

"RETURN TO ME"

AUTHENTIC PRAYER AND FASTING

Dr. Henry T. Blackaby

We are increasingly hearing a "mixed message" about the role of prayer and fasting. At times it is distorted, at best it is incomplete and imbalanced. A mixed message could be fatal to true revival and spiritual awakening!

The cry of God is always, "return to Me." In Zechariah 1:3(NIV), God says, "Return to Me... and I will return to you." We hear the same call again and again in the New Testament. Throughout, the Bible clearly speaks of "return to Me" as a call to repentance, to revival, to restoration of the love relationship that unites human beings with God. Repentance always brings a return of the love relationship with God.

Today we see a different focus.

We are being called on to "fast and pray... for revival!" The emphasis is dangerously close to shifting from "repent and return to Me" to fasting and praying for something - for revival.

God knows we need a revival, or else we may perish. Saving non-Christians is crucial and right and good, but revival is a deliberate turning back to God, a returning to God by His people in repentance, brokenness, and grief over their sin and loss of their love-relationship with Him. Are we grieving over having left our first love, over our broken relationship?

The present focus in fasting and prayer - often just fasting - appears to have as its goal what God will do *for* us rather than *to* us. But God's goal is for us to have a restored relationship with Him. While such a relationship will cause our lives and churches to become "highways of holiness" over which He can again go in power to the lost, we are

called only to "return." What happens as a result is all God's doing.

Today, the focus on fasting and prayer can have as its motive the results of revival, without any mention of repentance, brokenness, and grief over our sins.

In truth, our first motive in fasting and prayer must be *to return to God*. It must not be for what He will do in "revival," regardless of how crucial the need for revival may be.

As you hear the call for fasting and prayer for revival, understand anew of what true revival is:

Revival is not what happens to the "lost," but what happens to God's people when we come in brokenness and grief over sin - our sin - and are restored to that holy love relationship with God. Revival is when God's people are once again living to the praise of His glory and to the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We will always know, as God's people, when we have returned, because the manifest presence of God will be once again real and vital and powerful among His people. We will know when we have returned, because we will see evidence of a fresh and powerful sensitivity to sin and to the Savior.

In this restored relationship with Him, God is once again able to work through his people to touch a lost world redemptively.

The "return" of God's people to a holy relationship with Him is vital. Any call that passes over lightly the "returning process" can sideline or delay what we so desperately need and long for, the revival of God's people, and the salvation of multitudes who are lost.

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