

One Smooth Stone...

A shepherd boy stood before the challenge of the giant. The boy had one shot to make a difference. He selected one smooth stone and with great precision defeated Goliath. Like that one smooth stone, a timeless truth communicated in a timely fashion can slay giants.

We Need Genuine Renewal and Revival (Article No. 1)

renewal, *n.*--- *to begin again; to make effective for an additional period; to restore or replenish; to bring back to an original state of freshness and vigor; to revive and become new again; to regain what has been lost.*

Perhaps nothing is more sorely needed among God's people today than genuine renewal and revival. Living in a culture that dismisses God, despises His unchangeable Truth, and disregards His church has taken a toll on our passion and our purity. The temptation to redefine God and reinterpret His Word has proved to be irresistible, rendering many churches impotent and many Christians unfruitful. In some instances entire denominations have lost their way resulting in "maintaining the machinery" rather than maximizing ministry.

What can be done when such a situation develops in a church or a denomination? Where is genuine renewal and revival found? It goes without saying that the source of power, life, and vitality can only be found in God and His Word. But most believers, pastors and leaders included, do not understand that four levels of renewal must be experienced *in a specific order* for genuine, lasting renewal to take place. Like Nero fiddling while Rome was burning, if we do not understand this important process of renewal we are just "fiddling around" with all of our spiritually vacuous activities.

Four Levels of Renewal

The first level of genuine renewal is **personal renewal**. Anytime God did something significant in Scripture He began in the heart of a single believer. In Ur it was Abram who was singled out to begin an adventure of following God's call. It was in Moses' heart where the very first seeds of deliverance and freedom were sown by God. And it was in the citadel of Susa where Nehemiah's heart became burdened to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Each of these men, along with countless others through the ages, lived with the passion and pain of a God-planted vision – a vision that never comes through committees, boards, or strategy sessions. Revival and renewal is always personal. It works from the inside out, never from the outside in. For renewal to come to a family, a church, or a denomination, it has to first be birthed by God in the heart of His servant.

The second level of genuine renewal is **mission renewal**. Once a heart has been ignited by God with a renewed passion for following Him, there then comes a renewed sense of mission and purpose. According to James 1:8, the double-minded (literally, two-souled) man is unstable in all of his ways. When we are in need of personal revival and renewal, our spiritual vision is clouded and we become two-souled, vacillating in our loyalties and compromising in our commitments. Personal revival will always lead to a clear view from Mount Perspective where we see, unclouded, our mission and purpose in the world.

The third level is **corporate renewal**. Genuine revival is contagious! All God needs in any group or church is one heart set on fire by the Spirit. Nehemiah's passion was infectious, and God used it to bring a corporate revival among those living among the ruins of Jerusalem.

For decades they had lived impoverished, downtrodden, and plundered lives. But it all changed within fifty-two days once genuine, heartfelt renewal and revival had come – revival that was first personal, then missional, and corporate.

The final level of genuine renewal is ***structural renewal***. Many churches and Christian organizations are not structured for growth and effective ministry. It is a fact that with every 40-45% growth there must be structural changes to accommodate the growth. Yet most churches and ministries are attempting to do God's work with the same old worn-out methods and strategies. Jesus gave a word picture of this problem when He taught about new wine and old wineskins. His teaching did not advocate a rejection of truth for the sake of expediency, and neither must we. Truth never changes, but methods do. Baptists have long struggled with knowing the difference between *theology* and *methodology*. When *methodology* becomes our *theology*, we are no different from the Pharisees and other religious leaders of Jesus' day.

Yes we are in need of genuine renewal today in our lives, our churches, and our denomination. But true, God-sent renewal will not begin with structural change or corporate initiatives. It will begin in individual hearts of God's people. If we attempt to initiate renewal by reinventing our mission we will only be chasing the wind. If we think it will come on a corporate level first, we will vainly wait for a visitation that will never happen. If we try to restructure our way into renewal, we only risk frustration and turf wars. But if we will humbly let God begin a work on the personal, heart-felt level, we can see the kind of renewal and revival so often described in God's Word. It is renewal that begins in individual hearts that will rekindle our sense of mission and vision, revive our churches and denomination, and guide us to do whatever it takes to structure our ministry for maximum ministry impact. Never has genuine renewal been needed more than now.