

### Chapter Three

## Preparing the Heart for Revival

*Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek  
the LORD, till He comes and rains  
righteousness on you.*

*—Hosea 10:12*

**B**ecause the Jews were a nation of farmers, Scripture often refers to their occupation to illustrate its points. The prophet Hosea employed this strategy to tell the Jews they were becoming a nation of backsliders. He reproved them for their idolatry and threatened them with the judgments of God.

A revival consists of two parts: that which concerns the church and that which concerns the unsaved. Here I will speak about a revival in the

### Preparing the Heart for Revival

church. Fallow ground is ground that has once been tilled but that now lies waste. It needs to be broken up and mellowed before it is again ready to receive grain.

#### Softening Your Heart

If you want to break up the fallow ground of your heart, you must begin by looking at yourself. Examine and note the state of your mind. See where you are. Many people never seem to think about this. They pay no attention to their own hearts, and they never know whether they are doing well in their faith or not. They do not know whether they are gaining ground or going back, whether they are fruitful or going to waste.

*Make a  
point to  
examine  
your heart.*

Now is the time to divert your attention from other things and look into this. Make a point to do this. Do not be in a hurry. Thoroughly examine the state of your heart and see where you are. Check to see if you are walking with God every day or with the Devil.

Self-examination is looking at your life. It is considering your actions in the past and learning the true character of your life. Look over your personal history. Examine your individual sins one by one. I do not mean for you to glance at your past life, see that it has been full of sins, then go to God and make a general confession. That is not the way. You

must look at each sin one by one. It is a good idea to take a pen and paper as you go over them and write each sin down as it occurs to you.

Go over them as carefully as a merchant goes over his books. Each time a sin comes to mind, add it to the list. General confessions of sin will never do. Your sins were committed one by one, and they should be reviewed and repented of one by one. Now, begin and review what are commonly, but improperly, called sins of omission.

### *Our Neglect*

#### *Ingratitude*

Write down under this heading all the times you can remember when you have received favors from God for which you have never thanked Him. How many cases can you remember? Perhaps you remember a remarkable provision, some wonderful turn of events that saved you from ruin. Write down the instances of God's goodness to you when you were in sin—before your conversion—for which you have never been thankful enough. Do not forget the numerous mercies you have received since. How long is the list of times when your ingratitude has been so lacking that you want to hide your face in shame?

Go down on your knees, confess these times one by one to God, and ask forgiveness. The very act of confession, by the laws of suggestion, will bring similar sins to mind. Write these down. Review them

three or four times this same way and see what an astonishing number of mercies there are for which you have never thanked God.

#### *Lack of Love for God*

Think how grieved and alarmed you would be if you discovered any lessening of affection for you in your wife, husband, or children. If you saw another engrossing their hearts, thoughts, and time, wouldn't you be hurt? Perhaps, in such a case, you would feel you would die of a just and virtuous jealousy. In a similar way, God calls Himself a jealous God (Exodus 20:5). Have you not given your heart to other loves and infinitely offended Him?

#### *Neglecting Your Bible Reading*

Note the cases when, for perhaps weeks or longer, reading God's Word was not a pleasure. Some people read whole chapters so carelessly that they cannot remember what they have been reading. If so, no wonder your life is without purpose and your religion is such a miserable failure.

Also note instances of unbelief. Recall the times when you have virtually charged the God of truth with lying by your unbelief in His promises and declarations. God has promised to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13). Now, do you believe this? Have you expected Him to answer? Have you not virtually said in your hearts, when you prayed for the Holy Spirit, "I do not believe that I will receive"? If you have not believed or expected



to receive the blessing that God has specifically promised, you have accused Him of lying.

*Neglect of Prayer*

Think of the times when you have neglected secret prayer, family prayer, and prayer meetings. Remember when you have prayed in such a way that offended God more than if you had omitted prayer altogether.

*Poor Spiritual Attitude*

The way you have performed your spiritual duties can also reflect a poor attitude. For example, a person can pray with a lack of feeling or faith, in a worldly frame of mind, so that his words are nothing but mere chatter. Someone who prays this kind of lifeless, careless prayer would not be able to give a reason for his or her prayers.

*A Lack of Love for the Souls of Fellowmen*

Look at your friends and relatives and remember how little compassion you have felt for them. You have stood by and watched them going right to hell, yet it seemed as though you did not care. How many days have there been in which you failed to pray about their sinful condition or show any ardent desire for their salvation?

*A Lack of Concern for Unbelievers*

Perhaps you have not cared enough for unbelievers to attempt to learn about their condition. Perhaps

you will not even subscribe to a missionary magazine. Look at these factors and see how much you really care for the lost. Write down your true concern for them and your desire for their salvation. Measure your desire for their salvation. Measure it by the self-denial you practice to help send them the Gospel.

*Sin of Hypocrisy*

Do you deny yourself the luxuries of life? Do you economize, or are you unwilling to subject yourself to any inconvenience to save the lost? Do you pray for them daily in private? Are you praying with the correct attitude? If you are not doing these things, and if your soul is not agonized for the unsaved, why are you such a hypocrite pretending to be a Christian? Your practice of faith is an insult to Jesus Christ!

*Are you  
keeping your  
accounts  
straight with  
God?*

*Neglect of Family and Private Duties*

Think of how you have lived, putting yourself before your family. How have you prayed? What example have you set before them? What direct efforts do you habitually make for their spiritual good? What duties have you neglected?

Are you watchful of your own life? Think of how you have hurried through your private duties, never really checking yourself or keeping your accounts straight with God. How often have you entirely

neglected to watch your conduct, and having been off your guard, sinned before the world, the church, and God?

*Neglecting to Watch over Fellow Believers*

It is wrong to neglect to watch over your brothers and sisters in Christ. How often have you broken your covenant to watch over them in the Lord? How little do you know or care about the state of their souls? Yet you are under a solemn oath to watch over them. What have you done to become acquainted with them? With how many of them have you taken enough interest to know their spiritual states? Go over the list and wherever you find there has been neglect, write it down.

How many times have you seen your fellow believers growing cold in faith and not spoken to them about it? You have seen them beginning to neglect one duty after another, and you did not reprove them in a loving way. You have seen them falling into sin, and you let them go on. Yet you pretend to love them. What a hypocrite! Would you watch your spouse or child go into disgrace, or fall into the fire, and hold your peace? No, you would not. What do you think of yourself, then, when you pretend to love Christians (and Christ) while you watch your brothers and sisters fall into disgrace without saying anything?

*Neglect of Self-Denial*

There are many who are willing to do almost anything in religion as long as it does not require

self-denial. When they are required to do anything that requires them to deny themselves, that is asking too much! They think they are doing a lot for God, as much as He can reasonably ask. They are unwilling to deny themselves any comfort or convenience for the sake of serving the Lord. They will not willingly suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus Christ. Nor will they deny themselves the luxuries of life to save a world from hell.

They have no idea that self-denial is a condition of discipleship. They do not even know what self-denial is. They have never really denied themselves even a trinket for Christ and the Gospel. Some give great sums of money, and they do not feel the loss because their offering comes out of their surplus. These people often have the audacity to complain about others who give less than they. Yet those about whom they complain may be giving out of what they need. The poor woman who puts in her dollar has shown more self-denial than they have in giving thousands.

From these we now turn to sins of commission.

*Active Sin Choices*

*Worldly-Mindedness*

What has been the state of your heart in regard to your worldly possessions? Have you looked at them as really yours—as if you had a right to dispose of them as your own, according to your own will? If you have, write that down. If you have loved property and sought after it for its own sake to gratify



lust, ambition, a worldly spirit, or to lay it up for your family, you have sinned. You must repent.

### *Pride*

Remember all the instances you can when you have found yourself acting or thinking with pride. Vanity is a particular form of pride. How many times have you been vain about your dress and appearance?

How many times have you thought more about and taken more trouble and time decorating your body to go to church than preparing your mind to worship God? When you have attended church, you have cared more about how you appeared physically to other people than how your soul appeared to the heart-searching God.

You have, in fact, set yourself up to be worshipped by others, rather than to worship God yourself. You sought to divide the worship of God's house, to draw the attention of God's people to your outward appearance. Do not pretend that you do not care anything about having people look at you. Be

honest about it! Would you take all this time with your looks if every person were blind?

### *Envy*

Look at the times when you were envious of those who you thought were above you in any way.

Perhaps you have envied those who are more talented or more useful than yourself. Have you not so envied some people that you could not stand to hear them praised? It has been more pleasant to you to dwell on their faults rather than their virtues, their failures rather than their successes. Be honest with yourself. If you have harbored this spirit of hell, repent deeply before God, or He will never forgive you.

### *A Critical Spirit*

Remember the times you have had a bitter spirit and spoken of Christians in a manner that did not show charity or love. Love requires you to hope the best that a situation will permit and believe the best about any questionable conduct.

### *Slander*

The times you have spoken unnecessarily about the faults, real or imagined, of members of the church or others behind their backs—this is slander. You do not need to lie to be guilty of slander. Telling the truth with the intent to injure is slander.

### *Lack of Seriousness*

How often have you been lighthearted before God as you would not have dared to be in the presence of an earthly ruler? Perhaps you have been an atheist and forgotten that there is a God. Or perhaps you have had less respect for Him and His presence than you would show toward an earthly judge.

### *Lying*

Understand what lying is. It is any kind of intended deception. If the deception is not intentional, it is not lying. But if you decide to make an impression contrary to the naked truth, you lie. Write down all those incidents you can remember. Do not call them by any soft names. God calls them lies and charges you with lying. You, too, must charge yourself correctly. How numerous are the falsehoods perpetuated every day in business, social situations, words, looks, and actions! All are designed to make an impression on others for selfish reasons that are contrary to the truth!

### *Cheating*

Remember all the cases in which you have dealt with an individual and done to him what you would not like to have done to you. That is cheating. God has laid down a rule for this case: "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Matthew 7:12). That is the rule. And if you have not followed this rule, you are a cheat. Notice that the rule is not that you should do "what you might reasonably expect them to do to you," because that is a rule that would permit every degree of wickedness. But it is "whatever you want men to do to you."

### *Hypocrisy*

Hypocrisy may exist in your prayers and confessions to God. Remember when you have prayed for things you did not really want. You will know

this is happening if, when you have finished praying, you cannot remember exactly what you have prayed for. How many times have you confessed sins that you did not mean to stop committing? Yes, you confessed sins when you knew you would repeat them, just as you expected to continue living.

### *Robbing God*

Think of the times you have misspent your time, squandering the hours that God gave you to serve Him and save souls. Maybe you spend too much time with idle pastimes, more than working to bring people to Jesus. Maybe you do absolutely nothing. Think of cases where you have misapplied your talents and mental powers. Where have you squandered money on your lusts, or spent it for things that you did not need and that did not contribute to your health, comfort, or usefulness?

### *Bad Temper*

Perhaps you have abused your spouse, children, family, coworkers, or neighbors. Write it all down.

### *Hindering Others from Being Useful*

Perhaps you have weakened another Christian's influence by insinuations against him. You have not only robbed God of your own talents, but also tied the hands of somebody else. What a wicked person is he who not only wastes time himself, but also hinders others! This is done sometimes by taking their time needlessly, sometimes by destroying Christian



confidence in them. By doing these things, you have played into the hands of Satan, and you have not only proved yourself to be an idle vagabond, but also prevented others from working.

### *Removing Roadblocks to Increased Faith*

If you find you have committed a fault against an individual, and that individual is within your reach, go confess it immediately and get that transgression out of the way. If the individual you have injured is too far away for you to go and see him, write a letter confessing the injury. If you have defrauded anybody, return his money in full with interest.

Get to work with your restitution now! Go now! Do not put it off. Procrastination will only make the matter worse. Confess to God those sins that have

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been committed against Him. Confess to man those sins that have been committed against him. Don't think you can get out of this obligation by ignoring the old stumbling blocks on your road of life. In breaking up your fallow ground, you must remove every obstruction. Things may be left that you think are insignificant. However, if you do not remove the obstacles and do your best to make restitution for your mistakes, you will not feel at peace. The reason for the lack of joy in your relationship with Jesus is that your proud

and carnal mind has covered up something that God required you to confess and remove.

### *Fruitful a Hundredfold*

Break up all the ground and turn it over. Do not balk; do not turn away because of little difficulties. Drive the plow right through them. Go deep and turn the ground up so that it will all be mellow and soft. Then it will be ready to receive the seed and bear fruit a hundredfold.

When you have thoroughly gone over your whole history in this way, go over the ground a second time, paying special attention to it. You will find the things you put down will suggest other sins of which you have been guilty. These new ones are usually connected with the original offenses. Then go over it a third time, and you will remember other things. You will find, in the end, that you can remember particular actions that you did not think you would remember even in eternity.

Unless you consider your sins in this way—in detail, one by one—you cannot comprehend their number. You should go over this list as thoroughly, carefully, and seriously as you would if you were preparing yourself for the Final Judgment.

As you go over the catalog of your sins, make a resolution to reform your ways now. Wherever you find anything wrong, resolve at once, in the strength of God, to sin no more in that way. It will not benefit you to examine yourself unless you decide to

change every fault you find in your heart, temper, and conduct.

### *How Sin Blocks Joy*

If, as you proceed with this project, you find that your spirit is still not rejoicing, search yourself. You will see that there is still sin blocking your full awareness of the Spirit of God within you. This lack of joy is your signal that you have not been faithful and thorough. Your self-examination requires a full attack—it is not a gentle pastime. It is tearing sin away from yourself, revealing what can be painful.

You must honestly look at yourself, using your Bible as your checkpoint. Do not expect God to miraculously break up your fallow ground for you. You must actively participate, and you must submit your will. If you look at yourself accurately, taking note of your sins, you will definitely feel something. You cannot see your sins for what they are without deeply feeling something.

Experience proves the benefit of going over our histories in this way. Start your work now. Resolve that you will not stop until you find you can pray. You will never have access to the full power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within you unless you completely confess your sins. Let there be this deep work of repentance and full confession, this breaking down before God.

Then you will have as much of the spirit of prayer as you can tolerate. The reason so few

Christians know anything about the spirit of prayer is that they never take the trouble to examine themselves properly, and so they never know what it is to have their hearts broken up to be rebuilt in this way.

### *Outward Activity and Fruitless Christians*

It will do no good to preach to you while your heart is in this hardened, fallow state. The farmer might just as well sow his grain on the rock, because it will not bring forth fruit. This is why there are so many fruitless believers in the church—why there is so much outward activity yet so little profound feeling.

Look at the Sunday school, for instance, and see how much activity there is and how little Christian spirit. If you continue this way, the work will continue to harden you. You will grow worse and worse, just as the rain and snow on an old fallow field make the turf thicker and the clods stronger.

### *When Revival Starts*

Those who profess to be Christians should never be so self-satisfied that they expect to start a revival by suddenly jumping out of their sleep, blustering about, and talking to sinners. They must break up their own fallow ground. If your fallow ground is broken up, then the way to get more zest is to go out and see sinners on the road to hell, talk to them, and guide inquiring souls.



You may get excited without this breaking up of your fallow ground. You may show a kind of zeal, but it will not last long, and it will not take hold of sinners, unless your heart is broken up. Unless you are right with God and filled with the Spirit, your work will be mechanical and fruitless.

And now, will you break up your fallow ground? Will you clear your heart before God and persevere until you are thoroughly awake? If you fail here, if you do not do this, you will not get any further. I have gone as far with you as possible until you renew your neglected spiritual life.

Without a heart ready to receive the fullness of Jesus again, the rest of this book is worthless to the reader. It will only harden you and make you worse. If you do not start working on your heart immediately, one can say that you have no intention of being revived; you have forsaken your minister, letting him fight the battle alone. If you do not do this, I charge you with having forsaken Christ, with refusing to repent and work for Him.

## *Chapter Four*

# *The Spirit of Prayer*