

## **Psalm 85** **“A Prayer for Revival”**

Revival is the reimagining, reanimating work of God in the hearts of His people. Through faith in Jesus Christ we are made alive spiritually, having been dead in sin. But being spiritually alive doesn't necessarily mean that we are spiritually lively. Our faith waxes and wanes. We forget the redemptive power of God and neglect our responsibility to live holy lives. In those seasons of neglect—or even outright departure—we desperately need God's reviving work. In addition, whole churches, communities, and nations need revival. Psalm 85 is a prayer for revival. Sprinkled throughout the psalm is the word translated “turn” or “restore” (verses 1, 3, 4, 6, and 8). At the heart of the psalm (verse 6) is the plea, “Will you not revive us again?” We can ask God to restore our spiritual vitality. We must pray for revival. In fact, we can anticipate God's positive response to our prayers for revival for several reasons outlined in this psalm.

### **God's past blessings prompt us to anticipate revival (85:1-3).**

Because God has already blessed us and others in the past we can be sure that He desires to bless us again, to bring revival again. The superscription to Psalm 85 attributes this psalm to the Sons of Korah and was given to the director of music associated with worship among God's chosen people. It may have been composed after the exile (note the word “captivity” in verse one), but this cannot be determined with certainty.

#### ***In the past, God restored His people from their place of captivity (85:1).***

Addressed directly to Yahweh God, this psalm begins with the grateful acknowledgement that God had shown favor to His “land” in the past. He had “turned” the captivity of Jacob, meaning that He had turned the bondage of the Israelites into freedom. The people of God were once again free within the land of God's promise. The thought in mind may have been a restoration from captivity in a foreign land or the reinstatement of Israelite rule after a period of oppression within the land.

#### ***In the past, God forgave His people's sins (85:2).***

Israel's restoration was a consequence of God's forgiveness. Yahweh had forgiven the iniquities of His people. He had covered all their sins. Israel was prone to idolatry and God's judgment for idolatry had been relieved because of His forgiveness. God is a forgiving God. He forgives us based on the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for our sins.

***In the past, God turned away from His righteous anger toward His people (85:3).***

God had treated His rebellious people with righteous anger, but then He had “gathered” His wrath, meaning that He had brought together the expression of His anger under the banner of His forgiveness. He had “turned” from the heat of His anger to extend forgiveness and restoration. God is a God who delights to forgive those who respond to Him by faith. His forgiveness is available to all through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. His past blessings prompt us to anticipate His further reviving work.

**God’s saving love  
prompts us to anticipate revival (85:4-7).**

Having reflected on the past, the writer of Psalm 85 now turns with expectation to the future. He prays for God to revive His people once again. This section reminds us that we, too, can pray for God’s intervention and reviving work.

***Pray for God to turn us away from the path of His anger (85:4-5).***

Referring to God as the God of salvation, the psalmist prays for God to “turn” His people. That turning would involve a change of direction. In their sin, God’s people were heading toward God’s righteous anger. But God could turn them around and “break up” His anger, rendering it ineffective. In this way God’s people could once again be restored to His favor. This turning would require a work of God in their lives. The psalmist questioned whether or not God would maintain His righteous anger toward His people indefinitely, implying that His forgiveness and the restoration of His people would reflect His gracious nature.

***Pray for God to revive us so that we can rejoice in Him (85:6).***

Psalm 85:6 serves as the heart of this psalm, a prayer for revival. “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” In the Hebrew text there are two complementary questions: “Will you not turn? Will you not revive us?” There is no joy in hearts that are at odds with God. But when God restores His straying people to spiritual vitality there is rejoicing. “Revive” is the word for life and revival is the restoration of life to that which is dry and seemingly lifeless. We, too, should pray for spiritual revival.

***Pray for God to reveal His loyal love and grant us salvation (85:7).***

The psalmist asks Yahweh God to display His loyal love once again by bringing revival to His people. The word translated “mercy,” “love,” or “loving kindness” is a rich term that

carries a full sense of God's loyalty to His people as expressed in His compassion, care, and restoration. Through His loyal love He grants salvation, both deliverance from the penalty for our sins and from the harsh realities of life that we bring on ourselves through our indifference to God's will. We need revival, and we can pray for God to send revival based on His saving love.

**God's words of peace  
prompt us to anticipate revival (85:8-9).**

God is a God of order and peace. In fact, the Jewish concept of peace includes much more than the absence of war. It refers to the spiritual orderliness of life, life in harmony with God's purposes. Because God speaks words of peace, because He offers "shalom," we can anticipate answers to our prayers for revival.

*We must learn to listen to God rather than follow our own foolish path (85:8).*

The psalmist now promises to listen to God, to hear what Yahweh God has to say. It's obvious to the writer that God will speak words of peace to His people, His holy ones. God had set His people apart—made them holy—so now He would grant them peace and prevent them from turning again to folly. When we follow our own foolish path we subject ourselves to God's anger, but when we forsake foolish living and embrace God's ways we return to the place of His blessing and peace. Revival restores us to this position of God's favor.

*We must learn to fear God so that His glory may be evident around us (85:9).*

Again, the psalmist is confident in both God's peace and God's salvation. God's deliverance from hardships was near those who "fear" Him, who hold Him in the highest reverence and esteem. When God is honored among His people His glory becomes evident. This would be true in the land of promise, and it can be true in the lives of God's people today. God desires to bless us with peace, a harmonious life with Him, in order to display His glory to a needy world. Therefore, He is eager to grant revival to those who seek Him.

**God's righteous generosity  
prompts us to anticipate revival (85:10-13).**

In the closing section of Psalm 85 we read about the righteous nature of God intersecting with the lives of His people, a union of heaven and earth based on God's generous heart for His people.

***When God revives His people, the virtues of heaven are united with life on earth (85:10-11).***

With exuberant expectation the psalmist declares, “Love and faithfulness meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other.” The word “love” is again that word for God’s loyal mercy and loving kindness (compare verse 7). The word translated “faithfulness” is literally “truth,” an indication of God’s trustworthiness. Love and truth go hand in hand. Likewise, righteousness and peace “have kissed.” Being right with God and living in harmony with His ways form an intimate union. The psalmist goes on to say that “faithfulness” (literally “truth”) sprouts out of the earth while “righteousness” looks down from heaven. God’s trustworthiness and uprightness join together, linking heaven and earth as God’s revived people live in harmony with God.

***When God revives His people, we can confidently expect to experience His goodness and righteousness (85:12-13).***

The psalmist concludes this prayer for revival on a note of expectation. He affirms that Yahweh God will give what is good and the land of Israel would consequently yield its harvest. Like God’s people, God’s Promised Land would be restored to life. God is a generous God, generous with His goodness and blessings. When God’s ways are honored among His people, righteousness will “go before” Him and “make a path” for His footsteps. God’s presence among His people will become evident when we experience revival. We must pray for revival and, in fact, we can anticipate God’s positive response to our prayers for revival.