

# EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

## ‘Will you not revive us again?’

By Carmen Fowler  
The Layman

A woman stood next to me at the back of the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s General Assembly committee meeting room. Commissioners were entering their second hour of debate over the use of the Lord’s name and whether or not Presbyterians should take a position on the profane use of it. “Don’t they know it’s a plain and simple command?” she asked rhetorically. A few more minutes passed and her astonishment rose, “Have they forgotten that there’s real power in His name?” I had been standing shoulder to shoulder with her for some time but had not turned to look her in the eye until now. This was not so much a rhetorical question as a heart’s plea. Here was a woman who had driven from rural Wisconsin to witness her church at work. Now her cheeks were streaked with tears, her brow furrowed in pain.

Finally, sweeping her arm in an arc from left to right, taking in the room, she asked prophetically, “Can these dry bones live?” I said the only words that came, “Lord knows, Lord knows.” With that she nodded, knowingly, and left. I am confident she prayed and wept all the way home. I am confident that she is praying even now. And she is not praying for a reform of the PCUSA form of government, nor for one or two amendments to pass or fail. She is praying for genuine spiritual revival in the Presbyterian expression of the church that she so loves.

The time for reform has passed. The people have forgotten their first love, they have abandoned the ancient ways, indeed everyone does what is right in his own eyes and there is no fear of the Lord. What we need is a revival, something only God can accomplish.



General Assembly participants pray in the halls of the GA convention center before the debate on ordination standards.

The Psalmist prayed, “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” (Psalm 85:6, NIV). It was the cry of God’s people then and it is the cry of God’s people today. Whenever God’s people come to realize that they have come to the end of themselves they cry out that God would directly intervene. When we

“Will you not revive us again,  
that your people may rejoice in you?”

Psalm 85:6, NIV

reach a time when evil seems to know no bounds and every inclination of the human heart is sinful all the time, we are living in a time ripe for revival. And it begins with a deep ardent yearning in the hearts of God’s people for deliverance. Lord, will You revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?

There are 16 revivals recorded in the Bible and II Chronicles 7:14 is central to understanding them. It reads, “if My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways,

then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

The principles of revival revealed in this one verse are fivefold.

- First, one must ask, are we a people belonging to God, called by His name?
- Second, are we genuinely humble?
- Third, will we passionately pray?
- Fourth, will we fervently seek His face?
- Fifth, will we earnestly turn from our wicked ways?

If not, why would the Lord listen? Why forgive? Why heal?

Revival becomes necessary when the people of God fail to acknowledge God, exchange the truth for lies, and fail to show forth the grace of God to a watching world. Essentially, revival becomes necessary when the Church abandons her primary calling for lesser loves. Desperate times call for desperate measures and these are desperate times. We live in a generation of itchy ears, false prophets and the active suppression of the truth – not only within the culture, but tragically, within the church itself.

There is good news! Those are precisely the circumstances when God sends revival! Most Biblical revivals were preceded by times of significant spiritual decline, rampant depravity and deep despair. The Bible then tells us that the revival began in the heart of just one believer! That person became the tool God used to stir up His slumbering people. Biblical revivals are centered on a fresh and full proclamation of the Word of God, a return to genuine worship, the destruction of idols, deep repentance of sin and a desire among God’s people to be pure, set apart and offered to God for His use. A people revived by God experience unprecedented joy and a season of mission whereby God reaches others through the testimony of those transformed.

Sound good? Then let us look together at the revivals of the Bible that God might till the soil of our hearts, break up fallow ground, awaken slumbering spirits, and ready us for the revival He is yet to send.

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## Revival – The promises and conditions

*“If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”*

*II Chronicles 7:14*

### Week I: The promises of God

The Hebrew verb *hayah* means *to live, to recover, or to revive*. It only appears a few times in the Old Testament (Psalm 80:18; 85:6; Isaiah 57:15; Hosea 6:2) and its Greek counterpart only appears twice in the New (Romans 7:9, 14:9). Without using the word directly, the Scriptures make frequent reference to the experience of revival among the people of God.

The concept of revival hangs on the premise that something once lived and is now dead; something once fruitful now lies fallow; something once verdant is now parched. Like a valley of dry bones, disconnected and blanched, the question plagues those who remember, “Can these bones live – again?”

The purpose of revival is to call the church back to hear again the Word of God and experience again the grace of God offered in Jesus Christ. The offer is made anew to respond by a fresh confession of sin and a commitment to reversing the trend of apostasy evident in personal, congregational and denominational life.

The scope of God’s promise extends to all His people who are called by His name. That would logically include even the most nominal expression of the so-called Christian Church in the world today. The question is not “Is God willing to revive?” The question is “Do we genuinely want to live?”

Jesus said of Himself, “I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.” But many so-called Christians have grown satisfied with a paltry spiritual half-life based on half-truths fed them in half-hearted worship.

The decision belongs to each believer: Do you want to live? Do you believe in a living Lord? Do you want a living faith? Do you want to serve as a living stone? Do you want to be a part of a people belonging to God? Not just nominally called by the name “Christian” but authentic agents of Christ, offering your life daily for the advancement of His Kingdom purposes? If so, God promises to revive, again.

#### Questions for consideration:

What are signs of decay and death in your personal life, congregational life, denominational and national life that lead you to believe that now is the time to call out to God for revival?

What does God explicitly promise in II Chronicles 7:14?

Are there conditions? If so, what are they?

#### For further study:

Read about the revivals in the days of Samuel (I Samuel 7:1-13), Elijah (I Kings 18) and John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-14).

### Week II: Condition #1 – Humility

In II Chronicles 7:14 God promises to hear, forgive and heal (revive) based on His people meeting four conditions: humble ourselves, pray, seek the Lord’s face, and turn from wickedness to holiness. Let us consider each condition in turn.

God says He will hear, forgive and heal *if* His people will humble themselves.

Humility is about rightly understanding my relationship as a creature of God, the Sovereign Creator and Lord of all. Although there are more than a dozen words in Hebrew used in the Old Testament to deal with our aversion to and need for humility, the one used here is *kana*’ and calls to mind the picture of one bending the knee or the neck in deference.

Those who would have the very attitude of Christ Jesus (Matthew 11:29; Philippians 2) would willingly, voluntarily and completely humble themselves before God.

Humility is about dying to self and living to Christ.

Where the world glorifies the ones who make a name for themselves, the Christian bows to the One whose name is above every other name.

Where the world gratifies the flesh with immediate pleasures, the Christian bows to the gravity of grace, offering even the body as a living sacrifice, holy temple, where God’s Spirit would be pleased to dwell.

Where the world values silver and gold, the Christian values treasures stored up in heaven and a crown of righteousness that will be bestowed only in order that we might in turn have a gift worthy of rendering to the King.

Humility stands in stark contradiction to the world with eyes set on things above and hearts bowed in gratitude to the Savior of our souls.

#### Questions for consideration:

In what areas of your life do you need to humble yourself before God?

Read and discuss Galatians 2:20, Matthew 19:16-30 and Matthew 5:3-12.

What do these passages teach us about living with a “perspective” of humility?

#### For further study:

Read about the revivals in the days of Josiah (II Chronicles 34:1-33), Jacob (Genesis 35:1-15) and Moses (Exodus 32:1-34:7).

### Week III: Condition #2 – Prayer

In II Chronicles 7:14, God says He will hear, forgive and heal *if* His people will pray.

Most Americans claim to pray. The question is to whom are they praying, for what are they praying, and in what spirit?

The kind of prayer referred to in II Chronicles 7:14 is intercession offered in the attitude of Samuel, “far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.” (I Samuel 12:23)

Most of us know how to make our appeal to God, to petition God for the things we want or perceive that we need. Most Christians have a “prayer list” by which they make their requests known to God. And the Father hears the prayers of His children. But that is not the sum of prayer.

Some also know how to utilize prayer as the doorway into intimate communion with God, simply remaining in God’s presence to enjoy Him, meditating, worshipping, adoring God for who He is.

But the “work” of prayer is that of interceding for the world. In the act of intercessory prayer the Christian pleads that God would stretch out His hand. In the ministry of intercession, the Christian strives with God in the cosmic conflict between God and the enemy. True intercession is spiritual warfare and takes the one praying into the reality of battle where evil is assaulting the Kingdom of God.

This is not casual prayer. This is not child’s play. This is war. One should enter into this level of intercessory prayer after having prepared oneself for spiritual battle. So, read Ephesians 6:10-20, suit up and stand firm.

#### Questions for consideration:

For what and for whom did you pray today?

Would you describe your prayers primarily as petitions for yourself and those about whom you care, prayers of communion with God, or intercession for the Kingdom’s advance in the spirit of Ephesians 6?

Are you willing to become the kind of prayer warrior called for in II Chronicles 7:14? (If so consider Andrew Murray’s *The Ministry of Intercession*.)

#### For further study:

Read about the revival in the days of Jehoshaphat (II Chronicles 20), Peter (Acts 2:1-47), Paul and Silas (I Thessalonians 1:2-10).

Use Psalm 85 as a “pattern prayer” as you pray with others for God to revive us again.

1. Ask God to grant restoration as in times past (85:1-3).
2. Ask God to grant us His joy and love in our times (85:4-7). The prayer here for salvation is not for justification (adoption through Christ into the family of God for the first time) but sanctification (a moment by moment surrender of self to the Lordship of Christ over all of life). This is a prayer that we might be delivered from the cultural captivity of our generation and become anew God’s own possession to be used as He wills to reach the world that He so loves.
3. Ask God to grant us His peace by His presence in our land (85:8-9).
4. Ask God to grant us His peace among His people (85:10-13).

### Week IV: Conditions #3 – Seek His face; and #4 – Turn and rejoice

God says He will hear, forgive and heal *if* His people will seek His face.

Do we really “desire” God? (I Chronicles 28:9; 16:11)

Do we pant for God like a deer pants for water? (Psalm 42:1)

Do we crave God’s Word like a baby craves milk? (I Peter 2:2)

Are our hearts set on the things of this world or on God? (Luke 12:28-32)

Are our minds really set on the things which are above, where Christ is? (Colossians 3:1)

Are our eyes really fixed upon Jesus? (Hebrews 12:1-3)

In what ways are we intentionally drawing near to Him? (James 4:8)

In what ways are we seeking first the Kingdom of God? (Matthew 7:7)

Only when we seek the Lord with all our heart will He be found (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13).

Finally, in II Chronicles 7:14, God says He will hear, forgive and heal *if* His people will turn from our wicked ways to the way of holiness.

The fourth condition that would pave the way for revival, should God choose to send it, is the genuine repentance from evil. Certainly, God does not judge the outward appearance but the heart. And certainly we run the risk of being whitewashed tombs whose outward actions appear good when in fact we’re rotten to the core. However, it is equally true that God will not be mocked and that true confession shows forth in changed living.

John’s refrain was “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near” (Matthew 3:2). Paul admonished the people, “everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness” (II Timothy 2:19). Isaiah rebuked the people of God on God’s behalf, “Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!” (Isaiah 1:16-17).

To repent is to turn: Away from evil, sin and idolatry; toward Christ, holiness and fruitful living.

#### Questions for consideration:

Do I really desire God – to the willing sacrifice of what else?

What is the evidence in my life that I have genuinely turned from sin to Christ? (Without evidence, do I need to confess anew that I am really just paying Jesus lip service?)

#### For further study:

Read about the revivals in the days of Asa (II Chronicles 14-16), Zerubbabel (Haggai 1; Zechariah 1:1-6), and Peter (Acts 10) as well as the revivals in the days of Hezekiah (II Chronicles 30:1-9), Philip (Acts 8:1-25), Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8).

**Additional resources:** *Revive us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual Renewal*, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Broadman & Holman, 1999; and *Revival*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Crossway Books, 1987.

# EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

## Book Review

# Christians must learn to reframe the cultural rhetoric

Reviewed by Carmen Fowler  
The Layman

If you're exhausted by so-called "renewal efforts" repeating the same arguments, employing the same efforts, with recurrent disappointing results, then this book is for you.

Brad Bright, the youngest son of Campus Crusade founders, Bill and Vonette Bright, takes a piercing stab at the "issues" based approach most Christians take in confronting the depravity of their neighbors. That, Bright argues, misses not only the heart, but the issue itself.

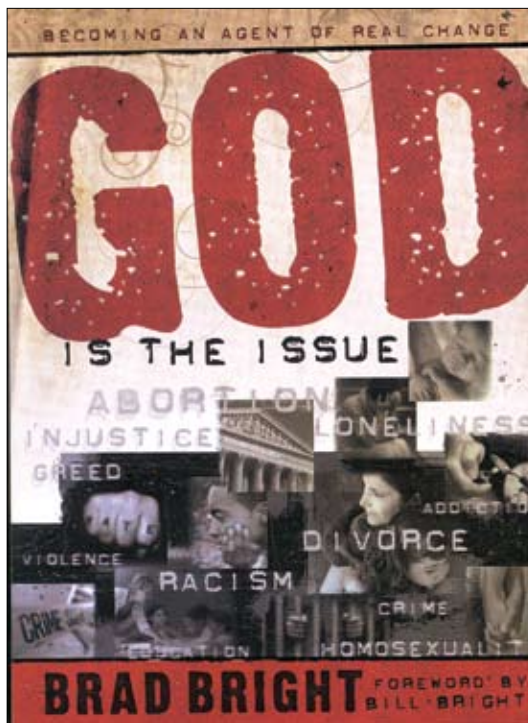
The issue is God. Always has been, always will be. The challenge is reframing the current cultural conversation which is fixated on lesser issues of immoral behavior instead of the primary issue which is God. What Bright proposes is training Christians to reframe the conversation in order to do what Jesus did: Turn every encounter into an opportunity to talk about the Father.

Bright opens by substantiating the need. Christians are "sidelined in the debate" because, he argues in a "relativistic 'Just do it!' culture, 'Thou shalt not' cannot compete." He then exposes the three reasons why the church is losing the battle for hearts and minds as a lack of compassion, boldness and training.

Having been convicted of the need to engage the culture differently, the reader is then instructed on how to "reframe the issue." This is more than training in persuasive speech and political spin, although there is some of that. By using examples of how Jesus and Paul "aggressively co-opted the rhetoric" of their opponents, Bright provides a solid Biblical foundation for his argument.

The book then moves into an exploration of the "seven rules of social change." They are:

- Never, never, never give in! (What price are you willing to pay?)
- Keep your eyes on the North star. (Is your goal clear?)
- Know your Areopagus. (Who is your audience?)
- Reframe! Reframe! Reframe! (Never feel obligated to answer the question.)



- Turtles rule! (How do you eat an elephant?)
- No pain, no gain. (Controversy is my friend.)
- Be a leader, not a loner. (Even the Lone Ranger had Tonto.)

Bright also shares what he calls the three R's of social change. When confronted with a critical attack from someone seeking to advance the

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cause of an immoral behavior (like abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, etc), we have three options. We can roll over, react or reframe. Bright

**God is the Issue**  
by Brad Bright  
Bright Media Foundation  
Second Edition edition (2008)  
[www.discoverGod.com](http://www.discoverGod.com)  
for free download

argues that although there are times when rolling over is strategic and reacting is necessary, Christians must learn to reframe the cultural rhetoric.

Next comes practical training in equipping Christians to help their neighbors make essential linkages between the issues and The Issue: God. The final chapter is well described in the book itself. "Starting from the premise that 'continuing to do the same thing while expecting different results is the definition of insanity,' strategies are presented for reframing issues and rhetoric at the national and personal levels." I would add that it also provides the real possibility of redeeming the rhetoric and changing the outcomes in our denominational debates as well.

Throughout the book I found points of contact where I could immediately apply the material to interpersonal, congregational, denominational and national concerns. Each chapter ends with review questions that make it a great resource for use in small groups, Sunday school classes, and equipping in apologetics for teens and adults.

Additionally, the book is linked to a Web site: [www.discoverGod.com](http://www.discoverGod.com). There you will find daily devotionals, additional resources for helping you reframe conversations, guidance for parents (called DG 4 kids), encouragement and interactive sections that make the book just a starting point. There's even a quiz and a "pastor's portal" to congregational resources.

What Bright is hoping for is not book sales per se, but a movement of American Christianity from the pew back into the public debates that frame our culture. If you're interested in becoming an agent of real change, you need to visit [www.discoverGod.com](http://www.discoverGod.com) and read *God is the Issue*.

# Professor says God is not a mascot of our own desire

By James D. Berkley  
The Layman

MINNEAPOLIS – “The misconceptions and heresies of our day take root not because they are completely preposterous,” according to Edith Humphrey, “but because they are twisted versions of something deeply significant that has been forgotten.”

Humphrey, New Testament professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, spoke at a meeting hosted by Presbyterian Action for Faith and Freedom. Her subject, “Marriage: A Treasure to Be Kept,” was timely, because of the many same-sex marriage measures facing the General Assembly.

“Today, our films, our music, our art, our hearts cry out, ‘It is not good to be alone!’” Humphrey observed, “But loneliness is everywhere. ... We are in the midst of a post-modern movement that has lost its sense of community, that does not recognize any shared norms, and that no longer has confidence that true communication can take place.”

Humphrey noted that this phenomenon is reflected in “business items on marriage, sex and the standards of fidelity that persist in returning to the PCUSA General Assembly.”

“Well then, what is it about sex, about the erotic, that is so enticing?” Humphrey asked. “Isn’t it that a physical encounter with someone else has the promise of taking me out of myself ... at least for the brief moments of passion? There is something primal, visceral, exquisitely promising about the coming together of two so that they make one body.”

Humphrey acknowledged the many possible approaches to marriage now afoot, and the arguments, Scriptural and sociological, that accompany the radically departing viewpoints. She commended godly arguments that “refute those who are revising or distorting the Scriptures in order to provide a false foundation for the acceptance of easy divorce and same-sex behavior in the Church.”

“For those who need a crash course on how to answer such revisionists,” she counseled, “consider the excellent and world-renowned work of Robert Gagnon, and the wisdom of Alan Wisdom in *Theology Matters* recently.”

Humphrey also spoke of “a more subtle attack on the classical Christian understanding of sexuality” arising from revision of the doctrines of the Trinity and of humankind. While revisionists “admit that Biblical writers never intended to countenance same-sex relations,” for example, “they argue that Paul did not realize the potential of his own theology” and “we know better than even Paul about what the Gospel means!”

To this, Humphrey had an emphatic response: “God is to be worshiped, not turned into a mascot of our own desire for ecstasy. Yes, erotic love is wonderful, but chastity and celibacy also have their place in our world – and especially in the Church. Who dares to say that Jesus was less than human because He refrained from erotic relations?”

“Remember,” Humphrey said, “the primal sin, according to St. Paul, is that humankind did not adore God or give thanks for what He has given us. Lack of thankfulness is typically expressed in our desire to re-imagine how we should like things to be.”

She even supplied – delicately – various progressive theologians’ “blasphemous pictures about the Holy One. ... Twentieth century theologians look at our diverse lovemaking and imagine that diversity is good in itself. But have they forgotten the ability of viruses and cancers to diversify? Those championing same-sex relations

look at their desire and project lust onto the nature of God, or God’s desire for us.”

Humphrey’s conclusion was clear: “If we muddle our thinking about human beings, it is quite likely we will be muddled about God, and vice versa.... Thinking carefully about sexual matters means to think carefully about the nature of humanity, of the world’s fallen condition, of the church, and of God, as shown to us in the Son.”

“Marriage is no humanly derived institution,” Humphrey said, “but a God-given reflection of God’s own goodness. We did not invent it, and we cannot re-imagine it. Whatever resolutions any church passes that might recognize a newly constituted form of marriage, they cannot change God’s creational declaration about male and female, that ‘It is very good.’”

“Human beings cannot change the nature of marriage any more than they can make the sun revolve around the earth. If the church does this, to where will people look for light?”

## Paper on Jewish-Christian relations must be rewritten

By Edward Terry  
The Layman

MINNEAPOLIS – Wanting more input from Middle East Christians who weren’t at the table when the paper was drafted and debated, the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has referred “Christians and Jews: People of God” back to Louisville for more work.

By a vote of 529-135, the commissioners agreed with the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee which called for the rewrite. The amended overture now calls for the Office of Interfaith Relations and Theology and Worship to consult with the National Middle East Presbyterian Caucus, PCUSA partner churches and agencies in the Middle East, relevant PCUSA mission networks, the Advocacy Council on Racial Ethnic Concerns and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy.

It also asks that correspondence among the National Middle East Presbyterian Caucus, Israel-Palestine Mission Network and the General Assembly Mission Council be sent to those working on the revised paper.

Nanette Sawyer of Chicago Presbytery pushed for adoption of the paper as it was

written. “There is good Biblically-based Christology in this document,” she said.

Belle Miller McMaster from Greater Atlanta Presbytery shared the prevailing opinion on the paper: That it had an absence of voices.

“Middle East Christians were not at the table to be involved in the process, nor PCUSA Middle Easterners, nor Christians who live in the Middle East,” she said.

### Christian-Muslim relations paper OK

The GA then turned its attention to a paper focusing on Christian-Muslim relations, approving an amended Overture 08-04 commending the paper to the denomination for study and guidance by a 548-129-4 vote.

The amended language encourages Presbyterians to have shared community experiences with their Muslim neighbors, including but not limited to: sharing meals, having activities in churches and mosques together, and inviting a Muslim leader to offer instruction in a church and a Christian leader to offer instruction in a mosque.

It also calls on Presbyterians to identify and speak out against “bigotry, prejudice, discrimination and violence” against Islam and Muslim peoples, especially in the United States.