

Revivals And Church History :: The Revival in Saskatoon Canada in 1971 by Bill McLeod

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The Revival in Saskatoon Canada in 1971- a first hand report

by Pastor Bill McLeod

In 1962 I moved from Winnipeg with my wife Barbara to Saskatoon to become the pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church. This was a church associated with the Central Baptist Conference. It had a membership at that time of 175 and the building would seat 300 comfortably. We had a good congregation. They were very thoughtful of my wife and I and very interested in Evangelism and Missions. The trouble was that nobody was really doing either. After I had been there about a year and knew the people fairly well; I introduced an evangelism series to try and get them involved. Nobody showed up for these so I concluded that the problem was that they needed some training in Evangelistic methods. This too went over like a lead balloon and I was forced to conclude the real problem was simply that they did not have the heart to do it. That was when I began to pray for revival. I began by emphasizing the Wednesday night prayer meeting. We had around twenty five people attending. I would say things like this, 'Miss Sunday morning if you have to; miss Sunday evening if you must; but never miss the prayer meeting unless you are dead,' People began to take this seriously and the prayer meeting began to grow. We got up to fifty and then eventually to a hundred. And, over a period of time we got up to a hundred and fifty. Occasionally we had as many people attending as we had members in the church. One of the things that helped to boost attendance was that we started a children's prayer meeting. They met with the adults on Wednesday but then after the singing they had their own prayer time in another auditorium. We eventually had as many as thirty or forty children attending. They ran their own prayer meetings and they loved it. We had an adult meeting with the children to make sure the train never got off the tracks. Because the children had their own prayer meeting this meant that more adults could attend since they did not have to stay home with their children.

It is not too well known that Jonathan Edwards and others told of very powerful revivals in their day that started with children having their own prayer meetings. Adults would sit at the back and listen to the children praying and often this sparked a revival movement among the adults. Before I knew better I used to speak for thirty minutes at the prayer meeting and then we would pray for perhaps fifteen minutes and we called this a prayer meeting. I turned this around so that I spoke for fifteen minutes and we prayed for thirty minutes. We then began to end our Sunday evening meetings with a half hour of prayer for revival. Five years before the revival we started a Saturday night prayer time for Deacons. It was understood we would not be longer than thirty minutes. We had ten deacons and our average attendance was around seven. We eventually started a prayer wheel. This was a large card where people could sign up for a definite time- promising to spend at least fifteen minutes a day in prayer for revival. We came very close to having the entire twenty four hours taken up with prayer. Later on we suggested that people should ask God to waken them through the night to pray for revival. This became a very important thing and people began sharing with me how they were praying for long periods of time during the night. One lady told me how she was usually prayed out in five minutes. Now, she said, I am praying for forty minutes at night and am not tired. There were some of our people who began meeting together privately just to pray for revival. We also began Cottage prayer meetings but this was the only thing that did not seem to catch on well in the area of prayer. The prayer meetings themselves also changed. We kept encouraging people to share with the group any answers to prayer they had. They began doing this and eventually people also began sharing prayer needs they had. At times we invited people to come forward and kneel at a chair while others of us would pray for them. The Wednesday night prayer meeting became a REAL prayer meeting and the attendance stayed high.

Before the revival began in 1971 we had the beginning of revival twice. On one occasion at a Saturday night Deacons prayer meeting somebody made the statement that if we were not dealing with our sins then praying was useless. God came on the scene and tears began flowing. One Deacon ran to me and hugged me and asked me to forgive him for he had been very critical of me. Deacons began kneeling with other deacons and making things right. Everybody was affected. Had I asked these men to share their experience the next morning-Sunday-in the service, we might have had a revival then. It was just not God's time for this never happened. On another occasion, one Sunday morning, while I was preaching, I sensed a new power in the meeting and then I saw people getting up and going to other rooms where they could be alone with God. Obviously something deep was going on but it was short lived. Certainly it was an

indication that the Lord was moving us in the direction of a genuine revival. WE did not see this at the time but later on we did. I should point out that had I tried to lay on my people all at once these various ways to pray, it would never have gone well. It would have been too much. In Zechariah 12:10 it speaks of God pouring out on His people 'the spirit of grace and supplication.' One translation speaks of 'the spirit of grace to supplicate.' There is such a thing as a spirit of prayer. Finney made much of this and declared that if he ever lost the spirit of prayer, he could not converse effectively, privately or publicly. When God saw that we meant business in the area of prayer He gave us a deepening spirit of prayer and thus our people were able to accept the different challenges we gave them.

There is a story going around that Duncan Campbell, the man God used in the Great Hebrides Awakening in Scotland, had shared with me that he had seen a vision of revival coming to Canada and beginning in my church. He had shared this with my brother Keith in Winnipeg some weeks before the revival but Keith never shared this with me till after the revival. Duncan Campbell was with us for a few days two years or so before the revival but never breathed a word about this vision to me. I am glad that nobody did share this with me for if they had done so I would have been running around trying to make it happen.

Ralph and Lou Sutura finally arrived and they gave us a large banner about revival they wanted us to put up on the outside wall of the church. We did so but that very night a rain and windstorm blew it down into the mud and it was never used again. it was not needed. These two twin brothers had seen revival in local churches over the years of their ministry. We started on a Wednesday evening with about 150 people. They gave an invitation and four or five people responded and there were some making things right with others. This kept on and by Saturday night we were more than just crowded out. We simply had to get a larger building. There was an Anglican building a few blocks away from our building and they said we could rent it as long as we needed except on Sunday morning. It would seat around six hundred.

The first night there we were crowded out and we asked the young people present to come and sit on the floor on the platform. Many did so and this relieved the pressure somewhat but we only spent two nights there and we simply had to move again. The Alliance congregation already had missionaries in town for their annual missionary conference and they cancelled their conference and offered their building to us. This was a very magnanimous gesture for with Alliance people in those days the missionary conference was a sacred thing and was never sacrificed for anything. We could seat close to a thousand people in their building and we speedily saw it fill up and we had to move again. We rented the largest church building in the city-a United Church building, It would seat 1600 people and it speedily filled up and then we started having two evening meetings to handle the crowds. The first meeting we had there the building was not only filled up but there were many people still trying to get in. The caretaker got very agitated and told me in no uncertain terms we would have to get rid of some people as the building was too crowded and he said the Fire Marshall would close the place down. I went to the pulpit and asked my people from the Ebenezer congregation to leave and go to the Alliance church which was not far away. They did so and I had a meeting there with them. A few days later the caretaker got saved and then he didn't care if we hung people on the lights!!

We had originally planned to run for a week and a half but we had to go for seven weeks. This was in October and that time of year we could have heavy snow etc. God gave us what we called 'revival weather' and for the entire time we had quiet sunny weather. People began phoning us to enquire as to what was going on. Others began to drive or fly in to Saskatoon to see first hand what God was doing. People began to sense the presence of God in a great way. The Suteras would have a 'sharing time' every meeting and at times as many as thirty or more people would want to share. There were two meetings where there was no preaching. Ordinarily one of the Twins would preach for forty minutes. A story circulated that there was very little preaching in the revival movement but this was not true at all. Somebody kept a record and there was a report that around fifteen sinners were converted in every meeting although the Gospel was not preached. As sinners heard the glowing testimonies of renewed Christians they came under conviction. Then too there were many people converted outside of the meetings as Christians began sharing the gospel with relatives and friends.

Edwin Orr was asked at a Conference in Minneapolis why he never referred to the Canadian revival He said that there were two reasons. He said it was based on a strong separatistic note and it never moved out of Saskatoon. The separatistic thing was that he reported that I had said (which I never did say) that God sent revival to my church because I would not work with Billy Graham. Dr. Orr did not know that we stopped counting teams going out of Saskatoon after we reached the 2000 mark. Teams visited every province in Canada and every state in the United States and then teams went around the world. A team of 80 German speaking people, -Mennonites, Pentecostals and Baptists- flew to Germany and spent some time there sharing the revival message. Another team of Dutch speaking people went to Holland during those days. I myself visited half of the States in the

the U.S.A. and every province in Canada except for P.E.I. and Newfoundland. I had crusades in South America in four or five different countries. I visited India twice and the Philippines three times and had meetings in Romania and Scotland. Other teams likewise visited other countries so obviously Orr was wrong in assuming the movement never left Saskatoon. Later on Edwin Orr got things right and apologized publicly to Canadian audiences and twice invited me to come to England and do revival research with him and others.

There was a great deal of restitution going on during those days. The Chief of police in Saskatoon issued a report to the daily paper and said this, 'I am not a religious person but I do know the difference between ordinary church work and revival. Revival has come to our city because we are having people coming in to us confessing to crimes.' The revival was marked with people making restitution with others or perhaps with Churches or other institutions. Conviction of sin was at times very very deep. One man told me the pressure of the Holy Spirit was so deep on his heart that he did not care if he lost his job, his family or even went to jail. Any one of these things was possible in his case. We often saw people under such deep conviction of sin that they could not speak without bursting into tears. Ralph and Lou did a tremendous job of keeping the movement inside Bible guidelines. Occasionally some Mormon or Jehovah Witness would start giving a testimony of some sort and they would stop them. The testimony times were carefully guarded. The Suterases were very obviously walking closely to the Lord and were a very big help to me.

Following the evening meetings we had what were called After Glows. These were informal meetings running anywhere from 30 to 300. We would sit in a circle with a chair in the middle and invite people to share a testimony or a song and then eventually people needing a personal revival would be invited to go to the chair and kneel and others would then come and counsel and pray with them. These meetings would sometimes go on for hours. Sherwood Wirt who edited the Billy Graham decision paper for years wrote a book entitled 'The After Glow' in which he tells about the way God met him in revival after coming to Canada and then attending a revival meeting in Winnipeg. Restitution was also a marked feature of this movement. We heard hundreds of people sharing their personal account of making restitution. A great wave of love swept over the evangelical world during those days. Over and over we heard people share how God had broken their hearts and transformed them into a loving individual. It would be easy to write a book dealing with Restitution or love. Hundreds of stories fill my mind even as I write. A group of churches contacted us from Colorado asking us to send a team as they had ten churches who were wanting to experience revival. We had none we could send so we simply sent a team of revived farmers from Saskatchewan. They had a week of meetings and sinners were converted and Christians experienced personal revival.

The revival movement after Saskatoon went west with Suterases and east with myself to Winnipeg. Wherever Ralph and Lou went there were the same manifestations we had seen in Saskatoon. I had meetings in Winnipeg at that time also and we had to go for five weeks of meetings there. We rented a building seating 1200 and it proved to be too small and so we had to rent a larger facility. Out of those meetings in after years we heard of 30 people who had gone into full time work as a result of the touch of God on their lives at that time. This kind of thing was true wherever the revival movement went.

The Western Tract Mission reported that in the first year after the revival tract sales and distributions increased by almost 300 percent. They had at that time around 3000 tract distributors. The Alliance denominations reported a 100 percent increase in souls saved in their churches the year following the revival. One Baptist group reported that for the first time in their history in the year following the revival they had gone away over the top in meeting their financial budget. There were many stories of divorced people remarrying after experiencing a touch of God. In India at a revival conference with members of the Mar Toma church a missionary with TEAM mission told how he had left the call of God to the mission field till a revival team had come to his home church in Ontario and he had come back to the Lord and was now of course in India.

It is impossible to chronicle ALL that God did at that time and is still doing as a result of the awakening in 1971. I once prayed over a new born child at the parents request that God would bless this child and she would become a worker for Him. Recently this girl was in our home telling us the way God was working in her heart and leading her into full time Christian work. While God used Pastors and Evangelists and Missionaries during those days, It would be truthful to say that he did also do much through the testimony of revived lay people. The story of revived people was a very effectual testimony to thousands of people in every walk of life. In retrospect all we can say is that God breathed into His church and Thousands found new life in Christ.

The Canadian Revival Fellowship in Regina Saskatchewan was formed in the early days of the revival and works with the many teams we have on the road. Their address is Canadian Revival Fellowship, 70 From Crescent Regina Saskatc

hewan Canada.S4N IS7.Their phone number is 1-306-522-3685. Ralph and Lou Sutera are still on the road and still being used of God to bring revival to individuals and churches. They can be reached through the Canadian Revival Fellowship. Their wisdom and patience in revival work was a tremendous help and blessing to me. There is an old saying credited by many, that if you once see revival it is unlikely you will ever see another one. It is pointed out in support of this that there are many great and godly men who never got to see even one revival.

Dr. Orr in his many works on revival has pointed out that there were churches that experienced six or seven revivals over a period of time. Pastor Stoddard, a relative of Jonathan Edwards saw five revivals in his church in 35 years. It all comes back to the combination of the God element and the human element. In that very interesting book by Pastor Calvin Colton published in 1832 he points out very clearly that in his day revival never came to a church that did not believe it would come. He also noted that it never failed to come to churches that believed it would come. The book is entitled 'A History of American Revivals of Religion.' I understand it has been republished recently.

There is a book entitled Flames of Freedom. It was written by Dr. Erwin Lutzer who is the head Pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago. It is the best book on the Canadian Revival that I know about. It has one weakness in that he does not give any reference to the way our church prayed. God promised through Peter in Acts.3:19 that there would be what he called 'Times of Refreshing from the presence of the Lord.' Let us believe him and seek such times for His glory. In Luke 11:13 we read, 'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.'

Re: The Revival in Saskatoon Canada in 1971 by Bill McLeod - posted by Bobw (), on: 2012/2/12 21:58

I have been praying for Revival now for several months. I share it with my Pastor and church family, but also on the large scale on Facebook. I really believe that a Revival will come. Whenever I talk about it, I start out with ME! Revival starts with individuals committing themselves to Jesus Christ. I pray for myself, that God will change me so that my wife and kids will see it. I pray for my wife and kids that they too will experience revival. Next I pray for my pastor and deacons and then the rest of our congregation. What happened in Saskatoon, could happen again in a larger scale. Could this be the last great revival before the rapture? If it is, I want to be a part of it! Thankyou Bill for the article. It is very inspiring and I have shared it with my Pastor and deacons