

THE TENTH IN A SERIES ON REVIVAL

Dwight L. Moody: Evangelism, the Heart of REVIVAL

BY KEN HORN



Revival is glorious. It is wonderful when God sovereignly touches a church that has been dry and lukewarm, and it leaps to spiritual life. Worship is energized, there is an air of expectancy and faith, gifts of the Holy Spirit operate, pews are filled, believers repent, and their lifestyles change.

But there is another sign necessary to validate any revival. When God is truly moving, souls are being saved.

Turning unbelievers into believers is what revival is all about. How should this happen? Should we await a dynamic, sovereign move of God that catapults a slumbering congregation into spiritual vitality? That's great when it happens. But it's not the biblical norm.

There is nothing more valuable than a human soul. This truth is repeatedly driven home to those enveloped by genuine revival. Spiritual excitement pales into insignificance where no sinners come to the Cross. Lack of evangelism brands the most spirited worship service mere human enthusiasm.

The church does indeed need revival. But it also needs more of this basic ingredient of revival — evangelism. It doesn't take a professional minister to evangelize. In fact, laypeople can often be more effective at evangelism than their pastors — because unbelievers are more likely to listen to them.

Great revivals can begin years before they are noticed. Some faithful Christian, little known or unnamed by history, leads a

soul into the Kingdom — a new believer who later is used by God as a spark for revival. Such was the case of Sunday School teacher Edward Kimball, who hesitantly stopped at a shoe store and led a young clerk to the Lord. We know little of Kimball. Few even recognize his name. But church history abounds with information about the young man — Dwight L. Moody. He was one of the greatest revivalists ever, used by God for the salvation of multiplied thousands in America and overseas.

Moody was truly an evangelist, in the most basic sense of the word. He had a lifelong commitment to soul winning. He saw the big picture, with hundreds at a time coming to Christ in his mass meetings. And he saw the small picture, regularly sharing his faith and leading souls one at a time to the Lord. Moody lived to share the good news, the evangel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. He lived to tell others of their need for a Savior and to bring them to Him.

History is hard-pressed to find another individual so devoted and effective at personal evangelism.

Moody's heart had been stirred by another revivalist, Henry Varley, when Varley said to him, "Moody, the world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to Him."

Later, Moody would say, "I aim to be that man."

Moody looked at large cities as a key to nationwide awakening. "If we can stir [America's cities], we can stir the whole country," he once said.

Moody walked the streets of Chicago, reaching out to the lost and needy, doing his part in the stirring.

He made a personal commitment to share Christ with at least one person every day. One evening he wearily slipped into bed, and it dawned on him that he had

not witnessed that day. Though tired in body, he quickly arose, dressed, and walked to Chicago's skid row, where he spent time talking to an alcoholic about his soul. He led the man to Jesus.

Moody was technically a layman. Born in poverty and forced to drop out of school to work at a young age, it seemed he had nothing going for him. He never had formal seminary training and was never ordained. Yet he traveled a million miles and preached to 100 million people. He saw hundreds of thousands converted.

Moody stressed the need to involve laypeople in evangelism. He had only been a Christian for three years when the Prayer Meeting Revival of 1858 provided him the example.

He also stressed the connection between revival and good works, providing a model of involvement and social reform as necessary

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outcomes of any move of God. He founded schools, orphanages ... even book companies.

Moody probably took the greatest leaps of any revivalist in standardizing revival efforts. Perhaps his greatest innovation was a fully focused music program. He recognized that music could move the human soul. Ira Sankey pioneered this role for Moody's

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meetings. One writer opined that Sankey had become as effective at preaching the gospel by song as Moody was by sermon. Moody gave Sankey and his music a full 30 minutes at the beginning of each meeting.

In 1871 the Great Chicago Fire took Moody's home, church, and the YMCA he served. After a brief time of depression, he returned to ministry with a new fervor. Moody ministered to the practical needs of the teeming throngs in the inner city, yet he never put social work above the

gospel. His burden for the city was translated into souls for the Kingdom.

Many Christians await "the day" when revival will hit their church, when unbelievers will start showing up and getting saved. But as believers pray for revival, they must not ignore what they can do now: witness in the power of the Holy Spirit. If Christians took this to heart, more churches would be in revival.

When revival comes, it may seem sudden. But it really brings

to fruition seeds that have been planted, watered and cultivated over a period of years. Where Moody's shoe store once stood, a plaque now reads, "In a shop on this site D.L. Moody was converted in 1855." It could as well say, "In a shop on this site, Edward Kimball started a revival." Few of us can be another Moody. But most of us can be another Kimball. Your personal revival awaits. And so do unsaved millions. e

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