

FRESH ENCOUNTER



A 28-DAY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

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ISBN 1-4158-3534-9

This book is the resource for course CG-1202 in the subject area Prayer in the Christian Growth Study Plan.

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Printed in the United States of America

Leadership and Adult Publishing
LifeWay Church Resources
One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, TN 37234-0175

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Henry Blackaby is a popular speaker and the writer of more than a dozen books. His workbook study *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* has sold more than five million English copies and has been translated into more than 50 languages. Both *Experiencing God Day by Day Devotional* and *Experiencing God Together* have won Gold Medallion Awards.

Blackaby earned degrees from the University of British Columbia and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, and he has four honorary doctorates. He has pastored churches in Canada and California and has served as the director of missions in Vancouver, Canada. For many years he served as the director of the Office of Prayer and Spiritual Awakening for the Southern Baptist Convention. His heart cry is to disciple God's people in such a way that the Holy Spirit will bring revival to the church and spiritual awakening to a lost world.

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LET'S SEEK THE LORD TOGETHER

Those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name (Mal. 3:16).

Today we're facing a period of moral and spiritual decline that is perhaps more rapid and widespread than ever in our history. Almost everywhere we go, we hear churches and people cry out for revival. They are saying that what they are experiencing is so bad, so dry, and so empty that they want a fresh touch from God. They want to experience God in the ways God's people experienced His mighty power and presence in the Scriptures and in history. Some are experiencing a fresh breeze of God's Spirit. Small mercy drops are falling in some localities. But many are saying, "We don't know what to do." Their heart cry is: "Is there a word from the Lord? What does God say we need to do?"

God's Word has an answer for us. God has revealed Himself and His ways as He has worked with His people down through the ages. He has spoken clearly about His expectations and standards. He has revealed principles and described examples. He stands ready to pour out times of refreshing on the dry and thirsty ground of our lives. But He's waiting on a people who are willing to pay the price of surrender and obedience to His will and His ways. He's waiting on a people who will return with their whole heart to a love relationship with their Creator and Savior. Will you be such a person? Will you join with others who are willing to be such persons?

In Malachi 3:16 we read that "those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard." We've prepared this devotional guide to facilitate that kind of conversation and prayer. We want God's people to study His Word about revival and spiritual awakening. We want to help you talk about His will and His ways. We want to assist you in seeing His standards and choosing to return to Him. We want to encourage you to pray together with others to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24).

Using This Devotional Guide

Spend time daily with the Lord. Each day use one devotional message to examine God's Word, understand God's pattern, and be encouraged by God's activity in the past. Take time to pray as you seek the kind of relationship with God through which He can revive you and use you for revival and awakening. Once each week, join others in "Seeking God Together for Revival in the Land." Days 7, 14, 21, and 28 will guide your time of talking and praying together.



SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus” (Acts 3:19-20).

Peter had just healed a crippled man at the temple gate, and a crowd came running to see what had taken place. Peter preached to the crowd and invited them to repent so that “times of refreshing” might come from the Lord. And many did: “Many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand” (Acts 4:4). The early church was in the midst of a spiritual awakening. Not long before on the Day of Pentecost three thousand accepted Peter’s message and were added to the church. Those early believers experienced life like most of us have never tasted.

As you read the following description, underline the words that describe the early believers’ emotions.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

They devoted themselves, were filled with awe, and had glad and sincere hearts. They shared their resources in such a way that “there were no needy persons among them” (Acts 4:34). They enjoyed the favor of all the people. And people were being saved daily.

Oh, that we could experience a time of refreshing like that! We’ve seen God work this way in history. (We’ll tell you a few of those stories.) Perhaps you are like us; we want to see God renew His works in our day.

Pause for just a moment and pray the prayer of Habakkuk:

*“LORD, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD.
Renew them in our day,
in our time make them known,
in wrath remember mercy” (Hab. 3:2).*

What Is Spiritual Awakening?

Spiritual awakening occurs when large numbers of people (or a high percentage of people in an area) experience this new birth to spiritual life in a short period of time. Spiritual awakenings are not just times of mass decisions for Christ. Decisions may or may not reflect a new birth. In a spiritual awakening people's lives are changed radically. Often a spiritual awakening results in a changed society in a city or a nation. Major social reforms have often accompanied spiritual awakening. When people put off the old life of sin and put on the new life in Christ, things are different: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17). Here are some examples of the kinds of things that take place during a spiritual awakening:

- Bars and taverns close for a lack of business.
- Police and law-enforcement personnel face a drop in work due to decreases in crime.
- Businesses receive money and merchandise from thieves, employees, and shoplifters who are seeking to return stolen goods.
- Christians and churches begin serious efforts to help the poor and needy in the community through orphanages, rescue missions, and other needs-based ministries.
- Laws change or are enacted to protect the oppressed and to uphold justice.
- Reconciliation takes place between races and ethnic groups.
- Foul language is replaced by civil and wholesome talk.
- Evil practices cease and are often outlawed.
- Private and public acts of immorality decrease dramatically.
- Marriages are restored, and family life is strengthened.

If that sounds like the kind of place you'd enjoy living and rearing a family, then let's seek the Lord together for revival and spiritual awakening in our land. If our nation is going to turn around from the rapid moral decline we're in, people's lives must change. Only Christ can change lives that drastically. And that's what we want to seek together—a changed nation.

SEEKING GOD FOR REVIVAL IN THE LAND

- Take some time to pray. Tell God how much you long to see a change in the society around you. Mention some of the things you'd like to see changed.
- Describe to God how dry and thirsty you are for a fresh encounter with Him. Ask Him to pour out refreshing springs of living water on you and those around you.
- Give God permission to show you the part you are to play in this work and pledge yourself to obey all He asks of you.



**SEEKING GOD
TOGETHER
FOR REVIVAL
IN THE LAND****SESSION 1**

Call on a volunteer to open your session with prayer.

Read Psalm 85.

Discuss what the passage has to say about revival in the land. What would need to change in our nation for these truths to become a reality? Pray verses 4-7 to the Lord.

Review what God has been saying to you through His Word and His Spirit.

1. What Scripture, statement, idea, testimony, or illustration that you read this week was most significant or meaningful to you and why?
2. What truth has God revealed this week that seems to have the greatest significance for revival in our nation?

Respond to the Lord in prayer.

Ask the Spirit to guide your prayers according to the will of the Father. Pray conversationally focusing on one subject at a time. Respond to the Lord about the things He has been revealing in your devotions this week.

Talk Together. Discuss some of the following questions or raise questions of your own.

1. What do we need to do individually or as a group in response to what God is saying through His Word, prayer, circumstances, and other believers?
2. What are the characteristics of a spiritual awakening that we need in our nation today?
3. Discuss Evan Roberts four-point message on page 8. What does this message have to say to us and our church?
4. What sins in the churches of Revelation 2–3 (p. 11) do we see in our church or in the churches around us? Are we seeing some of the disciplines promised to those churches?
5. How did you respond to the activity on page 13? Where do you see our nation and why? Where do you see our church and why?
6. Are there ideas for our church to be gleaned from the experience of the church in Wellington, Texas on pages 16-17?

Testify to what God has done.

If God has done something special in your prayer times this week or in your personal walk with Him, share a brief testimony with a focus on what God has done.

Seek God Together for Revival in the Land

Spend the remainder of your time in prayer for a fresh encounter with God in revival in your lives, churches, communities, and land. Pray about one topic at a time. Let the Spirit guide your prayers. You may want to consider some of the following directions for your prayers. Take notes if God reveals things as you pray.

1. Ask God to cleanse your life, your small group, and your church in such a way that you can shine the light of Christ into your world.
2. Pray that God will cause your church to return to Him in revival.
3. Ask the Lord to help you understand the condition of our nation, cities, and churches. Ask Him to help you feel the grief He feels.

NOTES

SMALL-GROUP LEADER GUIDE

This devotional guide has been designed to make your job as a leader as simple as possible. Invite group members to participate by taking a book and beginning to read the daily messages. Days 7, 14, 21, and 28 are set aside for your small-group session. Notice on pages 18-19 (for example) that instructions are given to guide the small-group session. You may choose to follow those instructions exclusively or supplement them with your own questions and prayer suggestions. Below are some additional suggestions that may be helpful.

Introductory Session. On page 64 you will find a list of additional resources. The Leader Kit has an introductory videotape with Henry Blackaby over viewing God's Pattern for Revival and Spiritual Awakening. You can use that message as an introductory session and then distribute this book to members who will then begin the devotional study.

Churchwide Emphasis. Pastors may choose to introduce this message to their entire church. Preach messages on biblical revivals, God's mission of world redemption and our part in it, how to know when you've departed from God, the nature and necessity of repentance for revival, and so forth. The *Fresh Encounter* paperback book (0-8054-6368-2) has an extensive section to guide spiritual leaders in preparing a church for revival and guiding them to return to the Lord. It would provide additional content and illustration to supplement what members will be reading in this devotional. This book provides valuable insights on guiding a group in returning to the Lord that would be beneficial to you as you lead your group.

Follow-up Options. Churches or groups wishing to continue this pursuit of God for revival may want to consider one or more of the following:

1. Fresh Encounter Weekend. Contact www.blackaby.org for information or assistance in conducting a church renewal weekend.
2. Study of *Fresh Encounter* Member Books 1 and 2 will take members further in understanding the message and responding to God's plumb line in Scripture. The six video plumb line messages from Henry Blackaby may be especially helpful in guiding people to return to the Lord.

Multiplication of the Message. Revival in our land will require many people and churches returning to a right relationship with God. Each session invite members to practice drawing the diagram from the inside back cover of the book from memory. Divide the group into pairs and ask one or both members to explain the pattern as far as they have studied it (Session 1: overview it all; Session 2: phases 1-2; Session 3: phases 1-4; Session 4: phases 1-7). Encourage members to watch for opportunities to share God's pattern with others and encourage them to seek the Lord together for revival. Watch for opportunities for your members to share testimonies with other groups or churches and invite them to start praying for revival and spiritual awakening.



OTHER *FRESH ENCOUNTER* RESOURCES

Member Book 1: God's Pattern for Revival and Spiritual Awakening

This six-week study examines God's pattern for revival and spiritual awakening from a biblical and historical perspective. Each week individuals study five daily assignments. Groups meet once each week to discuss what members have learned and what members sense God wants them to do in response. Christians develop a renewed sense of identity with God's people and prepare themselves to respond corporately to God's invitation to revival. (0-8054-9920-2)

Member Book 2: A Plumb Line for God's People

This book serves as a listening guide for the six video messages by Henry Blackaby. Plumb Line messages include: "God's Standards for the Family," "Religion vs. Reality," "Substitutes for God," "World's Ways vs. Kingdom Ways," "Unholy Living vs. Holy Living," and "Broken Relationships vs. Unity in the Body." The book provides summary statements from each of the messages, Scripture texts for each theme, and questions to help individuals and churches examine how they measure up against God's plumb line. (0-8054-9919-9)

Fresh Encounter Leader Manual

This manual provides administrative suggestions for using all of the series resources. It includes the small-group learning activities for Member Book 1. Training and guidelines are given to help spiritual leaders use *A Plumb Line for God's People* (book and video) in a large-group setting to guide God's people to return to Him in repentance and experience genuine revival. (0-8054-9921-0)

Fresh Encounter Leader Kit

Includes one copy each of both Member Books; the Leader Manual; an introductory video in which Henry Blackaby provides the scriptural background and overview of the seven phases in *Member Book 1: God's Pattern for Revival and Spiritual Awakening*; six 30-minute video messages by Henry Blackaby to be used with *Member Book 2: A Plumb Line for God's People*; and 12 audio messages by Henry Blackaby and Avery Willis. (0-8054-9898-2)

Fresh Encounter Paperback Book

This compilation of the messages in the two Member Books and the Leader Manual, together with additional illustrations and counsel, serves as a comprehensive and encouraging study of biblical and historical patterns for revival. Spiritual leaders will find it particularly practical in leading God's people to return to Him. (0-8054-6368-2)



To order *Fresh Encounter* resources, call 1 (800) 458-2772, order online at www.lifeway.com, or visit a LifeWay Christian Store.