

Challenge

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PRAYER LETTER OF CHALLENGE LITERATURE FELLOWSHIP (AUST.) INC.

I don't know about you but I have been challenged of late to pray for revival in the church here in Australia. While there are some churches that are doing a great job most are not and are in decline. Denominational yearbooks give evidence a plenty as to the condition of the church in Australia and it makes for very sad reading indeed. The church is looking for all sorts of quick fix-it solutions to arrest the decline in numbers. Unfortunately the problem with this is that it is not dealing with the core problem of the decline of the spiritual condition of the church. When you read the history of past revivals they invariably started with just a few perceptive people who recognized the need of the hour.

Psaln 85 is a psalm of restoration a psalm about overcoming discouragement in difficult times. There are four things to observe here that I think are very important in relation to revival.

1. We need to reflect on past blessings and mercies verses 1-3. As the sons of Korah crafted this song they took time to look back at how God had blessed the nation of Israel. They were no doubt exciting times, times of great expectation as to how God was working and how He was going to work. God had wonderfully brought Israel back to their land and set them free from their captivity to serve Him. In past revivals they often had their genesis in two areas. Firstly people remembered past blessing, past fruitfulness in ministry where it seemed that God was continuously at work. I remember when I was a young believer my wife and I use to go to church where it was just so exciting to see God at work. It was the time when churches ran a Sunday evening gospel services and the pastor of this church was a wonderful evangelist. There was hardly a Sunday went by when we did not see someone make a decision to become a Christian. Interesting enough most of these commitments went on with the Lord. Like the sons of Korah I yearn to see that sort of blessing return to the church.

Past blessings also included knowing God's forgiveness for sin and being restored to all that God wanted them to be. Of course this is exactly what God wants for His church when it comes to revival. He wants to see a church that means business with Him and building the kingdom of God. The remembrance process also includes God's mercy in pouring out His mercy on a rebellious people who deserved quite the opposite. I can't help but think of Jeremiah when Israel had been taken captive after years of warning from God, which was clear evidence of God's mercy. In the book of Lamentations he is reflecting on what has happened and is so disappointed that Israel had not been obedient to God's warnings. However, he encourages himself with these verses in chapter 3; "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

2. We need to pray for restoration verses 4-7. As the writers of this psalm remember God's past blessings they are moved to seek God for the restoration of Israel. Likewise as the church we need to pray for restoration. I read recently of how Isaiah went into the temple in chapter 6 of that book, and saw the Lord high and lifted up. The immediate result of this was that he saw himself as he really was before a holy God. Often our assessment of the church and our own Christian walk is way too optimistic as to how we are going spiritually. Isaiah was under no illusions as to how wrong he had been and I think we and the church would have a similar response. So the cry of the psalmists to God is to restore us, to revive us back to the people you want us to be that we may experience the full blessing you want to pour out on us, and rejoice in the Lord.

3. We need to wait on the Lord verses 8-9. Waiting for anything these days is considered an unnecessary impost because time is money, or we have so jammed our schedule that we are constantly under pressure. Robert Levine was quoted in the devotional book, 'The Word For Today' as the author of the term 'honko-second'. It is the time between when a light changes and the person behind you honks his horn. The bottom line is that we all want to experience God's blessing but we don't want to spend the necessary time waiting on God. As Bob Gass says in TWFT that we all want God's blessing but we don't want God's timing.

The psalmists were determined to hear from God and by implication what He wanted for their lives, not man's opinion or strategy. We need to see that waiting on the Lord is not foolishness. In fact not waiting on the Lord is foolishness. I have seen churches who have laboured away in their area for little or no result. When I have inquired of churches if they have waited on the Lord to see if their particular strategy or program, has the seal of God's approval upon it, usually the answer is no. What this does to the congregation is to breed a profound sense of disillusionment and discouragement and they just 'throw in the towel' in surrender. Waiting on the Lord is critical to knowing God's will and purpose for us as a church and as an individual. (Isaiah 40, verse 31)

4. We need to look for God's promises verses 10-13. I have found that praying the promises of God brings great encouragement and confidence in God. The psalmist lists these promises in verses 8, 9 as first of all peace. In a church that has been racked by disharmony peace is a desperate need. Then is verse 9 there is salvation for those who fear the Lord. This is not so much conversion as being delivered from a difficult or testing situation. Again we can see that the church is in a very tough spot in terms of the impact it is making in the community. We need to be delivered from the world and its influence so that we can get back to what it really means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Then we see the promise of righteousness. Walking in a right way with God is almost seen as an optional extra in the Christian life. Again we see that people want the blessing of being a Christian but not the commitment of

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being a Christian. Then there is the blessing of future harmony. In its primary application this refers to the promise of heaven to those who know the Lord. Heaven can be defined as the ultimate place of harmony because God dwells there in all his glory.

Then last but not least there is the harmony between heaven and earth. The fact that God is pleased with His people is born out by His blessing on the crops. As we look around our country and see the drought that has afflicted this land for several years, we need to see that God is trying to say something to us as a people. When we are not in harmony with heaven then God in His love will move to get our attention. Drought is one of the ways he does this in the Bible and it is one of the ways he does it in the church. When we are not seeing God's blessing we need to ask if our church is in harmony with heaven. Now that is a good question to ponder.

Praise:

1. We are really experiencing the result of all your prayer because we have seen some wonderful gifts come into Challenge over the past month. We have probably had one of the best years in terms of gifts given to our work at home and for Africa. Let's rejoice in the amazing goodness of the Lord.
2. Praise the Lord for another wonderful opportunity to do a special edition of the paper in Brisbane. We are thrilled to be able to do this in our desire to expand the work of the paper in Australia.
3. Continue to praise the Lord for the Impact Africa mission trip coming up in July. At this stage we have about 25 folk who are coming. We have been amazed at the amount of interest in this trip. If you would like to come please contact our office on the number below.
4. We continue to rejoice in the fact that some more new churches have included Challenge in their mission support program. Also we have seen an excellent response to personal support for our staff. We worship a mighty God.
5. We continue to rejoice with the number of responses we are getting from the distribution of the various editions of the African Challenge.

Pray:

1. Pray for Carl Carmody as he heads to New South Wales and Queensland to do promotion for the paper. We are seeking the Lord to expand the work in Australia in these urgent days. Pray for God-ordained contacts and for safety in travel.
2. Continue to pray for the work in Africa as we endeavour to consolidate and develop the work. Finance is an ongoing challenge and we would value your prayer for this and for the ministries we work with.
 - (i) Pray for South Africa and for our partner Multi Ministries, who do a great job with all the administration and distribution of the paper. Continue to pray for the effectiveness of our main edition and for the prison edition. Pray for the resources to do quality follow-up to the numerous commitments we are receiving.
 - (ii) Pray for the work in Botswana and for our partners there in Andrew and Sandra Freeman. They are also distributing both editions of the paper and do a great job.
 - (iii) Pray for the work in Kenya and for our partner Peacemakers International headed up by Paul Dondoh. Paul is working under difficult conditions and is in need of a vehicle such as a Hi-Ace Toyota van. We have had \$750 given so far and need a further \$3,500.
 - (iv) Pray for Malawi as we are ready to start there this month if the funds are available. We have a committee already in place and have received costing for printing 10,000 papers. We need a \$1,000 per month to meet commitments.
3. Continue to pray for the preparations going on in Argentina. This has taken us much longer than we had anticipated. Getting the infrastructure in place is critical to sustaining the work once we start.
4. We have some needs for our home office. We are looking at a new subscription program to update our existing system. We need about \$8,000 to get the basic system which is much needed as we have limped along with a setup that is far from adequate.
5. Please pray for the work in NZ done in partnership with the Challenge Weekly. Distribution has grown slowly and we would love to see it grow much more.
6. Pray for the Challenge families as the enemy is never happy with the spread of the gospel.



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