

Listen to this profound thought by John Starke:

I cannot choose to fall asleep. The best I can do is choose to put myself in a posture and rhythm that welcomes sleep. I lie down in bed, on my left side, with my knees drawn up; I close my eyes and breath slowly, putting my plans out of my mind. But the power of my will or consciousness stops there. I want to go to sleep, and I've chosen to climb into bed—but in another sense sleep is not something under my control or at my beckoned call. I call up the visitation of sleep by imitating the breathing and posture of a sleeper ... There is a moment when sleep "comes" settling on this imitation of itself which I have been offering to it, and I succeed in becoming what I was trying to be. Sleep is a gift to be received, not a decision to be made. And yet it is a gift that requires a posture of reception—a kind of active welcome.

The profoundness that I find with these words... is that John Starke is comparing sleep - to revival. (LISTEN) churches cannot produce revival... any more that you and I can produce sleep. We are only able to be the object of revival... rather than its producer. ... It is a gift to be received. ... We can (and need) to put ourselves in a posture and rhythm that welcomes revival. ... But unlike sleep... I don't think our waiting is as passive as it seems.

We will see this in our passage this morning from Genesis 35. We come today to the first recorded revival in the Bible. It is when Jacob returned to Bethel. ... My hope is that today's message will inspire us to become the kind of people (the kind of church) that God uses for revival. ... You and I both know that we need revival in our land today. True revival is the only answer to the overwhelming problems that dominate our society and our world. I don't think there could ever be a better time for it... and I don't think that there was a better time for Jacob to experience one... either.

Jacob was facing unbearable trouble... a desperation that created a deep sense of need in his heart and life. ... Jacob was afraid... frightened to the core of his being. ... His daughter (Dinah) had just been abused and raped by the local prince of the area. ... In retaliation... his sons had just struck out and killed all the males of the city. ... They had also looted the city... taking all the women and children as servants.

Now Jacob was facing retaliation from the surrounding nations of Canaanites. In fact... he was actually expecting them to join forces... greatly outnumber him... and come attack and destroy him (we saw this last week in Genesis 34:30). ... He was very fearful of what was about to happen. ... But there were other things were disturbing Jacob as well.

Jacob had not set a spiritual example before his children. He had not given them the needed spiritual and moral guidance. He had often demonstrated a weak character before his children... seldom standing up to others... for what he knew to be right. ... He had lived a carnal... worldly life... and the impact upon his children was now being realized. ... Jacob was heartsick... needing God to step into the life of his dear family... and bring revival to them all.

And then... there was the fact that Jacob was experiencing a deep sense of disobedience and backsliding. ... He had been back in the promised land for some nine or ten years... yet he had never taken time to travel up to Bethel to fulfill his vow to God. ... What was his vow? ... That he would worship God at Bethel when he was in the area (we saw this back in Genesis 28:20-22). ... There was no excuse for his continued disobedience... because Bethel was only a day's journey away... (only

some twenty to thirty miles distance.) ... Furthermore... right before entering the promised land... God had given Jacob a deep spiritual experience at Peniel. So when Jacob entered the promised land... he had an unusual sense of God's presence... and his responsibility to journey up to Bethel was bound to be fresh upon his mind. ... But that is not (at all) what happened. ... He had settled down right beside Shechem and soon seemed to forget all about Bethel. He acted as though he did not remember his vow to God. ... But the growing and convicting power of God's Spirit... was no doubt working on Jacob... convicting him of his disobedience and backsliding.

Jacob was also bothered about STILL something else - deeply bothered about it. He had allowed idolatry... the worship of other gods... within his own household. (This will be discussed later.) ... The point to see now... is that Jacob had not made God the Lord of his household... and he was now being forced to face up to his failure.

With all the trouble that had fallen upon him and his family... Jacob had to search and find out what was wrong... what had caused God to remove His protective hand from him. ... Jacob's conclusion was bound to be that the fault lay within his own heart and life... that he had been disobedient and backsliding. And now God was dealing with him... in discipline.

But the truth of the matter was this: God had **always been** dealing with Jacob. ... God had never left him alone. ... It had just taken a long time for Jacob to face up to his failures. ... In fact... it had taken this crisis of the threatening attack by the surrounding Canaanites.

Jacob takes spiritual responsibility for his house... and exhorts them that it is time to get right with the Lord and clean up their lives. Within these verses we find the elements of the first revival in Scripture.

Everything seemed to have come to a head. ... Jacob was almost out of his mind. ... Dinah was sitting desolate in his camp... shamed and a widow before ever a wife - thanks to the fury of her brothers. ... Levi and Simeon were scowling defiantly at Jacob (whose rebuke they had just refused.) And the story of the last night's dark deeds... was speeding across the length and breadth of the land... to all the Canaanite peoples. ... If ever a man needed a decisive word from God - it was Jacob... the morning after the Shechem massacre.

Revival was needed... and it came! ... But before we get to it... let me point something out which is very important. ... (LISTEN!) ... The good news of the Gospel... is that none of us has to stay the way we are. ... No matter how many times we've failed the Lord... we can go home again... if we truly repent and obey. ... It happened to Abraham (Gen. 13)... Isaac (Gen. 26)... David (2 Sam. 12)... Jonah (Jonah 3)... and Peter (John 21.) ... And now it's happening to Jacob.

Here is the posture and rhythm that welcomes revival... which we learn from our passage today. We will see five elements:

- **Ceasing**—A Putting away of strange gods. We are to put away ANYTHING that harms our walk with God.
- **Cleansing**—"Be clean." If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- **Changing**—"Change your garments." We are to repent of our sin... start fresh... and change the direction we are spiritually going in our life.
- **Committing**—We are to arise and go up to our Bethel. When we are truly determined to serve the Lord... we will not be easily deterred. Bethel was uphill. ... Revival takes effort. It demands total commitment.
- **Complying**—They gave to Jacob all their strange gods and he hid them. They obeyed Jacob... when he called for them to turn them over to him – so they would no longer have them again.

So these are the five things we will look at today. They are the posture and rhythm that welcomes revival.

Genesis 35:1

Probably thirty years at least had passed since Jacob had had that vision of the "ladder"... and now God reminds him of the pledge which Jacob had failed to redeem. (Jacob said he would return to Bethel.) ... God here addressed Himself to Jacob's conscience... with respect to his neglect in performing the vow he made after seeing the ladder of angels. ... God had performed His part... but Jacob had failed. ... God had preserved him wherever Jacob went... and had brought him back safely to the land of Canaan. ... But now... Jacob had been in the land nearly ten years.

We need to recognize that the years we spend... in living a lack-luster... partially obedient Christian life... are a waste of time (absolutely a waste of time.) ... God called the children of Israel to get out of Egypt and into the land of promise. God appeared to them and told them to go into the land...

but they didn't go in. ... Forty years they wandered around... and then God appeared to Joshua and said, "*Go into the land.*" He picked up right where He had left off. ... But they had wasted forty years.

How many people are wasting their lives as Christians? ... I don't know about you... but maybe you'll see yourself a lot like Jacob... and that's another reason our passage today is so applicable! ... (JUST REALIZE THIS!)... If He'll be the God of Jacob... He will certainly be the God of any of us also -- that's wonderful! This chapter is a great encouragement to us.

Is God calling for revival in you...? Do you have any sense that you have wasted your years... as a Christian...? ... Just as we see here in verse one... God initiates revival. He calls us to it. He produces it. ... Has He put His finger on any areas of your life... where there has only been partial obedience to Him? Are there things that you know He wants you to do... but you have been ignoring...?

Genesis 35:2-4

Here are the five elements of the posture and rhythm of revival. #1. Is to put away all the god's and idols in your life.

The idols that Jacob called them to put away... probably included the gods that his own beloved Rachael had stolen from her father... when they left Haran. But remember that Jacob's sons had looted Shechem... after Simeon and Levi slaughtered all the males of the city. ... They... no doubt took many idols... made of precious metal... that were great works of art. ... But they had no place being among the people of God. All this heathen stuff had to go... if there was to be revival.

How many people today still hang on to the gods and idols of this earth? Remember... anything can become a god to us. ... Whatever consumes us — whatever we give ourselves to... whatever dominates us... whatever we look to for help... whatever we put before God Himself — that thing becomes a god or idol in our lives. ... It may be GOOD (or bad) things such as... money... popularity... family... personal appearance... human intellect... clothing... drugs... alcohol... horoscopes... career... superstitions... worldly philosophy... or psychology.

Churches can have idols. ... Our church had to go through a trial... in recent years... when we faced a situation and were very prayerfully following Scripture's clear teaching for handling it. ... We had a person persistently demand that we **stop** following Scripture's prescription... and to try (instead) using that person's proposed modern techniques of psychology. We didn't... because whatever we look to for help... whatever we put before God Himself — that thing becomes a god or idol ... and we have no posture for God-sent revival. ... Churches or individuals can have an idol.

J. Vernon McGee has written:

There are too many folk who six days a week are serving some other god, and on Sunday they try to serve the Lord. Many Christians, even fundamental believers, have their strange gods, and then they wonder why their service in church on Sunday is not a thrilling experience. My friend, you are going to have to put away your strange gods. I don't know what yours might be." ... "If you are going to come back to Bethel where you met God at the beginning, then, my friend, you must put away those things that are wrong..."

The posture and rhythm that welcomes revival that we have in our passage is **Ceasing** — Put away the strange gods. We are to put away ANYTHING that harms our walk with God... or attempts to replace Him... as our source of help.

Then Jacob says, "Be clean." Here is another part of the posture and rhythm that welcomes revival. For the believer... that means confession of sins. You have to deal with sin in your life. You cannot come to church on Sunday and dismiss the way you have lived during the week that has just passed. ... After all... you take a physical bath and use a deodorant before you come to church. Why would anyone want to come to church without taking care to rid themselves of "spiritual" body odor...? ... (LISTEN!) there is often a bad smelling "spiritual body odor" in our churches... simply because there is no confession of sin... no cleansing. "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1John 1:9). There must be the confession. He will forgive... but we must confess.

Jacob called for **cleansing**... before they went up to Bethel. With "*Bethel*" meaning the "house of God"... we have an example (here) about cleaning up **before** you go to church to worship.

I am going to be real honest here. I don't think that there is enough of this that happens just before church services begin (in our day.) ... I am very happy that we all love to be with each other and want to visit and find out how each other's weeks have gone – but when it is done to the exclusion of preparing your heart to meet with God (once the service starts)... it ceases to be a good thing. Please use the moments before the church service

begins... to place yourself in the posture and rhythm that welcomes revival.
“Cleanse your heart before going up to Bethel.”

Jacob also told them to change their garments... and this refers to old habits. It symbolized that they were putting off the old life of sin and putting on the new life of godliness. ... Jacob's command is likely where Paul derived the metaphor for the changed life... exhorting the Ephesian church (and us)...

Ephesians 4:22-24 (ESV)

²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

The third posture and rhythm that welcomes revival... that our passage mentions... is **change**. Are there some old habits that you need to put off...? ... Here again... I ask... what has God identified in your life as needing to go...? ... Or... what good habits has He identified... that you need to put on...?

A fourth posture and rhythm is **commitment**. Bethel was a good thousand feet up from Shechem geographically. ... This would be a hard trip getting his entire household up to Bethel. ... But Jacob had the consecration... in spite of the difficulties. (LISTEN!) Many of our Sundays are up-hill tasks... in getting our household to church. ... It requires commitment to do. Some of you might be thinking about the hardship you experienced in getting here this morning. ... Thank you for showing your commitment. Keep it up! It is part of the rhythm we need for revival.

The fifth posture and rhythm that we observe is **compliance**. They had already ceased to regard their idols as having significance on par with the Lord. Now they were told to hand them over... to never have access to them again. Bury them... and don't come back to them.

I hate to say this... but all too often... we are ready enough to put our idols away... in times of spiritual awakening... but all too prone to put them where we can go back to them (later) if we wish. ... (For example)... you may have controls put on your computer... that are designed to keep you from sin. ... However... you know there are ways of getting around them... or you may have access to other computers and devices. ... But in turning them over to Jacob... his household wasn't doing this. They willingly gave up their access to them.

Why did the people give Jacob their earrings? Jewelry in itself was not evil... but in Jacob's day earrings were often worn as good luck charms to ward off evil. The people in his family had to cleanse themselves of all pagan influences... including reminders of foreign gods. ... Satan must not be employed in the service of God... and we need to forsake even the appearance of evil.

After placing themselves into the posture and rhythm that welcomes revival... revival did come. ... Here is part of the supernatural wind that blew around them.

Genesis 35:5-7

The surrounding communities were evidently plotting vengeance for the Shechem massacre... committed by Simeon and Levi. ... But a supernatural dread... not of Jacob... but of **God**... fell upon the land.

When God's people are doing God's will in God's way... they can depend on God's provision and protection. When we fear God... we need fear no one else. ... Not a hand can be raised against any of the Lord's people... without His direct permission... and even when our enemies are enraged against us... God can put His "terror" upon them... and suddenly they are impotent. (What does Proverbs 21:1 say...? "*the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He channels it where ever He wills*".)

Isaiah 43:2-4 (ESV)

² *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.* ³ *For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you.*

⁴ *Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.*

Jacob had been putting off the requirement of returning to Bethel and fulfilling his vow. He had felt safe... remaining where he was. He was in the midst of what he thought was ideal living... where he had built up a reputation with the people of the land and expanded his personal business. ... But (CAREFULLY MARK THIS!)... disobedience to God is the single **greatest danger** for any child of God.

The irony here is that Jacob was in greatest danger - when he thought he was safe... and he was actually the **safest** when he thought he was in the greatest danger. ... (Thanks to the writer of Scripture... we know what

Jacob could not know.) By returning to Bethel... he was in God's will and finally being obedient. There... he was safe. (LISTEN!) The safest place for you and I to be... is always in the will of God. ... When God's people are doing God's will in God's way... they can depend on God's provision and protection.

Jacob and his people had been dwelling in the posture and rhythm of revival... and revival happened. We can see it in many ways. One of the definite results of revival... is a deepened sense of God's presence. (Here the deepened sense of His presence was in the form of His provision and protection)... And another result (that we also see here) is a deeper worship.

They built a permanent altar... and once the altar was built... the people worshipped and sought the face of the Lord. (Scripture does not mention this because it is to be assumed.) There would have been no reason to build a permanent altar... unless Jacob and his people were going to worship God there... and do so publicly... before the Canaanites.

He built an altar and gave it a name—El-bethel, "The Mighty God of the house of God." It was a great step forward to get beyond God's house to God Himself. ... Jacob expanded the name that he previously gave this place... to "the God of Bethel."

When Jacob had his vision of the ladder with angels ascending and descending... he was very much impressed with the place. He uttered... "*Surely, the Lord is in this place!*" and "*How awesome is this place!*" (Genesis 28:16-17.) He thought Bethel was a particularly holy spot. ... However... now we see that Jacob has grown (very much) in his

understanding. ... It wasn't the place that was important any longer. Instead it was the God of the place... and what He had done for Jacob.

(LISTEN!) This needs to be happening with you and I. When we are young in the Lord... our minds are naturally impressed with things... people... places... and events. We link our spiritual experiences with big name speakers... large conferences that we must attend every year... at special conference grounds in the mountains or at the beach. ... AND THIS IS ALRIGHT! I am NOT knocking Christian conferences... excellent Biblical communicators... or conference facilities. ... UNLESS (relatively speaking)... they overshadow God Himself. (BE HONEST WITH ME... HERE!) Isn't it true (?) that we can rejoice so much in our great Christian rallies... that our day-to-day enjoyment of God Himself (once we come down from the mountaintop) is minimized...?

Here is what I am saying: Seek an everyday love for God Himself... one that will overshadow the best conference you have ever attended. Don't be content with a focus on a place or an event. Grow as Jacob did. Rejoice more in God's presence.

I have been to a lot of conferences myself... and I am likely to attend more. I've been motivated by them to seek revival in our land. But a better rhythm and posture for revival... is for us to focus on the Lord above any place... person... or event.

Every day... as you study your Bible... read it while telling yourself... *"Yes... that is what God is like! That is what God taught me about Himself several years ago... when I went through _____."* ... Or perhaps read and

tell yourself... *“That is the way God does things. He did the same in my life...”* ... You might even say something like... *“Wow! What a glorious truth! I really believe that! I have found that this has been true several times in my life...”*

Do you see what I am saying...? I am saying **enjoy God!** Interact with Him through His Word. Remember His past blessings... reflect on them and meditate on His Word. This will place yourself into the rhythm and posture of revival.

Just like Jacob... we need revival today. We need to place ourselves in the rhythm and posture that welcomes revival.

I am going close this morning with a quote that I have used before. It is a prayer attributed to Sir Francis Drake (the ship captain explorer during the Elizabethan era) :

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new Earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love."