spiritual renewal—“a new production of an old play.” The prodigal son experienced revival slopping pigs—“he came to himself”—a revival of his true, *authentic* self. Zacchaeus experienced revival across the supper table. Peter’s revival happened on a rooftop, arguing with God on what to eat and not eat, and Mary’s, at the feet of a supposed gardener at the tomb. Elijah experienced revival in a cave, Joseph Smith in a grove, the Emmaus travelers while breaking bread, Paul on the dusty road to Damascus, and Lydia on the banks of a river near Philippi.

Revival shows up in different clothes, in different places, in different ways, with different people who through the grace of God experience “a new production of an old play.” Revival “quickens and renews,” “activates,” “sets into motion,” “restores to life or consciousness, vigor, and strength,” “makes operative and valid again.” It creates “a new production of an old play.” And it does so through the blessing of *charismatic ministry*, another term that begs for broader understanding.

Charisma commonly refers to someone who possess astonishing leadership power or whose personality is extraordinarily magnetic. However, its root meaning is much richer. Charisma is derived from the Greek word *charizesthai*, meaning favor or gift, and *its* root word, *charis*, which means grace. In this sense, *anyone* who bears the gift of the good news of God’s grace is charismatic. One need not be flamboyant or a cart-wheeling extrovert to share the gift of grace. *Charis* can be shared one to one in quiet, unassuming ways that bring renewal and revival to the living dead.

There are a lot dead people walking around. The book and film titled, *Dead Man Walking* applies this label to prisoners on death row. These men and women, whose fate is circled on the calendar, move toward their appointment with death assuming its destination *before* its arrival. It’s not a label exclusive to those facing the death penalty. There are many people within and beyond the church who have lost the spark of life. As ministers of blessing, evangelists are called to circle the *date of revival* on the calendars of those whose lives are dimmed by choice or circumstance. Evangelist are called to renew in them the promise of eternal life and to enable them to assume its destination in the *here and now*—not some far off distant tomorrow!

Revival ministry takes place across breakfast tables and lunch counters, in hospital waiting rooms, living rooms, and barrooms. It happens on fishing trips, visits to the zoo, on a 747 jetliner, or the seat of a Harley Davidson. Revival happens wherever and whenever the Holy Spirit breaks in and people are awakened once more to God’s grace. Borrowing a phrase from theologian Marcus Borg, revival is “meeting Jesus, again, for first time!” But, where and how does it begin?

Where Does Revival Ministry Begin?

It begins at home. It begins with *self*—with what might be called an evaluation of one’s “self-community.” We live a multiplicity of roles. You may be a spouse, a parent, a grandparent, a carpenter, a clown, a minister, a musician, a friend, etc. Your effectiveness in these roles varies. They often compete with each other and it is easy to delude yourself as to which role is the most important. Head and heart may say, “Husband, wife, or close friend tops my list” until a measurement of your activities reveals that you devote far more time and energy to something lower in the queue. As one person said, “I am one. I am many—and at times I am divided.”

The first step leading to a healthy self-community is an appropriation of one’s ultimate worth confirmed by God’s grace despite our fragmented personas. The second step is realignment. Evangelists with a healthy sense of self-community regularly evaluate competing roles and priorities and make *realistic* adjustments. Said another way, we can only revive others if we are constantly aware of our own need for revival and awakening. You cannot wake up others if you are not awake yourself! *You cannot revive others if you are half-dead yourself.*

Personal revival requires honesty, discipline, and courage. It demands a *no-excuses-given* examination of your spiritual life and ministry. This doesn’t mean beating oneself up. This is not a matter of guilt trips and self-flagellation. It is rather a proactive review of your spirituality focused on *renewal*, not rejection. Personal review and reflection provides fresh possibilities that fuel enthusiasm for your ministry. Such an evaluation need not be a solo act. Observations, input, critique, and guidance from someone you respect and trust can be invaluable.

Spirituality is often narrowly defined. It is not merely a measurement of how often one prays, meditates, or studies scripture. Fundamentally, spirituality has to do with wholeness—one's liveliness and awareness. Put simply, spirituality asks the question, "Are you awake?"

Sometimes people get the mistaken notion that spirituality is a separate department of life, the penthouse of our existence. But rightly understood it is a vital awareness that pervades all realms of our being. Someone will say, "I come alive when I listen to music," or "I come to life when I garden" or "I come alive when I play golf." **Wherever we come alive, that is the area in which we are spiritual. And then we can say, "I know at least how one is spiritual in that area." To be vital, awake, aware, in all areas of our lives, is the task that is never accomplished, but remains the goal.**

[Brother David Steindl-Rast in *The Music of Silence* as quoted in Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat. *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life*, (Scribner: New York, 1996), 29.]

How do you awaken yourself and others? The answer fills volumes. Countless books, articles, and resources contain wonderful insights for renewing lives swallowed by *everydayness*. The following suggestions are neither exhaustive nor revelatory and are offered as reminders.

Personal Revival Includes:

- **Healthy Self-Community**—Evaluate your many roles. Do your priorities coincide with your efforts? Make realistic priority, time, and activity adjustments.
- **Compassion**— "Do unto *yourself*, what you would do lovingly for others." Get in touch with your own *brokenness*, neither excusing its cause nor condemning it. Resolve to make corrections by opening yourself to God's healing and restorative Spirit.
- **Confession**—Honestly acknowledge your place before God, self, and others. Remember that confession is also a positive act, i.e., "confessing God's goodness in one's life." Isaiah said, "Cease to do evil. Learn to do well." We often forget the second sentence. Repentance is not only eliminating shadows. It's emphasizing the light! Crowd out the "not-so-good" with something better—learn to do well.
- **Reconciliation**—Come to terms with disjunctive relationships. Seek unity where there is division. Be willing to forgive and be forgiven. Seek God's blessing of reconciliation.
- **Surrender/Sacrifice**—Let go of negative self-images and limiting theological perspectives. Sacrifice is the relinquishment of what has value in lieu of what has a higher more pressing claim. Relinquish ineffective patterns and perceptions; replace them with new possibilities.
- **Spiritual Disciplines**—Pray, meditate, study scripture, read and reflect, go on nature walks, listen to music, appreciate art and poetry. Take time to waste time with God in whatever way brings personal renewal.
- **Joy and Enthusiasm**—Learn to laugh again, and laugh often. Celebrate life and let your enthusiasm for God's blessings become contagious. Samuel H. Miller in *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life* writes: "In the muddled mess of this world, in the confusion and the boredom, we ought to be able to spot something—an event, a person, a memory, an act, a turning of the soul, a flash of bright wings, the surprise of sweet compassion—somewhere we ought to pick out a glory to celebrate." (Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, *Spiritual Literacy*, 16.)

- **Refreshment**—Be kind to yourself. You need downtime that becomes *up time* that brings “refreshment.” Take time for exercise, recreation, movies, meals out, etc. Again, personal revival comes when you take care of your physical, mental, spiritual, and relationship needs.

Revivalists “Awaken” Others through:

- **Love and Acceptance**—God’s love is a circle without a circumference. No one, let me repeat that, “no one!” is on the outside looking in. God does not place people into categories of race, gender, age, economic status, political persuasion, sexual orientation, etc. The ground is level at the foot of the cross—*every soul* is of inestimable worth. Revival cannot take place without love and acceptance.
- **Discernment**— First of all, you can’t revive the dead without visiting the cemetery! Thomas Merton says, “It has become painfully clear that **a remote spirituality has little or no impact** on the way we live as a society.” There is no shortcut to *being with* people. Who’s alive? Who isn’t? Who’s dead and doesn’t know it? We discern people’s needs when we establish trusting relationships with them.
- **Being Proactive**—You can’t wait for a phone call or an invitation. We don’t barge into people’s lives, but we can establish loving relationships that create a *standing invitation*. Revival ministry is preventative as well as restorative. It is easier to revive a dying person than one completely dead.
- **Observing**—Seeing and hearing what’s there and what’s not there. What barriers prevent others from being fully alive? What is missing in their lives? We must invest ourselves in the lives of others so that we can hear their silent cries for help as well as their pleas in times of crisis.
- **Encouragement and Affirmation**—A little bit of encouragement and praise goes a long way. Encouragement and affirmation build strong relationship bridges. Guidance, positive support, and critique can travel the same bridge.
- **Active Listening**—This involves hearing and overhearing. When we listen intently to another person’s story they will be more inclined to hear our story.
- **“Telling It Like It is!”**—This does not mean “getting in someone’s face,” but being compassionately direct. Honest counsel shared without sensitivity and compassion runs the risk of alienation.
- **A Leap of Faith**—Never hesitate to do good! When you get a hunch or nudge to help someone, weigh its appropriateness then move out and do it. Sometimes we allow the “still, small voice” to remain so still, that it dies.
- **Friendly Contact**—Make phone calls, send notes, cards, and letters of care. Remember birthdays, anniversaries, and other special events. Surprise them with unexpected acts of kindness. Show up and root for the “home team.”
- **Having a Well-Furnished Mind**—Read, watch, observe, and learn. Fill your mind with meaningful scripture verses, wise quotes, personal stories, testimonies, etc. Is your mind an ocean teeming with life or a small pond barely sustaining life?
- **Confession/Being “Real!”**—Appropriately share your journey with others (the good and not so good). Admit your limitations while not limiting your message of hope. Share what life has taught and is teaching you.

- **Being a “Value-Bearer,” a “Hope Giver,” and an “Enthusiast**—What greater value brings new life than Micah’s plea, “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8 NRSV) Be a hope giver. Hope is the gift that keeps on giving. Put so much joy into your life that it spills over into the lives of others.
- **Congruence**—Jesus had congruence. He was one with his word. There is no substitute for integrity—for walking your talk. Be a living example.
- **Being Contextual**—Be current, up-to-date, and relevant with today’s demanding world and culture. Contextual ministers do not answer questions that are no longer being asked.
- **Competency**—Seek learning by study and faith. Continually develop your knowledge and skills. “Sharpen your saw” and help others sharpen theirs.
- **Commitment**—Sincere commitment always shows. Your commitment to your call and to those whom you serve speaks volumes. The strength of your character or ethos opens doors to help others.
- **Forgiveness**—Help people come to terms with their past, present, and future misalignments. Help them to forgive others, to be forgiven, to forgive themselves, and to experience the joy of reconciliation. It’s not how many times you fall; *it’s how many times you get up!*
- **Confidentiality**—Confidentiality is not a promise—it is a moral mandate, a guarantee! Notwithstanding obvious legal reporting requirements, privileged communication says, “Don’t be afraid, you are safe with me.” Relationships of trust give birth to revival.
- **Peacekeeping/Peacemaking**—Peace is not the absence of pain but the presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of pain. Help others to be at peace with themselves and to make peace with areas of conflict in their lives.
- **Prayer**—Pray for others and for yourself. Pray for guidance and understanding. Help those who have never prayed—and those who no longer pray—to pray.
- **Blessing**—Revival comes *through the minister* not *by* the minister. Revival is the work of the Holy Spirit. We facilitate God’s blessing of new life and awakening through prayer at a point of need and through the sacrament of evangelist’s blessing.

In a sense, all of this is to say that resurrection happens *here and now* or it doesn’t happen at all. Animation is a sign of life—not irrefutable evidence. The mourners and curiosity seekers who gathered around Jesus when he shouted, “Lazarus, come forth!” needed new life, as much if not more so, than Lazarus. Revival is a “wake-up” call. The evangelist as a minister of revival sounds the call that awakens *self* and others to experience—a *new production of an old play*—a restoration of new hope, new confidence, and new life!