

Essentials of Spiritual Revival — Nehemiah 8:1-12

Scripture Reading — Psalm 119:129–144

Introduction, Context, Thesis Statement

- July 1st, 445 B.C., Jewish New Year (Feast of Trumpets). The returned Israelites from the exile had a great spiritual revival under the godly leadership of Ezra.
- February 2021 A.D., Chinese New Year. After a difficult year full of challenges, do you feel like you're in a spiritual valley and in need of a spiritual revival?
- So, **how does spiritual revival happen?** Let's learn it from their example.
- We can extract six elements of spiritual revival from this passage: **three indispensable requirements and three inevitable results.**

Three Indispensable Requirements

1. Desire for God's Word (vv. 1–3)

Spiritual revival must begin with the desire for God's Word in our own hearts!

- “All the people gathered as one man”: at least 50,000 (7:66–67) people with one heart/mind.
- “they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses”: The subject is “they”, all the people. It is the people, not the leaders, that took the initiative to listen to God's word.
What brought you to church today? Is it your personal desire for God's Word?
- "the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel": the Pentateuch, their Bible. This long description shows the nature of the Bible: It is the Word of God (the Lord), mediated by the prophet of God (Moses), given to the people of God (Israelites), teaching them to live according to the will of God (the Law).
2Tim 3:16–17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
1 Peter 2:2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.
- “Ezra”: a priest and scribe. Returning to Jerusalem 13 years earlier, he “had set his heart to *study* the Law of the Lord, and to *do* it and to *teach* his statutes and rules in Israel” (**Ezra 7:10**). It takes revived leaders to revive the people. Ezra's 13 years' example is bearing fruit.
Is your heart set to study, to do and to teach God's Word? God will let you see its fruit!
- “from early morning until midday”: about six hours long; “the ears of all the people were attentive”: undivided attention for six hours listening to God's Word!
Would you be so attentive to God's Word for hours when you have the time?
May God help SLCCC to be a church that desires the Word of God!

2. Reverence for God's Word (vv. 4–6)

The attitude with which we treat God's Word is the attitude with which we treat God.

- “a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose”: They come prepared. The podium is not to highlight the preachers but to exalt the Word of God.
When a preacher brings the Bible to this podium, do you exalt God's Word in your heart?
- “all the people stood”: outward appearance that reflects the inner reverence of heart. Heart is the key to worship, but outward appearance ought also to reflect the heart.
Do your manners reflect the fact that you are in the presence of a holy God to worship Him with a reverent heart and listen to His Word?
- “Ezra blessed the Lord”: praising God before reading His Word. A worshipful heart is key to understanding God's Word aright. Prepare your heart as you come before God's Word.
Psalm 100:4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise!
Are you here to worship God through His Word? Or are you merely using His Word to satisfy yourself or to solve your own problems?
- “‘Amen, Amen,’ lifting up their hands”: spontaneous expressions from the hearts showing that they echo with every word of Ezra's praise.
Caution: This is not the misguided pursuit by some Charismatics of an empty worship experience, as if it's all about emotion and expression apart from God's Word. But, when true believers hear God's glory rightly proclaimed from God's Word, there necessarily is a loud "Amen" echoing in our hearts even if not expressed outwardly.
- “bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground”: More than the enthusiastic Amens, they also have the humility to bow their heads in worship.
Isaiah 66:2 But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.
If you tremble at God's Word, God will look to you and grant you spiritual revival.

3. Understanding of God's Word (vv. 7–8)

Attitude alone is not enough. In addition to the desire for and reverence for God's Word, spiritual revival also requires correct understanding of God's word.

- “understand”: key word of the passage, used six times in the original (v2, v3, v7, v8, v9 [where “taught” is literally “caused to understand”], v12). Understanding is the key!
Ephesians 5:17 Therefore do not be foolish, but *understand* what the will of the Lord is.
Psalm 119:130 The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts *understanding* to the simple.
God does not want ignorant worship. Our lives of worship can only grow when we continue to deepen our understanding of God's Word.
- “Clearly”: likely “translating” as in some versions, for their mother tongue likely got rusted after many years of exile. The key is: they make sure the people *understand* God's Word!

Proper use of God-given resources (sermons, study bibles, commentary, etc.) can help us better understand His Word.

Your worship can only go as deep as your understanding of God's Word goes.

Three Inevitable Results

1. Sorrow for sin (v. 9)

The first fruit of spiritual revival is the sorrow for sin from understanding God's Word.

- “all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law”: Their heart is pierced by God's Word. No doubt, they are reminded of their sins throughout generations and that their current hardship is God's discipline as foretold in His Word (**Deuteronomy 28:15–68**).

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Have you had similar experiences? Have you been so convicted by God's Word of your sinful condition that you cannot help but sorrow and grieve and even weep?

- Maybe Romans 1 shows you that God has given you over to a lustful life, that you're completely enslaved to your sins;
- Maybe Ephesians 2 shows you that you are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, like a walking dead without any hope in the world;
- Maybe 1 Corinthians shows you that, as a believer, you often cause divisions and quarrels, destroying the unity of the church;
- Maybe the book of James shows you that your heart and mind still indulge in the pleasures of the world, no wonder there is no spiritual growth.

If God's Word makes you sorrow for your sin, you may be having a spiritual revival.

Psalm 34:18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

2. Joy of the Lord (vv. 10–12)

God wants joyful worship, so spiritual revival won't stop at producing sorrow. It inevitably proceeds to bring joy of the Lord!

- “eat...drink...send portions...”: In OT feasts, eating together is part of worship. God is glorified when His people receive and share His bounty with joy and thanksgiving.
1 Cor 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
- “do not be grieved”: not that they shouldn't grieve for their sin. Chapter 9 is all about their tearful confessions. But this is their New Year (Feast of Trumpets), a holy day to worship God together. You cannot worship God with grief. Worship requires the strength from joy.
- “for the joy of the Lord is your strength”: In context, this strength refers specifically to the strength needed to worship God. This strength originates from the joy of the Lord.
Joy is vitally important to worship. See **Psalm 96:11-13; 97:1, 8, 12; 98:4; 100:1** etc.
“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” — John Piper

- “to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words”: It is the understanding of God’s Word that brings joy. The “joy of the Lord” is the joy from God’s Word. For these Israelites, words of promise such as **Deuteronomy 30:1–6** is sure to bring immense joy.

Unbelievers often think of God’s Word as a bunch of rules, designed to kill joy. But for believers, there is great joy in God’s Word.

Jeremiah 15:16 Your words were found, and I ate them, and *your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart*, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts.

As believers grow in their understanding of God’s word, their joy will grow too, giving them an ever-increasing strength to worship God.

A call to the unbeliever: If you have never had this supernatural joy, today, I beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God! What kind of evil heart is keeping you from fully trusting Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Are you trying to win God’s favor by your own deeds? No wonder you don’t have joy. Or are you under the illusion that you are the lord of your life, refusing to acknowledge the sovereignty of God? Are you all about gains and losses in this life, ignoring the eternal judgment of God? Are you despising the precious atoning blood of God’s only Son, trampling it under foot as of no value? I implore you to humble yourself before God, grieve over your sinful ignorance, trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation with all your heart, and you’ll find the eternal joy of salvation from God’s Word.

3. Obedience to God’s Word (vv. 12ff)

Sorrow and joy are the inner result that brings out the outer result, that is, an obedient life.

- “eat...drink...send portions...make great rejoicing”: the exact same verbs as commanded to them in verse 10, demonstrating perfect obedience to every word they’re taught.
- The rest of the story also shows their obedience to God’s Word in various aspects of life: Chapter 8:13–18, celebrating the Feast of Booths as is commanded in God’s Word; Chapter 9, fasting and confessing sin, having seen from God’s Word the devastating reality and consequences of their sin and the sin of their fathers; Chapter 10, renewing covenant with God, taking oaths to obey God’s Word completely; Chapter 11, repopulating Jerusalem in order to restore the worship life of the city; Chapter 12, the Levites singing praises, the people offering tithes and sacrifices.
- The result of an obedient life: more joy from God (12:43). A revived life is full of joy!
A revived life is not only joyful itself, it also brings joy to God! (Zephaniah 3:14, 17)

Summary

Do you desire this kind of life ?

Remember, the six essentials of spiritual revival can be summarized into one point, that is:

A life centered upon God’s Word!