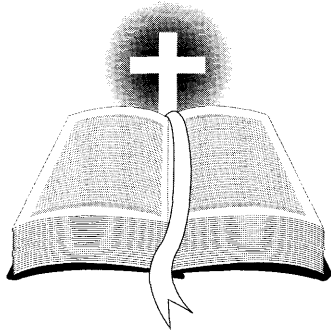


## CHAPTER EIGHT



### O STANDS FOR “OPEN UP!”

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

**W**illiam Pannell, professor of preaching and world-renowned African-American Christian leader, observes that after years of trying to find ways to communicate *beyond* the biblical text, many churches are returning to the simplicity of preaching *from* the text itself.<sup>1</sup> Messengers of hope couldn't be happier! Every message of hope goes back to the Word.

### The Arsenal of Texts

Having set the stage through stories of God's ways in awakenings, it's time to aggressively open up for our hearers the biblical arsenal of texts. Revival reports aren't entertaining novelties to make us feel better. They are reinforcements of the biblical promises that point us toward spiritual revolution. God's Word alone can successfully prepare us for and take us through extraordinary seasons of grace.

Results of neglecting this second ingredient are tragically illustrated from recent genocide in Africa. Rwanda was the birthplace of

what is known as the East African revival, beginning some five decades ago. That revival has spread throughout many parts of East Africa, impacting Rwanda so significantly that 85 percent of its population called itself “Christian” at the beginning of the 1990s. Rwanda hosted large evangelistic crusades, with record conversions between 1991 and 1993. So what went wrong? “Did God turn his back on Rwanda,” as *Time* magazine claimed? What lessons has the church in Africa learned from this tragedy? Tokumboh Adeyemo answers his own questions this way: “Solid and sound biblical teaching did not follow to sustain the fire of revival. Instead, the church leaders were caught in the political game of ethnic rivalry and control of power.”<sup>2</sup>

If God’s agenda for revival and awakening is to prevail, there’s an indisputable necessity for clear biblical teaching. How sad that a move of God in a nation so desperately in need of Christ’s dramatic presence in the church was never fanned into full-blown, life-changing revival. Let us learn from this kind of revival story as well. Only a Christ-centered, Bible-based awakening has the power to sustain and change the world in the way God desires.

When Jonathan Edwards wrote a book calling for concerts of prayer in the thick of the First Great Awakening, he chose a lengthy title of nearly thirty-five words. It outlined the need to mobilize visible, explicit, united prayer for revival and missions. The final words of the title stated that all of this must be done “according to the prophecies and promises of the Holy Word of God.” In a day of impending revival, Edwards insists, messengers of hope must open up God’s “prophecies and promises” in a way that drives us to concerted prayer and to readiness for what is coming. Like Paul, every agent serves the church by fulfilling God’s commission “to present to you the word of God *in its fullness* . . . to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him” (Col. 1:25–28).

Actually there are hundreds of passages from which to draw this message. For example, for nine months I scoured a copy of Scripture, working methodically from Genesis to Revelation, highlighting with a yellow pen every verse that demonstrates (either by promise, prophecy, or action) this fundamental claim: God is ready to do for us and to give us “immeasurably more than all we ask or

imagine" (Eph. 3:20). When I finished the experiment, nearly half my Bible had turned yellow! No question about it: the Bible is *filled* with messages of hope. Most of them can also be related, directly or indirectly, to the hope of revival.

At the end of this chapter, I have listed twenty of what I consider to be some of the most potent biblical texts on the hope of revival. That can get you started. In another publication, *Biblical Agendas for Concerted Prayer*, I list hundreds of other texts that not only talk about the inward and outward dimensions of revival, but also point toward responses of repentance, spiritual warfare, zealous worship, and consecration of life, all filled with Christ-centered hope.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, certain books of the Bible brim with themes of hope such as Joshua, 2 Chronicles, Psalms, Isaiah, Zechariah (at least twelve separate messages on revival), Luke, Acts (a case study on an awakening), Ephesians (a blueprint of revival based on the massive breakthrough in Ephesus), as well as Hebrews and Revelation (which carries us into the final revival). Look for these and other passages to address topics such as:

- The promises of God for revival
- The ways of God in revival
- The manifestations of God during revival
- The impact of God on his people out of revival
- The centrality of Christ in all revival
- Personal and corporate dimensions of revival

If you do this, it won't be long before you have found enough messages of hope to keep you an active messenger until Christ's return!

Above all, as we saw earlier, every text on hope should summon our hearers to the feet of Christ. Remember the three key words (the major themes in every revival): *focus* on the person of Christ, the *fullness* of the life of Christ, the *fulfillment* of the mission of Christ. You may want to return to chapter 6 once more to study the questions at the end. See also the questions later in this chapter. By centering in on Christ, the questions will help you grasp even deeper ways to open up for others biblical teachings on revival.

## Let's "Open Up!"

Ready to get started? Apply these practical guidelines as you involve your hearers in the second ingredient of every message of hope, opening up for them the biblical texts of revival.

### *Establish a Bridge*

How is the text you want to teach from relevant to what you may have already told your hearers in your introductory highlights as you motivated them to "hop on"? Can you tie these first two ingredients to each other?

### *Establish a Theme*

What is this specific text going to do for your hearers? How will the passage reveal to them God's character, ways, and promises in order to build in them a greater hope for personal, local, national, or even world revival? How will this text challenge them to be more fully prepared and involved when revival comes? Do you need to tell them this specifically before you read the passage?

### *Read the Text to Them*

Read God's Word with the enthusiasm it deserves. Through it, God is giving your hearers extraordinary hope for themselves and their generation.

### *Establish the Context*

Where does this passage fit within redemptive history? Or within a particular moment of redemptive history? Or within the immediate experience of God's people at the time it was written? Can you show your hearers any similarities between the context for this text and the spiritual challenges in our own times?



## *Unfold a Vision of Revival*

You may want to use the following questions to dig out what the passage teaches. They will help you think through how to teach the passage to your audience for maximum clarity and motivation. There are many ways to approach your time of teaching, but here are a few suggestions.

How might this text, directly or indirectly, show in fresh ways how God manifests himself in times of renewal or revival? (*focus*)

How does this text help to better define the ways spiritual awakening gives God's people a healthier, deeper life together in him? (*fullness*)

How does this text speak, directly or indirectly, to the mission thrust of God's people toward one other person, a whole community, or an entire nation? What role does renewal and awakening play? (*fulfillment*)

What does this text teach about what it takes in any generation for God to unleash revival?

What does this text reveal about hindrances to revival (either inside or outside the church)?

What does this text teach about important steps we should take to prepare individually or corporately for a coming revival?

Are there supporting texts from other passages of Scripture that might be woven into your teaching on this text?

How might this text encourage your hearers to *expect* God to intervene with us in extraordinary ways, to accomplish much more than we have ever seen?

Using this text, how can you preach Christ more fully to your hearers as the one who guarantees and sums up all this text teaches on revival? As the one around whom awakening centers?

How would Christ be more central in the church's experience, and even among unbelievers, if this text would receive a much fuller expression in our generation?

How do the principles and activities of revival portrayed, defined, or promised in this passage point us, in anticipation, to the

final revival at the end of history? What will it be like for every hope highlighted in this text to find its consummation in the day of Christ's coming? How should that change the way you depict the unleashing of "approximations" of the promises for your hearers right now, right where they live?

### ***Promote Anticipation***

Stir their imaginations. Challenge them to imagine what it might look like if God were to do in our time what this passage promises.

Ask them if they can be satisfied to go on living with anything less than blessings like these from God. Is this what God desires? What he deserves?

Reaffirm your own confidence that such a work of God in revival is at hand; that he is not only able and willing but also *ready* to do it.

Tell a concluding story from past or present demonstrations of revival to illustrate the central hope of this text.

In all that you share, be both personal and passionate.

### ***Make the Text Your Own***

Finally, the text must also be lodged deep in the messenger's soul, not just his brain. As David Allen Hubbard taught so often, "Apply your whole self to the text; apply the whole text to yourself. Trust God for the results."<sup>4</sup> This is foundational to infusing your audience with a message of hope. Heralds—parents, Sunday school teachers, pastors—need to spend time in God's presence to receive God's message. Only a message that comes that way will open up hearts to believe God for "great and unsearchable things you do not know" (Jer. 33:3).

Can we anticipate *immediate* results if we are faithful to open up the Bible in these ways? Absolutely! First of all, faith comes by hearing (Rom. 10:17). Therefore, every message of hope activates stronger levels of faith toward God. We give our hearers a whole new way to think about God and about their daily walk with Christ. They receive from us exciting perspectives to transform their own studies of Scrip-



ture in the weeks ahead. Since faith is the evidence of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1), as hope grows so does faith. Everything else in the Christian life flows out of faith. So results *will* be immediate. Taken captive to the whole counsel of God, Christians can't help but be transformed into prisoners of hope. As the vision is substantiated with the Word of God, your hearers will be set free from fears—fears of being disappointed or fears of the cost of revival. Greater confidence to prepare for revival—and more insights on how to do so—will explode with joyful anticipation.

When the church begins to throb with people like this, in a sense revival has already begun! Now, more than ever, they're ready to pray.

## Twenty Passages That “Open Up” Revival

I promised to end with Scriptures that I've enjoyed using. This is just the beginning:

### Old Testament

1 Samuel 7:2–15  
2 Samuel 5:1–12  
2 Chronicles 7:11–16  
2 Chronicles 15:1–15  
Psalm 80  
Psalm 102:1–22  
Isaiah 59:15–60:3  
Jeremiah 33:1–22  
Joel 2:12–32  
Haggai 2:1–9

### New Testament

Luke 1:68–79  
Luke 2:25–38  
Luke 3:1–9, 15–18  
Acts 4:23–35  
Acts 19:1–20  
Romans 11:11–16  
Ephesians 1:15–23  
Ephesians 3:14–21  
1 Thessalonians 1:2–10  
Revelation 3:14–22

Father, thou openeth the gates of wonders, making us enjoy the gift of the Christ, his word standing. When the wicked comes against us the power of thy word is for us.

Open the gates of thy wisdom for us and rebuke the power of the wicked against us. In the glory of Thy council we stand. The Christ of thy word has made us stand.

We see the door of thy mystery. Let the poor confess their sins and see the glory of thy resurrection. Thy goodness and greatness is among the daughters. Fill these with the fullness of Christ. Bless us with light and prudence in the power of the Holy Ghost. The presence of God is with us and the blood prevails. Anoint us so we will in Thy pity come to thee.

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