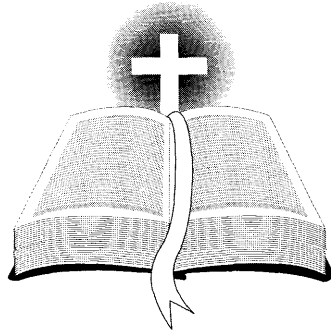


CHAPTER TEN



E STANDS FOR “ENTER IN!”

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

A respected African-American pastor led a revival prayer rally in Chicago, with almost two thousand in attendance from across the city. He asked us to respond to his prayer with the same response as another messenger of hope, Isaiah: “Here am I, Lord! Send me!” His request seemed rather innocent. As he began, he prayed first for God’s work in our own lives, and then in our churches. We responded to each prayer: “Here am I, Lord! Send me!” Next he spoke to God about some of the desperate needs of the city. At the end of a brief petition for each concern—addressing the unrelenting battles of the poor and the homeless, praying for those abandoned in prisons and those with AIDS, calling for revival within the political establishment—we announced, “Here am I, Lord! Send me!” Finally his prayers swept on to the extensive challenge of sharing the gospel with specific unreached people groups across the globe. Still we joined him to conclude each intercession with, “Here am I, Lord! Send me!”

In essence, we were giving God carte blanche to send us anywhere at any price to be an answer to our own prayers. As his twelve-minute



prayer unfolded, you could feel the audience responses dwindling in energy, more and more muffled—I would even call it timid. We were all waking up to the implications of seeking God for revival. Were we really *that* eager to enter into it if God would grant it?

In fact, no message of hope is complete until we have called prisoners of hope to active participation in the unleashing of their vision—to be the answer to their prayers, to prepare themselves for all that revival will call them into for Christ’s sake, and to start acting as if revival is coming.

The Risk of Being Shaken

In typical British understatement, J. B. Phillips writes: “Anyone who opens his personality to the living Spirit of God takes the risk of being considerably shaken.”¹ The same can be said of anyone who opens himself or herself to the Spirit’s gift of hope. Are you willing to take such a risk? If so, are you convinced that you must also invite your hearers to let God considerably shake them too? This is the fourth ingredient in every message of hope. Each message must conclude with such a compelling ring of hope that we send people out to actively engage it in simple steps of preparation, living daily in anticipation of God doing exceedingly more in genuine revival. Our job is not done until we provide our hearers with practical “next steps” toward obedience as prisoners of hope.

If, in fact, we announce the promise of revival in the right ways, our hearers will stir with holy restlessness over the status quo. They will require us to help them move into new territory. So it is your job as a Messenger of Hope to exploit their longings by suggesting fresh ways to obey Christ. Christians must believe and act as if such a revival really is at hand, impending, bearing down on top of us. Teaching people to “enter in” isn’t about *reactionary* living. New Testament discipleship, a proper response to every message of hope, is *anticipatory* discipleship. Faithfulness to Christ is lived out in anticipation of where he is headed and what more he is ready to do with us. To truly understand this important truth would turn almost every disciple-making curriculum in our churches upside-down. We’re



moving from faith to faith, promise to promise, glory to glory (John 1:16; 3:34–35; Rom. 1:8, 17; 2 Cor. 3:17–18). Pouring out ourselves for Christ today gets us ready for the outpouring of his Spirit tomorrow.

Dealing in issues of practical living is similar to the ways Christians create seasons of spiritual preparations during Advent and Lent. In both, Christians are asked to practice living in a way that demonstrates anticipation of something more wonderful to come—the incarnation and passion of our Lord.

Messengers of Hope should reflect on the work of John the Baptist. John’s message was straightforward: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 3:2). In other words, “Get ready. The King is about to break in upon you.”

In the Book of Luke we read: “The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. . . . ‘A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” . . . The people were waiting expectantly. . . . ‘one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’” (3:2, 4, 15–16). Then John called his hearers to very specific acts of anticipatory obedience, such as sharing with the poor and working for justice.

We can nurture no higher ambitions than to mobilize our hearers to wait expectantly, to take steps of repentance and change, and to be ready to “enter in” as revival comes. Isaiah states it well:

Loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke . . . set the oppressed free . . . share your food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter. . . . Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear. . . . Then you will call and the LORD will answer.

Isaiah 58:6–9

Many texts outlining the church’s preparations for the final revival (the consummation) have equal application to the attitude of any prisoner of hope longing to “enter in” to the work of revival. Take the words of Peter: “You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. . . . since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless,

blameless and at peace with him” (2 Peter 3:11–12, 14). Or again, follow the advice of John: “Continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. . . . we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 John 2:28; 3:2–3). Shouldn’t the church be living in this atmosphere all the time—not only looking toward the consummation, but anticipating every approximation of the consummation when Christ appears in that powerful manifestation of his presence that generations have called revival? John Piper, one of our nation’s leading pastors, has recently written 450 pages on what he calls “the purifying power of living by faith in Future Grace.”²

How to “Enter In”

As you think of calling your hearers to “enter in” to the coming revival, you might want to answer for them one or more of the following questions, depending on what you’ve shared through the previous three ingredients:

How should we worship God more accurately in anticipation of the great works we believe he is getting ready to do? Also, in what ways does this vision require a change in our daily prayer life alone and together?

How will we begin to study the Scriptures differently on our own, as we look for themes of revival like those we just explored?

How should we adjust our lives together—as families, as small groups, as a church—so that we are ready to receive deeper visitations of the Holy Spirit when God is ready to grant them?

In what ways might we currently be grieving, quenching, or resisting the Spirit, either in our individual or corporate discipleship? Where is repentance required for moral sins? For unbelief? For indifference to spiritual opportunities? For ungodly distractions? For false hopes? For prayerlessness?

If, in fact, a fresh invasion of Christ by revival is just ahead of us, how would we reevaluate the extent and form of personal pos-



sessions? What needs to change in our giving patterns to the church, to ministries, to missions, to the poor?

In what way does this message give us new courage for evangelism? How can this message be incorporated into what we share with unbelievers when we tell them the good news of Christ? How can we share with them the stories of revival, for example, in ways that will entice them to take another look at who Christ is? How will this help prepare the way for a spiritual awakening to Christ?

Where do we need to work at racial or denominational reconciliation, especially locally, in anticipation of a revival God intends for the blessing of the whole body of Christ?

In light of the hope of coming revival, how do we need to readjust the weekly schedule and programming of our church? How can we reinvigorate our church activities so that this rising sense of hope is woven into all of them? How can we retool the disciple-making curriculum to be much more anticipatory in its focus?

Does this particular message of hope bring any adjustments to our social or political involvements? What social policies, for example, are most in keeping with what God will do in a national spiritual awakening to Christ? What political activities might contradict our claim for the need of divine intervention?

How does the coming revival impact the ways I look at world evangelization? Does this particular message of hope give me new courage to open my life to be sent by God, in the mission of Christ, in directions where I’ve not gone before?

If we succeed in asking listeners to “enter in” to the work of revival, once again we can anticipate immediate results from our ministry. How? More than ever before, our people will be better prepared for, less in the way of, and more likely candidates for God’s visitation. The steps taken to prepare for revival cause us to “enter in” right now to richer levels of Christ-honoring discipleship (individually and corporately) than could be experienced otherwise. We will (to use John’s words) purify ourselves because of the hope that’s within us—hope for any imminent revival and the final revival.

Let me be clear here. None of this implies that we can somehow make revival happen if we simply take the correct steps. Rather, we *respond* to what God is about to do to bring revival to fruition. Renewed obedience springs from hope grounded in the sovereignty of God.

From Prisoners to Messengers

Whatever you do, as you lead others to obedience, pick out no more than one or two opportunities for application of a specific message. That's about all the change a person can handle at any one time. Also, be sure to give an illustration of what the application might look like. People need to see specific examples.

Without a doubt, one of the most important applications—one of the most strategic ways to “enter in” to God’s work in coming revival—is to invite your hearers to be not only prisoners of hope, but also to become Messengers of Hope themselves. They, too, can begin to share this vision with other Christians on a regular basis. Encourage them to pass along the message you gave to them. Remember, the great need of the hour is to flood our nation with Messengers of Hope, agents of revival.

A significant step toward this goal is for your hearers to commit to be more intentional in their study of the topic of revival. One tool to help them is the small group discussion guide for *The Hope at Hand* called *Take It to Your Friends*.³ Or, you can also use the ten-session study curriculum incorporated in *Stand in the Gap: How to Get Ready for the Coming World Revival*.⁴

Finally, to quicken their growth into Messengers of Hope, have your hearers consider forming a concert of prayer. As they gather with other prisoners of hope to pray for revival on a regular basis, even if just for a few minutes a week—maybe between Sunday school and worship—the message of hope they’ve heard from you will become a vision sought and shared. No better doorway exists for Christians who want to “enter in” to the coming revival.