



Effect of prayer groups on revival

Research on revival clearly shows that there is nothing more central and important when preparing for revival than prayer, especially prayer in small groups. This type of prayer is done in prayer groups sometimes referred to as 'prayer cells', 'prayer societies' or 'home cells.' Such groups usually start with one or two people who establish a prayer group that multiplies into dozens or even hundreds of small prayer groups. This has happened in some form or another in more than 90% of all recorded revivals.

Revival never just happens. There is always a time of preparation preceding it, and preparation always includes prayer. Dr. James Edwin Orr, the renowned revival scholar, said that every revival could be traced back to anything from one to ten people starting to pray for revival. Throughout history, the multiplication of small prayer groups has proved to be the simplest and most effective strategy for saturating towns, cities and a nation with prayer, and mobilizing prayer for renewal and revival in the church.

Revival which follows the outpouring of God's Spirit of prayer and supplication in response to the multiplication of prayer groups, has been the pattern of all major awakenings around the world. We read in the Book of Acts how the early church gathered and prayed 'from house to house.'

Prayer groups preceding revivals

Here are some examples of how prayer groups preceded revivals over the past 350 years:

- In about 1680, a German Lutheran theologian, Philipp Jacob Spencer, encouraged 'prayer societies' - small prayer groups, where people could gather for prayer and Bible study. The result was a remarkable surge of ministry.
- Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (founder of the Moravian Church and the influential Moravian prayer and mission's movement) adopted the concept of prayer societies for the spreading of the gospel message.
- The First Great Awakening (1727-1742) that covered America, Britain and countries in Europe and Scandinavia, was marked by multitudes of prayer groups in cities, towns and regions. Jonathan Edwards, known as the leader of the 1741 revival in Northampton and New England, adopted the concept of prayer societies or prayer groups. During the 1730-1740-decade, prayer societies (prayer groups) multiplied in many towns and congregations throughout New England.
- William Carey, also called the 'father of modern missions', who did remarkable work as a missionary in India, was deeply affected by the concept of prayer societies.
- The Cambuslang revival, in Scotland in 1742, was built on the concept of prayer societies. Testimonies of the power of prayer groups in the Cambuslang revival affected many

other cities in Scotland and the rest of Britain, Europe and Scandinavia. The method of multiplying prayer groups was, for instance, used in the Netherlands and Germany and resulted in remarkable revivals in 1748 and onwards.

- John Wesley and a small group of Christians were praying in Feters Lane, London when God poured out His Spirit on them. This formed part of the commencement of the Second Great Awakening (1789-1806), and what later became the Methodist Church. John Wesley used the concept of establishing prayer groups in as many places as possible to great effect.
- The Second Great Awakening, which started in England, touched more nations than the First Great Awakening. The revival in England can be traced back to a seven-year period of prayer that preceded it. Local churches had set aside Monday evenings to pray for revival and missions. This 'prayer movement' eventually made its way to America, and after seven years of prayer, revival came to the USA also.
- At the beginning of the Second Great Awakening in the USA in 1806, a small group of students met regularly to pray for revival. This was called the 'Haystack Prayer Meeting.' The revival that resulted from this meeting was one of the significant streams that contributed to the national and international Great Awakening, and it had an enormous effect on global mission awakening.
- During the Fourth Great Awakening (1857-1862), prayer groups were established from country to country, city to city and town to town. This happened in every nation, including South Africa. In Ulster, Northern Ireland, 104 prayer groups started within a few months, and within a year, revival came to Ulster. Prayer groups sprang up everywhere, many of them among the young people. In Scotland in 1860, about 2,000 prayer groups started to pray for revival, and within a few months, Scotland was in the grip of a most extraordinary revival.
- American pastor, writer and evangelist, R.A. Torrey went to Australia in 1905 for a series of meetings. For eleven years prior to his visit, a group of ministers and laymen had come together every Saturday night to plead with God for a 'big revival.' In Melbourne, Torrey found 2,100 prayer cells with 20,000 people praying in home prayer meetings. The city was saturated with prayer! The meetings had the atmosphere of revival, and there was a remarkable harvest.
- In 1902, participants at the Keswick Convention in Britain (with some 5,000 attending), heard about the home prayer cells in Australia and how it had prepared the ground for the ministry of R.A. Torrey there. This sparked a fire. Tired of organising and labouring, they decided to follow the same principle of home prayer cells praying for revival in Britain and the world.
- The decade of revival (1900-1910) started in the late 1890s, when prayer groups were established all over the world (China, Korea, India, Australia, and many countries in Africa, Europe and Latin America) and began to pray simultaneously for revival. The prayer groups were not globally organised, it was God moving in every nation. In Wales, conference speaker and author, Jessie Penn-Lewis, reported that since 1897, there was a sudden increase in prayer, a hunger for revival and a deep concern about the state of the Church. Prayer intensified even more after 1902. More churches started to pray, more prayer meetings were established, more people attended, and more people started to pray

with intensifying desperation. In the first months of 1903, four young men, eighteen years of age, started a prayer meeting every night on a mountainside. They continued for two months, and dozens of people joined them, resulting in awakening in their church.

- The revival in Nagaland (1976) in North East India came after six years of non-stop prayer by the Baptist Churches in Nagaland.
- In 1989, Brian Mills, responsible for mobilising prayer for the 1989 Billy Graham Crusade in London, used the principle of 'prayer triplets' (three people in a prayer group, with each person praying for three unsaved people). More people were saved due to the prayer triplets meeting for months before the crusade than during the crusade itself!

From these testimonies, it seems that there is no more effective way to prepare for revival than to *start and multiply prayer groups*. I have not seen anything that has had a greater effect. Today, there are many initiatives, strategies, projects and plans, but they result in limited success or end in failure. Let us remember that initiatives, programmes, strategies, projects and plans are necessary, but they often fall short because there is not enough spiritual power to change the hearts and minds of the people and result in long-term change in individuals and communities. However, when the Church started to pray, the power was there. Then, programmes, plans and strategies brought much change. We need the power of the Holy Spirit – so let's pray!

Article taken from "South African Revivals: 1786 – 2015" written by Bennie Mostert.