

Hope Deferred

Will God Answer Prayers for Another Great Revival?

By Jim Jarman



William MacDonnell is my friend. As a follower of Christ from

a home where faith was a contentious subject, Will's prayer request at our weekly Bible study was almost always the same. "Will you pray for my mother, Mary? She doesn't know the Lord and she doesn't want to talk about it."

There were weeks when Will hesitated to ask again. You could see it in his face. "I know I keep asking, but will you pray for my mom? She doesn't know the Lord. Will you pray she accepts Christ?" We prayed for Mary again—prayers of expectation, prayers of hope.

For several years, our Bible study group prayed for Mary MacDonnell—and we weren't the only ones Will had asked. Will himself had prayed a lot longer than the rest of us. How could God ignore all these years of fervent prayer by so many?

When Mary became terminally ill, Will's requests intensified and so did our prayers on her behalf. His parents lived almost 200 miles away. The physical and emotional distance between mother and son increased Will's concern and his desire for God to answer.

"God, we have asked You for Mary for a long time. Please, please save Will's mom!"

And of course, from Will himself—the pleas of a son praying for a dearly loved mother, "God, please let my mom come to know You before it's too late."

And then the word came, but it was not what Will wanted to hear. Mary died. Oh, how it broke Will's heart. Years of hope. Countless cries and requests. Mary had slipped into eternity and there was nothing more to pray.

Will had placed his reliance in God. We had, too. We continued to trust God by bringing other requests to Him, but something changed in our fervency. The loss dampened our expectations.

When Hope Seems Lost

Hope can be defined as the belief or expectation that something can or will happen. Proverbs 13:12 describes it this way: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life."

How do we pray when hope seems lost, when a situation deteriorates rather than coming to resolution? How can we keep from becoming discouraged and giving up when our nation slips further and further into darkness? How do we maintain confidence in the grace and love of God when judgment, logical consequences, and the downward slope of destruction seem inevitable?

Let's face it: Isn't it difficult to maintain endurance in our prayer lives—to intercede for years only to see no progress, or worse, regression? Prayer is often described as a battle—a fight we sometimes wonder if we're losing. God told the Prophet Jeremiah to stop praying for Israel (Jer. 14:11–12) because in His displeasure, He had deemed it was too late. He was sending judgment.

Should we do the same when it seems our nation also deserves judgment? When hope for revival is deferred or other prayer longings go unanswered, it doesn't just make our hearts sick. It also makes our guts wrench, our muscles weak, and our minds confused.

Prayer is supposed to be offered up in faith. But if faith is the "assurance of things hoped for" (Heb. 11:1, ESV), what do we do when our hope has gone? We often give up hoping—for our own self-preservation. If we don't dream, then we won't be disappointed. If we want to play catch with Dad, but Dad's always working, eventually we decide baseball isn't so important. If we long for revival, yet we don't see repentance on the horizon, we believe our prayers for revival are wasted.

There is a reason Paul reminded the Church at Rome: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13). The God of hope wants us to overflow with hope, but it will require the power of the Spirit in our lives. Just imagine: complete joy, total peace, and an abundance of hope! Isn’t that what we need? Here’s how to maintain hope for the long haul:

Remember Scripture

Paul wrote: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The Scriptures give us hope. They show us the heart of God—His faithfulness, goodness, grace, and mercy—and, yes, even His justice and judgment.

When Solomon dedicated the temple (1 Kings 8), he prayed fervently to God on behalf of his people.

“God, when wrongs are committed and when we sin and turn our backs on You, when You have judged us and shut up the heavens so it does not rain, or famine and plague come to the land . . . God, when we get what we deserve because of our sin, but then repent and turn to You, O God, will You hear from heaven, Your dwelling place, and forgive us and bless us once again?” (vv. 28–30, 47–48, author’s paraphrase).

Why does Solomon, in his wisdom, pray like this? He knows “there is no one who does not sin” (8:46), but that God is faithful to keep His “covenant of love” (8:23) if the right conditions are met. One of the most interesting accounts of intercession in Scripture is found in Genesis 18. Abraham contends with the Lord for his nephew Lot and the city of Sodom. He asks God, “Will you sweep away the righteous with

the wicked?" Abraham's pleas and God's response are worth noting.

"What if I find 50 righteous people? Will You spare the city?"Yes."What if I find only 45?"Yes."What if I find only 40?"Yes."What if I find only 30?"Yes."What if I find only 20?"Yes."What if I find only 10?"Yes.

The destruction of Sodom is well known. God did not find ten, but He gave Lot and his family a chance at freedom. We often read this story and focus on the outcome. God did judge and destroy Sodom. Yet the story of Sodom is as much an account of grace as it is judgment. Notice the length to which God will go to save. Time and again, He agrees to spare the city.

The Apostle Peter reminds us that while there is a day of judgment, we should never forget this one thing: God is patient, "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:3–9). This gives me hope and keeps me praying for revival. When people come to Christ, society may change. But the goal of revival is not the restoration of a society, but the preservation of a people for God Himself. God's heart is that none should perish—and often great moves of God come during the darkest hours of a nation.

God called my wife Lynn and me to Sweden where less than one percent of the population attends any church. One congregation closes its doors every week. At this rate, evangelicalism will be dead in the country by 2054—that's just 41 years from now! One Christian leader said she looks to Sweden today to see where America will be in 20 years, barring God's intervention in either country. Yet, we hope for revival among the Swedish people, a hope rooted in God's goodness and grace. We have that same longing for our fellow Americans. In fact, the darker the circumstances seem, the more hope we have.

Jesus references the story of Lot just before He tells His disciples a parable to convince them to "always pray and not

give up” (Luke 18:1). He says that the end of days will be just like the time of Lot. But then He immediately teaches them about prayer that keeps on hoping. He uses a story about a widow who persistently seeks justice and a judge who couldn’t care less about her case. The judge finally rules in the widow’s favor just to get her to leave him alone.

Jesus says that if an unjust judge will do this, “will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly” (18:7–8). But then He adds these haunting words: “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (18:8).

When we implore the throne of heaven on behalf of a prodigal loved one—or when we cry out for revival for a prodigal nation—we are petitioning the courtroom of God. For everyone who believes, the justice of God has been met on the cross. God wants lost people to be found.

When your hope in prayer seems elusive, remember Scripture.

Remember History

What God has done in the past, He can do again. This encourages me.

On the southeastern edge of Glasgow, Scotland, is the suburb of Cambuslang. In the 1740s, it was a small farming, weaving, and mining town. During that time, prayer movements were starting throughout Britain and Scotland, and Cambuslang’s local pastor, William McCulloch, authorized one to begin in his parish. Afraid of emotional outbursts, he wanted the prayer meetings strictly controlled and only preapproved congregants could participate. God often has a different agenda.

For several months, the prayer group met when finally, on February 14, 1742, the conversion of one woman broke the dam of resistance. People started coming under conviction and being saved—in very emotional ways uncommon in the church.

Crowds converged on the little parish from all over. Other ministers came in to help with the revival. Finally, Rev. McCulloch asked George Whitefield to come and preach. The crowds grew to more than 30,000 people! The events were called “Holy Fairs” and culminated with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper for new believers.

This was the result of one pastor who gathered a small group to pray.

Sometimes prayer doesn’t just precede a revival. Sometimes prayer is the revival. It seemed to be a normal Tuesday in February 1970, when students of Asbury College in Kentucky filed into Hughes Auditorium at 10:00 a.m. for their regular, required chapel service. Some, however, sensed the presence of the Spirit upon entering—almost as if the room was being transformed into holy ground.

Custer Reynolds, the school’s academic dean, was in charge of the service that day. He decided not to preach, but instead gave his testimony and then invited the students to come and share what God was doing in their lives. One student came, followed by another and then another. The 50-minute chapel service lasted 185 hours non-stop, 24 hours a day. It was not planned in advance. There was no predominant leader. No one wanted to leave.

Students were weeping, publicly confessing their sins, praying in small groups, seeking out and asking forgiveness from others they had wronged. Some sang quietly in small groups. Everyone was polite and orderly.

As students prayed that week, they sensed the Spirit telling them to take the revival to other schools. Teams were formed

and during the first week of travel, students went to churches and schools in 16 states and saw more than 1,000 conversions. By the summer of 1970, teams had gone to some 130 other colleges, seminaries, and Bible schools from New York to California to Latin America. Everywhere they went, revival followed. Weeping. Repentance. Conversions. Prayer.

I personally experienced this renewal because my college was one of the first schools that the Asbury teams visited. My life has never been the same. When my own personal hope seems to vanish, I remember what God did in the past and what He has done for me.

It's Never Too Late

My friend Will's confidence in God's grace remained steadfast—even after his mom died. And that confidence was rewarded. One Sunday night when Will showed up at our house for our regular study, he had an uncontrollable ear-to-ear grin, a famous smile we hadn't seen in awhile. He was so excited; he couldn't wait to share his news. Unexpectedly, Will received a call from the woman who had cared for Mary in her final days.

"Will, as I cared for your mom while she was dying, she asked me what she had to do to be born again. I explained to her what it means to know Jesus. We prayed together and Mary asked Christ to be her Savior."

Words cannot describe the joy Will experienced. His mom was in heaven! God had heard our cries! Hope deferred was now a longing fulfilled. As long as we have life and breath, and the person we're praying for has the same—it is not too late.

Arms raised. Knees bowed. Face down. Hearts broken. It is never too late to ask the God who longs to redeem to do the seemingly impossible. There is a renewed sense of hope that

God might answer our prayers for revival in the nations of the earth. By His Spirit, He is stirring His people to pray in greater numbers than ever before. If Jesus is still interceding for us, how can we possibly stop praying for others?

This is the hope we have for our nations, cities, friends, and loved ones.

I sense that somewhere out there, in the place we call "Eternity," Mary MacDonnell is shouting, "Amen!"

JIM JARMAN and his wife Lynn are international intercultural church planters and have been appointed to serve in Sweden with Converge Worldwide and New Life Church, Stockholm. Their hearts long to see God ignite a flame of revival among Swedes—and they invite you to pray with them. If you would like prayer updates, contact them at jim@newlife.nu.

Let the Shaking Begin in Me

By Jim Jarman

The year was 1950. The famous revival on the windswept Isle of Lewis in the Scottish Outer Hebrides was already underway. It began when two elderly sisters fervently prayed. Peggy Smith was 84 and completely blind. Christine, her younger sister by two years, could hardly walk and was bent over double from arthritis.

With a deep burden in their hearts, they began praying. Twice a week for many months, they went down on feeble knees at 10:00 p.m. and did not rise until 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. In the midst of their prayers, God gave them a vision of a man they had never met, a man God would use to change the island. The

man's name was Duncan Campbell—and God brought him to the Hebrides to preach and shepherd the revival.

Supernatural Movement of God

People on the island were inexplicably drawn to Christ. Without publicity, telephones, or Internet, they awoke in the middle of the night and felt compelled to gather in a farmer's field or at a local parish church. Sometimes they did not make it—and instead simply fell by the side of the road, confessing their sins to God. Bars and dance halls shut their doors for good. Starting with the small town of Barvas, the entire Isle of Lewis turned from darkness to light. Entire towns were being converted to Christ, with the exception of the stubborn little parish of Arnol.

Arnol defiantly resisted the gospel. No one wanted to hear what Duncan Campbell had to say. In fact, the citizenry held opposition meetings to denounce the revival. Campbell and his fellow leaders knew the only answer was prayer.

They gathered one evening in a farmhouse and began to pray, earnestly appealing to the promises God had made in the Bible. At midnight, Campbell asked John, the local blacksmith, to pray, which he did for more than two hours. Near the end of his prayer, with his cap in his hand, John looked heavenward and said,

“God, do You know that Your honor is at stake? You promised to pour water on the thirsty and floods on the dry ground. . . . I stand before You as an empty vessel and I am thirsty—thirsting for Thee and for a manifestation of Thy power. I'm thirsty to see the devil defeated in this parish. I'm thirsty to see this community gripped as You gripped Barvas. I'm longing for revival and, God, You are not doing it! I'm thirsty and You promised to pour water on me. God, Your honor is at stake, and I take it upon myself to

challenge You now to fulfill Your covenant engagement."

At that moment, the house shook violently. A jug on the sideboard crashed to the ground and broke. Those who were present said that wave after wave of power swept over the room.

At the same time, the town of Arnol was awakened from its slumber. Lights went on. People came into the streets and started praying. Others knelt where they were and asked God to forgive them. Men carried chairs and women held stools, asking if there was room for them in the church. At 2:00 a.m., revival came to this last resistant town on the island.

Another Shaking

As I reflect on this historic account, I wonder why my prayers don't seem to shake much except my own confidence in prayer itself. How can I connect with God in such an intimate way that I can pray with absolute certainty that God has both heard and will answer? Why do I so willingly accept a "No" from God and chalk it up to His all-knowing nature instead of taking the time to understand His heart so that He can respond "Yes" to me?

There is no question that our society needs a shaking from God, a response that manifests His presence and His power, a deliverance that restores communities and nations. But I sense that any outward shaking will be preceded by an inward one that changes the very core of my being.

Before I can challenge God to remember His covenant, it is God's prerogative to challenge me on the condition of my heart. Does my pulse stay in sync with the rhythm of His? Do I know God's heartbeat well enough to pray His will so that He can say, "Yes"?

The history of revivalism shows that prevailing prayer precedes all major moves of God's Spirit. "Lord, do not callous my heart. Callous my knees." This is my longing as I pray.