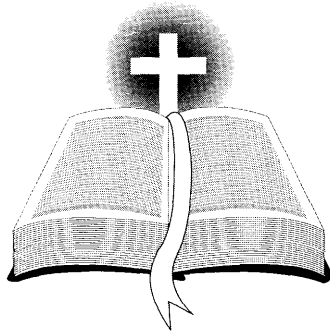


CHAPTER NINE



P STANDS FOR “PRAY BACK!”

Hop On!
Open Up!
Pray Back!
Enter In!

In the midst of a spiritual awakening, Martin Luther exclaimed, “I judge that my prayer is more than the devil himself; if it were otherwise, Luther would have fared differently long before this. If I should neglect prayer but a single day, I should lose a good deal of the fire of faith.”¹ That’s how seriously every Messenger of Hope must define prayer; it is key to the success of his or her calling. This is true not only for us but for our hearers as well. We must constantly help those with whom we share our message of hope to pray that message back to God, asking him to translate the message into reality, according to his Word. Prayer is the first and primary response to a message of hope; it also completes the message. It keeps the fire of faith (and hope) burning.

This was illustrated during the huge prayer rally I guided in Hong Kong Stadium, when we asked God to use the return of Hong Kong rule to mainland China as a vehicle to bring revival. As I explained

in the introduction of this book, we centered our thinking on Jeremiah 33:3: “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” Then I walked this gathering through nearly three hours of prayer using the whole thirty-third chapter. In this passage, the prophet describes a city awash in revival. I asked the thousands before me to envision what it would look like for God to reproduce Jeremiah 33 within Hong Kong, especially after 1997. What a powerful experience we had that hot July afternoon, praying back to God the great and unsearchable things revealed so long ago. Hope blazed!

Why pray? Why is this a key ingredient for every message of hope? Because Messengers of Hope leave their hearers with two unshakable conclusions: (1) This vision is too wonderful to live without, and (2) this vision is too wonderful to produce by ourselves. Our only alternative, therefore, is to seek divine intervention, to ask for the extraordinary. The more we pray like this, the more the flames of confidence spread, and the closer to revival we move.

Pray Back Together

Messengers of Hope also get God’s people praying *together*. In previous revivals, these gatherings were called “concerts of prayer”—which meant concerted, united, corporate prayer. In point of fact, about 90 percent of what the Bible teaches on prayer is about corporate prayer. The hope that we proclaim is not just for an individual here or there. Most biblical promises for revival boast corporate manifestations. Ever since writing *Concerts of Prayer*, I have worked extensively with united prayer movements around the world. After twenty years, I’ve concluded that helping Christians join together to “pray back” the message of hope to God may actually be the single most important contribution made by any Messenger of Hope. Not only do such times of prayer allow God to initiate the fulfillment of the message, but it also provides time for immediate application of the Scriptures by the hearers in their prayers.



Pray Back Pointers

As you move your hearers into this third ingredient of praying God's message of hope back to him, keep these pointers in mind. Remember, they are equally applicable to family devotions, Sunday morning worship, or concerts of prayer.

Emphasize that the first and primary response to the message they've just heard is to intercede with God for its fulfillment. Show them the urgency of seeking God, of responding while the message is fresh. Praying needs to happen *now*.

Help them develop a strategic prayer agenda. Ask them questions like: What must God do for us *here* to reenact this passage or fulfill this promise in our experience? What would it look like? How might we be involved? As a result of such vision, what do we need to say to God, to seek him today for all that this hope offers us? (You might even provide them a few initial answers of your own, based on the text.) Then, help them express their insights in prayer to the Father.

Your prayer time may involve a combination of approaches. We want to avoid making anyone feel awkward or confused over how best to pray. Here are some successful approaches that you may adapt for your prayer time: Have your hearers pray your message back to God, working through major ideas in your message, praying verse by verse, or section by section. Encourage them to start off with a brief session in small groups, praying for two minutes over each verse or point. Interrupt at the end of each two minutes to summarize the next point and refocus them on the topic for the next two minutes.

Guide them in prayer through the three major facets of revival—focus, fullness, fulfillment—by drawing on what you taught them about each theme from the specific text just shared. A logical flow exists in moving in our thoughts from focus to fulfillment. Your prayer time could follow the sequencing of these three words, helping your hearers unpack even greater insights on revival as they reconstitute your message into these three categories. You might have them try five minutes apiece in small groups on each theme.

Or, from a very different direction, have them respond to your total message by working through what I call the six biblical responses of prayer. Described in greater detail elsewhere,² let me summarize them here:

Reflect—You might begin with a short period of silent prayer, thinking over the message and individually praying about its personal and corporate applications.

Rejoice—Next, direct a time of praising God for any prospects or promises the passage offers us or our generation. Also, praise him for all we have learned from the text about the person of Christ as the heart of revival. “Rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2) remains one of the strongest expressions of worship. Praise God in anticipation of what is coming and the glory that revival will bring to his Son.

Repent—Here, address any personal or corporate hindrances to the revival highlighted by the text that might grieve or quench the Holy Spirit and so impede awakening. Repentance praying expresses our readiness to *turn away* from whatever in us contradicts the message of hope, and to *turn toward* everything Christ is offering us through the message of hope.

Resist—Together in prayer deal with hindrances and strongholds raised up from the outside by the powers of the Evil One. Often the chosen text will pinpoint certain battle lines God’s people must face in God-given awakenings and the advance of Christ’s kingdom. Through our prayers of resistance, we stand victorious over the forces of darkness, even before revival comes.

Request—Boldly seize upon the many promises held out in the text. Aggressively ask God to bring to pass in our own experience—in our churches, in our generation, even among the nations—all that the passage has revealed about Christ-centered awakening.

Recommit—All good revival praying will conclude by affirming deeper commitments to God. Encourage those praying to make a promise to continue praying like this until revival comes, to prepare for his work of revival through personal and corporate changes, and to be themselves an answer to their prayers, no



matter what it may cost. A time of rededication at the end of the prayers also predisposes hearers to the fourth ingredient of every message of hope, the call to “enter in” to revival right now.

In conducting concerted prayer, many additional approaches can be used to insure a positive prayer time for your hearers. Concerts of Prayer International, for example, offers a handbook titled *Creative Approaches to Concerts of Prayer* with over fifty suggestions.³ In one of these suggestions, a team of leaders might model from the front how to pray point by point, or verse by verse, each taking thirty seconds apiece, one after the other. Or, a responsive prayer can be written out ahead of time, printed on a flyer, and used by everyone in the group to pray the message back to God.

I remember one time preaching about the revival under Elijah on Mount Carmel and concluding with a five-minute prayer that highlighted the drama. I asked the audience to respond after each summary point in my prayer by simultaneously whispering to God (with a sense of awe): “Let the fire fall!” None of those present will ever see 1 Kings 18 in the same way again.

A Challenge

Although anyone can be a Messenger of Hope, allow me a special word of challenge to pastors. For the next eight weeks, deliver a message of hope series on Sunday mornings. As an experiment, shorten your usual message time by ten minutes. Then assist your congregation to use that ten minutes to pray your message back to God.

How might you fill the “pray back” time? One possibility: At the end of the message, put people in groups of six (having them stand, with three people in one pew turning to face three in another). Six is a minimally threatening group size because at least three will be ready and willing to pray brief prayers out loud.

For the first minute, stand in silence, reflecting on or praising God for what has been heard. Use the next eight minutes to go over your major points, allowing two minutes for each point, praying in groups of six throughout the sanctuary. Encourage prayers of repentance,

resistance, or request. Encourage prayer for yourselves, but also for your church, and beyond your walls. The final minute might be another time of silence for personal recommitment. Or, it could involve a corporate prayer—asking Christ to allow you to be part of God’s answers to the previous nine minutes, using, perhaps, a responsive prayer you’ve composed ahead of time and placed in the bulletin.

Can we expect immediate results from this third ingredient? Of course! In a number of ways:

- *It will change the way you share your message.* Knowing that your hearers will take whatever you say and turn it into prayer, asking God to manifest what you have taught them through revival in their lives and in the lives of others, you’ll be more dedicated to the preparation of your teaching and more enthusiastic to teach than ever before.
- *It will change the way they listen.* If they know the moment you’ve delivered the message they will be asked to pray it back to God, they might even take notes for a change! The hearers will actually join you in shaping the message, expanding, deepening, and applying the message by *how* they pray. Also, the prayer time will create a fresh environment for hearing, embracing, and obeying this message of hope. No better way exists for your listeners to lay hold of a vision for revival than by praying it back to God. As we pray, the Holy Spirit is able to get the message out of our heads and down into our hearts as never before.
- *It will change how your hearers apply the message.* The praying prepares them for ingredient four—to “*enter in*”—and for what your message calls them to expect and prepare for, day by day.
- *It will change the life of your church and the world beyond.* Why? Because we serve a God who answers prayer. When we ask something according to his will, he does it (1 John 5:14–15)! Praying back his Word to him means you are praying with certainty that you are seeking his will. In most cases your message will inspire your hearers to offer up to God prayers they have



never offered to him before. God will take full advantage of such an opportunity! Nothing can remain the same.

Yes, Luther is right. Prayer secures the fire of hope. It also secures every message of hope. In the end, it transforms hearers into prisoners of hope. Like Jacob of old, full of hope that Abraham's covenant blessing was about to fall on him, they will not let go until they see God's face (compare Gen. 32:26–30 with 33:10–11).

These signs follow believers. The people receiving the Holy Ghost have something which the world cannot understand. The comforter proceeding from the Father going on in us, and through us. Earth testify to the shortage of the Church, knowing nothing of the greatness of God. All praise to God. Having found the faith, baptized in Him, I'm telling the story of Him. He is God for you. He is God to do. He is your thrilling life, the only help now we show. Pouring upon us the help of His power and love. Accept Him in might, saying God is right. Ask the Lord for help the more. Looking for God to guide the soul.

Charles Harrison Mason,
"An Exhortative Invocation" (1919),
taken from *Conversations with God:
Two Centuries of Prayers by African-Americans*