

COMEBACK GROUPS

Returning to God's Word, Will, and Way

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

4

CHAPTER 1

Comeback Groups Realize

13

CHAPTER 2

Comeback Groups Respond

25

CHAPTER 3

Comeback Groups Remember

41

CHAPTER 4

Revive Us Again

53

CONFERENCE TRAINING PLAN

58

ENDNOTES

64

Introduction

In 1973, I was saved at the age of ten at Plymouth Park Baptist Church in Irving, Texas. My sister and I were in Sunday School and morning worship each week. Missing church and Sunday School was not an option. I have joked that I developed a drug problem in my childhood years—I was “drug” to church every Sunday by my parents! Mom also enrolled us in Vacation Bible School each summer, plus other activities, where we heard about Jesus while building friendships with kids our age. All of this laid a foundation for me to hear and accept the gospel one Sunday night during a revival.

I remember that special Sunday vividly. I also remember there was a dynamic guest preacher who shared the gospel message with us. That Sunday morning, I paid close attention to what he said, and I suddenly (and quite unexpectedly) felt the moving of the Holy Spirit within me. To be honest, it scared me. As a ten-year-old boy, I realized that God was speaking directly to me. The evangelist preached a powerful sermon and presented a clear and compelling invitation to follow Christ. He asked us to stand, sing, and respond to God.

I knew that I should have walked the aisle at that moment, but I chose not to. The congregation sang through several stanzas of the invitation hymn, but I kept my hands firmly planted on the back of the pew in front of me. My personal hymn at that moment could have been “We Shall Not Be Moved”!

When the invitation was over, we took our seats. The offering plate was passed, announcements were made, people who responded to the gospel were introduced, and my family headed home for Sunday lunch.

All afternoon I could not get the words of the preacher out of my mind. And then it happened again—in my bedroom of all places! The Holy Spirit began convicting me of my sin and of my need for Jesus. I knew God talked to people in the Bible, but now He was talking to me! I went to my mother and explained what had happened that morning at church. She and my father spoke to me about what they believed was taking place, and there on Pritchett Street in Irving, Texas, at the age of ten, I asked Jesus to be my Savior.

We went back for the Sunday night revival service, listened to another message from the evangelist, and when the invitation was given, I made my way to him and told him that I had accepted Jesus as my Savior at home with my parents. I remember my parents made me walk the aisle by myself—probably because they wanted me to accept responsibility for this spiritual moment. It was scary because the auditorium was completely full of churchgoers. A few weeks later, I was baptized on a Sunday night.

I thank God for the revival week at our church. That revival was life-changing for me and others who also surrendered their lives to Jesus, making Him their Lord and Savior as I did. I did not fully understand everything that had happened, but I understood the essentials of the gospel.

God's Pattern for Revival and Spiritual Awakening

My friend and former teammate at Lifeway Christian Resources, Claude V. King, is the co-author of *Experiencing God*. Claude has written numerous works, and he wrote a book in which he chronicled God's pattern for revival. In this book, Claude outlined seven phases that describe the process of revival as seen on the pages of Scripture.¹

Phase 1: God is on mission to redeem a lost world. He calls a people into a relationship with Himself, and He accomplishes His work through them.

Phase 2: God's people tend to depart from Him, turning to substitutes for His presence, His purposes, and His ways.

Phase 3: God disciplines His people because of His love.

Phase 4: God's people cry out to Him for help.

Phase 5: God calls His people to repent and return to Him or perish.

Phase 6: God revives His repentant people by restoring them to a right relationship with Himself.

Phase 7: God exalts His Son Jesus in His people and draws the lost to saving faith in Him.

Revival in the Old Testament

Revival is a powerful event that can be seen throughout the Old Testament. As you read verses about the revival of God's people, you see the heart of God to restore and forgive them.

- "Return, unfaithful Israel. . . . I will not look on you with anger, for I am unfailing in my love" (Jer. 3:12).
- "Return, you faithless children . . . for I am your master" (v. 14).
- "Return, you faithless children. I will heal your unfaithfulness" (v. 22).
- "Since the days of your ancestors, you have turned from my statutes; you have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you" (Mal. 3:7).
- "Repent and turn away from your idols; turn your faces away from all your detestable things" (Ezek. 14:6).

Revival in the Old Testament was a response to the grace of God and His desire to restore the people of Israel to a vibrant relationship with Him. The Israelites rhythmically strayed from their covenant with God, turning to idolatry and disobedience. "Come back to Me," said God to His people. When people returned to God, revival was not far behind.

Revival was a sign of the inward change of the heart. God's warnings to His people through the prophets served as a wake-up call to return to a place of true worship, obedience, and devotion to the God who loved them with all His heart.

Revival brought about a renewed passion for God, a hunger for His Word, and a desire to live according to His commandments. In the midst of spiritual lethargy and complacency, revival rekindled the fire of devotion, inspiring the Israelites to seek God with their whole hearts.

But Wait, There's More!

Revival in the Old Testament had broader implications beyond individual lives. It often had local, regional, and national implications. The revival under the leadership of King Josiah, for example, resulted in extensive religious reforms throughout Judah, culminating in the rediscovery of the book of the Law. Such revivals brought about social, moral, and religious transformation within the nation, reminding them of their unique identity as the people of God.

Revival served as a catalyst for the strengthening of faith. When the Israelites experienced seasons of doubt, despair, or external threats, revival gave them a renewed confidence in God's power, faithfulness, and provision. Through revival, God demonstrated His authority and reminded His people of His ability to deliver them from any adversity. This reinforcement of faith helped the Israelites overcome their fears and walk in obedience to God's will.

Revival in the Old Testament was not limited to the Israelites alone. It often attracted the attention of distant peoples, becoming a testimony to God's sovereignty. The revival under the prophet Elijah, for instance, displayed God's power over false gods and drew people from other nations to acknowledge the one true God of Israel. In 2 Chronicles 15, the revival under King Asa attracted the attention of people from the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, who defected to him in large numbers when they saw God at work among the people. (See verse 9.)

The Old Testament provides us with examples of revival experiences that emphasize the significance of returning to God, renewing spiritual life, strengthening faith, and living as God's covenant people. Revival transformed individuals, communities, and nations. The lessons learned from these Old Testament revivals continue to be relevant today, reminding us of the importance of seeking God, renewing our faith, and experiencing personal and corporate transformation.

Fast Forward

Throughout history, the church has experienced spiritual revivals that have shaped the course of religious life, and the course of countries. From the Renaissance to the present day, spiritual movements have surged, offering solace, enlightenment, and a renewed experience and deepened connection with God.

The Protestant Reformation, spearheaded by Martin Luther in the early 16th century, marked a significant shift in Christianity. Challenging the established authority of the Roman Catholic Church, Luther sought to reform doctrine and religious practices. This movement triggered a wave of religious fervor, emphasizing direct communion with God, Scripture-based teachings, and individual response to the Bible.

The Great Awakening, which swept across Europe and North America in the 18th century, revitalized Christian faith and ignited a deep sense of personal piety. Preachers such as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards gave impassioned sermons, emphasizing the need for personal conversion and spiritual rebirth. The movement brought people together in large-scale outdoor gatherings, fostering a sense of community and shared religious experience.

Most recently, the Asbury revival broke out in Wilmore, Kentucky, on February 8, 2023. This revival was sparked by students who stayed in Hughes Auditorium of their own volition following a chapel service. When word about the spontaneous gathering took flight via social media and news outlets, the country took notice. The revival made the national news for many days in early 2023. Students prayed, worshiped, confessed sin, read Scripture, and met together for an extended time. Because of the reporting of the revival at Asbury on social media, young people by the millions viewed parts of it on Tik-Tok® and other social media platforms. *The Courier-Journal* reported that by February 18, over sixty-three million views on these platforms had taken place. People were interested in this revival, and for a generation of young people who had not connected with God and His church (like previous generations), the spiritual implications might be remarkable.

The spiritual revival in Kentucky, and revivals that precede it, remind us there is a deep yearning for connection to God. Scripture tells us that God's invisible attributes are on full display, alerting the observant person that there is a Creator. "For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

People who do not know God have a revelation of His presence and power through the created world. When revival breaks out among God's people, as it did in Asbury and other places, it helps spiritually curious people to take steps towards God. These lost individuals—to whom God reveals Himself through the created order—may be brought into the kingdom of God through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Interaction with God's people, especially when His people are in revival, can be transformative.

About This Book

God promises that if His people seek Him, pray, and humble themselves, He will hear from heaven and heal their land. (See 2 Chron. 7:14.) Some of you reading this book have experienced personal, spiritual revival at one point or another in your life. Others may even remember earlier revivals that broke out in the United States, or other countries. God is at work to this very day, and His Spirit is dealing with the hearts of people everywhere.

This book is a continuation of a series of annual books written by David Francis, Lifeway's long-time Director of Sunday School. The books are always short (three to four chapters) and are crafted to be read in just one or two sittings. The books also come with free conference training plans. David would say these books are "short, sweet, and to the point." They are designed to help churches discover new insights and train their group leaders in ways to conduct group ministry more effectively.

Chapters one through three of this book are based on three chapters in 2 Chronicles (chapters 14–16), which detail the revival that took place under King Asa. Readers will examine the elements of revival during King Asa's reign, and apply those elements to the work of Bible study groups today.

Why “Comeback” Groups?

This book has been titled *Comeback Groups* because of the focus on revival. The act of returning and coming back to God is called repentance, which is an action that is associated with revival. Repentance involves hearing God’s Word, responding to God’s Word, and making important spiritual changes.

God declares, “Return to me, and I will return to you” (Mal. 3:7). We have a choice to turn back to God. Revelation 2:4-5 contains the words of the Lord to His church at Ephesus: “But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.” The idea of repenting and coming back to God are both found in that verse.

Comeback Groups are Bible study groups in which people return to the Lord; Comeback Groups have group members who actively seek to return to the Lord spiritually. Individuals become aware of their sin. They seek God. They allow God’s Spirit to change them. When individuals experience revival, and the groups to whom they belong experience revival, churches experience revival. (See Claude King’s seven phases of revival I mentioned earlier on page 5.)

But Comeback Groups also come back in other ways. As people seek the Lord, they inspire and challenge their groups to come back to important tasks that may have been abandoned over time. Comeback Groups come back to doing the things that focus attention on important aspects of ministering to people through ongoing Bible study groups. We will look at those throughout this book, as we consider how they connect to the theme of revival, and how they connect to the story of the revival that took place under King Asa.

Three Elements of the 2 Chronicles Revival Are Addressed in Comeback Groups

As individuals and groups of believers seek God, important things take place. These can be seen in the revival that took place in 2 Chronicles 14–16. Each of the three elements will be explored in one of the three chapters of this book. For now, suffice it to say that under King Asa, he and his people experienced three realities that fueled revival in the Southern Kingdom of Judah:

- There was a realization of the presence and power of God (chapter 14)
- There was a response to God spiritually (chapter 15)
- There was a remembrance of God’s work (chapter 16)

We will see how these three realities apply to you and to the group you lead. My prayer is that revival breaks out in my life, in your life, and in the lives of the people you serve as a group leader. I pray that revival breaks out in your church. I pray that revival breaks out in our nation. We need Him more than ever before.

The Uniqueness of Kids' Groups

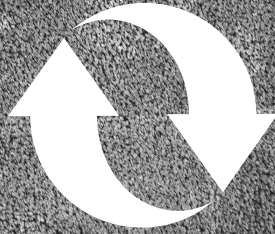
I love group leaders who serve the littlest ones in our churches. These wonderful adults have heard the call of God to teach children the Bible. They have heard the call to minister to and serve the families of the kids in their groups. Group leaders in kids' ministries around the country are laying foundations on which children will build their spiritual lives. And they are having a lot of fun doing it!

Because kids' groups have the littlest people in our churches, many of those children are not in a personal relationship with Jesus yet. Like my parents took me to church, moms and dads today take their children to church, enroll them in a Sunday School class, involve them in other activities, and allow the church to partner with them in raising their kids spiritually.

In kids' ministries, children are taught foundational stories from the Bible. They learn that Jesus loves them, died for them, and wants them to be with Him forever. Some kids come to Christ early in life (I was saved at age 10). Others come to know Jesus as Lord a bit later. Not every child in the church's ministry will experience revival like students and adults who are already saved.

If you are a leader in your church's ministry to kids, keep reading. This book applies to you as an adult, and it applies to your role as a group leader. No, the kids in your group may not be saved, nor may they experience revival like the one we will soon read about in 2 Chronicles 14–16, but the children you lead can come back (there's that term again) to learning and doing the same three things we'll study in each of the book's three chapters. So can the parents of those children!

By teaching little ones the Word of God, you are preparing their hearts and minds to place their faith and trust in Jesus. Thank you!



Chapter 1

**COMEBACK
GROUPS
REALIZE**

Second Chronicles 14 opens with the somber words, "Abijah rested with his ancestors and was buried in the city of David. His son Asa became king in his place" (v. 1). After the reporting of King Abijah's death, the chapter then focuses on the reign of King Asa and his efforts to bring about religious reforms in the kingdom of Judah. Bible scholars believe that Asa was very young when his father died.

King Asa began his reign by removing foreign idols and altars from the land of Judah. He encouraged his people to seek the Lord and obey God's commandments.

During his rule, the kingdom experienced peace and a renewed focus on God for multiple years. Recognizing the need for military strength, Asa fortified various cities throughout Judah by building up their defenses and equipping his army of 300,000 soldiers from Judah with shields and spears, as well as 280,000 soldiers from Benjamin with bows and arrows.

Then, significant challenge occurred. Zerah, an Ethiopian ruler, marched against Judah with an enormous army of one million men and three hundred chariots. Despite being vastly outnumbered, young King Asa put his trust in the Lord and prayed for God's help. The Lord answered Asa's prayer and granted him victory over the Ethiopians. Judah's army pursued and defeated the Ethiopians, capturing a large number of spoils.

Second Chronicles 14 portrays King Asa as a faithful and dedicated king, who sought to bring about religious reforms, strengthen his military, and lead his people in obedience to God's commandments. It was during this period, that we read about in chapter 14, that the people of Judah would have realized several initial truths about repentance and revival. Comeback Groups today realize and respond to these same things, too.

Realizing One Godly Person Can Influence Many People

Asa began his reign as king by doing some very good and godly things: “Asa did what was good and right in the sight of the LORD his God. He removed the pagan altars and the high places. He shattered their sacred pillars and chopped down their Asherah poles. He told the people of Judah to seek the LORD God of their ancestors and to carry out the instruction and the commands” (2 Chron. 14:2-4). As a result of Asa’s religious reforms, the people of Judah experienced a time of peace.

Not a bad beginning for a young king who had lost his father, right? As we read about Asa and his leadership, we look back and can see what his people experienced—Asa’s good and godly leadership. Perhaps you are a group leader who might say to yourself, “Yeah, but I’m no King Asa.” In fact, you are. King Asa was a human being just like us. Even though Asa did some truly remarkable things to stoke the fire of revival in his heart and in the hearts of his people, Asa was not perfect. Sometimes we elevate Bible characters to a place that is a bit too lofty. Asa, as good as he was, made mistakes. He failed. He sinned. Asa was just like us.

Despite his shortcomings, Asa served as an example of godliness to his people. They realized that the land experienced an extended time of peace because of Asa’s spiritual reforms, and the repentance and revival that accompanied those reforms. Asa challenged the people to make God the focus of their lives. He commanded that the people obey the Word of God. At the same time, Asa removed some of the temptations in the people’s lives—the places and objects of false worship that distracted them from the True and Living God.

I once heard a preacher say, “God uses crooked sticks to hit straight licks.” By this he meant that God uses imperfect human beings to accomplish His perfect will. King Asa had to have been a bit crooked (we will see that later in the story). So was King David, the man after God’s own heart. Even Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus (described as a righteous man in the Gospel of Matthew) was not perfect. Peter failed Christ three times during the night of Jesus’s trial. Noah was a drunkard. The apostle Paul was a murderer, who hunted down first-century Christians before his conversion on

the road to Damascus. You and I are not perfect, either, but God can use us—just like He did with King Asa—to shine as an example of godliness to our group members. Don't underestimate your spiritual influence!

Realizing the Power of Prayer

Prayer is often the starting point of repentance and revival. King Asa was faced with an impossible situation, in which he and the nation of Judah would perish at the hands of Zerah the Ethiopian. Vastly outnumbered and facing a much larger army with superior weapons, King Asa did what Comeback Groups and their people do today: He prayed. "Then Asa cried out to the LORD his God, 'LORD, there is no one besides you to help the mighty and those without strength. Help us, LORD our God, for we depend on you, and in your name we have come against this large army'" (2 Chron. 14:11).

Arthur Flake, the first Superintendent of Sunday School for the Southern Baptist Convention back in 1920, was convinced that the primary mission of every Sunday School group was clear-cut. He minced no words when he said the following: "The supreme business of Christianity is to win the lost to Christ. This is what churches are for. It was Christ's supreme mission. . . . Surely then the Sunday School must relate itself to the winning of the lost to Christ as an ultimate objective."² Flake realized the power of prayer.

I wonder how we, our groups, and our churches might change if every group leader began praying consistently for opportunities to know and interact with lost people? What might happen if our groups (which tend to be inward-focused) became places where people prayed for those who have no relationship with God? What if, during our group's prayer time each week, we heard the names of lost people being lifted up to God?

King Asa exercised godly influence over the nation of Judah. Today, group leaders can exercise godly influence over their groups by praying and leading them to pray. Comeback Groups and their members pray can for three primary things:

- **Godly leaders and their groups pray for opportunities to share the gospel.** Arthur Flake was convinced that evangelism was the primary purpose of Sunday School. The first step in what is known as “Flake’s Formula” (a five-step process for growing the Sunday School) is “Know Your Possibilities.” This first step requires God’s people to look around their community to discover new possibilities—unreached people—for whom the church could, and should, start new groups. Opportunities to share the gospel are pivotal if churches are to be Great Commission churches.
- **Godly leaders and their groups pray for lost people by name.** Praying for lost people was important to Arthur Flake, and he believed it should be important to group leaders. He went on to write, “Each teacher should have a prayer list both of the lost pupils in his class and of the lost who are prospects for his class. This list should be kept in the Bible and daily spread out before God as the teacher prays for each one by name. . . . Many Sunday School pupils can be reached only through prayer.”³ Does this describe your practice? Do you have a list of persons you are praying for daily? And not just praying for them, but praying for their salvation? You might ask, “Where do the names of these people come from?” My answer is from your circle of friends, relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances. Stop now and list the names of people in the margin of this book, people who need the Lord but are far from Him. Let these names become the starting point of a renewed commitment to pray for their salvation.
- **Godly leaders and their groups pray for revival.** Not only do Comeback Groups pray for lost persons, but they also pray for revival among group members. Comeback Groups recognize that repentance and revival go together; therefore, they ask God to forgive them, transform them, and draw them back to Himself. Here are some actions that groups can take as they pray for revival.

1. **Comeback Groups seek God’s guidance.** Begin by seeking God’s guidance through personal prayer and study of the Bible. Ask God to reveal His will and to ignite a passion for revival within your hearts.

- 2. Comeback Groups confess and repent.** Encourage members of the Bible study group to examine their lives and confess any sins or areas where they have strayed from God's path. Repentance is a crucial step in preparing the way for revival.
- 3. Comeback Groups pray for spiritual awakening.** Pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon your group, church, community, and the world. Ask God to awaken hearts, convict people of sin, and draw them to Himself. Pray for a hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- 4. Comeback Groups pray for unity.** Pray for unity within your Bible study group, as well as unity among churches and believers in your community. Ask God to break down any barriers, divisions, or strife that may hinder revival.
- 5. Comeback Groups intercede for others.** Expand your prayers beyond your immediate group and intercede for others who need revival. Pray for the salvation of souls, the restoration of backsliders, and the transformation of lives. Lift up specific individuals and families.
- 6. Comeback Groups pray for boldness and power.** Ask God to empower each member of your group with boldness, courage, and the use of spiritual gifts to share the gospel and be agents of revival in your spheres of influence.
- 7. Comeback Groups offer praise and thanksgiving.** Spend time praising and thanking God for His faithfulness, love, and grace. Express gratitude for past revivals and answered prayers. Cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving, recognizing that revival is a work of God's sovereign grace.
- 8. Comeback Groups pray persistently.** Revival may not happen overnight, so continue to persevere in prayer. Dedicate regular times for corporate prayer specifically focused on revival. Encourage individual members to maintain a consistent prayer life for revival. Remember that prayer for revival is not a one-time event, but a continuous journey of seeking God's face and aligning

our hearts with His purposes. Be patient, faithful, and expectant, trusting that God will respond according to His perfect timing.

Realizing the Necessity of Pursuing God Together

King Asa knew the importance of pursuing God as a community. He set his people on a new course by giving them something new to focus on: "He told the people of Judah to seek the LORD God of their ancestors and to carry out the instruction and the commands" (2 Chron. 14:4). When King Asa said these words, he did not tell just a person or two. Asa knew that repentance and revival were something for the entire community of God's people to pursue. King Asa would go on to say, "The land is still ours because we sought the LORD our God. *We sought him . . .*" (v. 7, emphasis added).

Nothing has changed since King Asa's day. God's people must still seek Him together. Of course, we can and should pursue Him individually, but there is something powerful that happens when groups pursue God. We are emboldened by one another's faith. We draw strength and courage as we hear stories of triumph in our personal spiritual journeys; we hear tales of how God used a testimony we shared or a deed we did that led to a person placing their faith in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and Lord.

Every Bible study group has a percentage of people who have not darkened the door of the group's meeting space for weeks, months, or years. To pursue God as a group, we must pursue individuals who have drifted away. Practically, this means that if we are serious about experiencing revival in our lives, we are going to be concerned about pursuing group members who have become irregular in their attendance. We pursue them because we want them to experience revival and repentance, like we desire for ourselves.

Realizing God's Work on Our Behalf

I can only imagine what young King Asa must have felt like when he heard reports that the Ethiopians were marching up from Egypt to fight his much smaller and much less-equipped army. Second Chronicles 14:9 reports that Zerah the Cushite (Cushite was another name for the Ethiopians) came against God's people with a million-man army and three hundred chariots. The only thing that stood between the invading army and the people of God was Asa's army, an army that was ill-equipped and outnumbered compared to the invading army of the Cushites.

Asa, the young King of Judah, was honest with God in his prayer. He admitted that he and his people depended upon the Lord; they were powerless. Yet, in God's name he and his army marched against the invading army. (See verses 9-11.) The army of Judah must have realized just how much they needed God at that moment.

It's in moments like this that a revival often begins—when we realize just how much we need the Lord. We realize our sinful, impoverished state, and we openly admit that we are in no position to change our current pathway. It's only when God intervenes on our behalf do we have a chance. Asa's humility and honesty were all that he and his people needed—and they needed God to show up on their behalf. What happened next changed them and a nation.

After Asa prayed his humble prayer for help, I imagine that he and his soldiers checked their weapons one last time, girded their loins, and went out to fight. If they failed to win the battle, their wives, their children, and their parents would be killed by the approaching enemy army. Everything was at stake. They were outnumbered. The enemy had superior weapons; the situation was dire. Yet, they also realized just how powerful God is.

Scripture records that God routed the Ethiopians; the fight was over before it even began. We do not get any of the details from the account in verses 12-13, other than God was responsible, the enemy army fled, and Asa and his army pursued them. Oh, and one last thing we know: The Cushite army was completely destroyed. The enemy soldiers all died, and the invading army was crushed.

The God Who Crushes Armies

I am reminded of the wisdom and truth of Proverbs 21:31 when I read the story of King Asa: "The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD." It is a sobering reminder that although human effort is required, God brings the victory. It is God who is powerful, not us.

This was a truth that King Asa and his people learned afresh and anew on that day. The army-crushing God of 2 Chronicles 14 is also the serpent-crushing God of Genesis 3. He is the fear-crushing, cancer-crushing God we worship today. And He is able to crush on our behalf, just as He did for His people thousands of years ago. Isaiah 52:10 says, "The LORD has displayed his holy arm in the sight of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God."

The imagery is clear: God, who is Spirit, is pictured as removing His robe and showing His strong arm, ready to fight on behalf of His people. He is acting righteously, and on behalf of others. We see this most fully when Jesus Christ willingly went to the cross and died as a substitute for us.

The power of God was on full display just three days later. There, just outside of Jerusalem on Easter morning, God demonstrated His power to the world. His arm was bared. Jesus had died but rose from the grave to the glory of His heavenly Father!

The same powerful, arm-baring, army-crushing God we see in Scripture has not changed. He is still omnipotent (all-powerful) and ready to act on behalf of His people, which includes both you and the group you lead.

Can You See It?

I have two questions for you to consider. First, how have you experienced the power of God in your life?

I have seen God perform miracles; He deliver my family from almost certain financial disaster in 2010. We moved to Nashville, so I could start my work for Lifeway, leaving a home in Texas on the market, just as the housing market collapsed. We ended up with two house payments, and my wife had a hard time finding work. My paycheck barely covered our expenses. The situation was financially devastating to us, and we thought we were going to lose our home in Texas. I even began to wonder if I misheard God's calling to end a ministry in Texas and start a new one in Tennessee. But we kept praying, and God bared His arm. He brought us not one, but three buyers, just as time was running out. I imagine you have similar stories. Perhaps yours involves a health issue, a financial issue like mine, a relationship issue, or something else.

My second question is multifaceted: How have you experienced God's power in your Bible study group? Have you experienced new growth? Has God brought new people to you? Have you heard stories from your group members about God's work in their lives? Have you heard stories of how God miraculously saved a friend or family member of one of the people within your group?

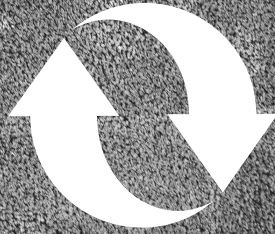
God's power continues to be on display all around us, just like He was for Asa, and for me and my family.

As 2 Chronicles 14 closes, God's people had a new revelation about their God: He is able! Asa and his people experienced God in a brand-new way, as they chased the Cushite army and brought home the spoils of war. This event in Judah's history was the genesis of a period of great spiritual revival. How I pray that we might be aware of God's work on our behalf—and on behalf of the people in our groups. When we realize that God is truly there, that He truly sees us, and that He truly cares for us to the point that He rolls His sleeve up to help us in our moments of need, how could we not worship Him and surrender all we are and all we have to Him?

King Asa's story does not end here, not by a longshot. In fact, if anything, it is just beginning. Young King Asa just learned a life-changing truth, as he humbled himself before God. Asa learned that God, whom he discovered in the Old Testament, the One who had led Israel out of slavery and through the Red Sea, the One who brought His people into the promised land, and the One who was powerful enough to make the sun stand still (see Joshua 10:13) was working on his behalf. The very same God! And that God now works on your behalf. He works on behalf of your Bible study group, too.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What part of King Asa's story do you find most encouraging?
2. In what ways is your group pursuing God together?
3. How has God displayed His power in your life?
4. How has God displayed His power in the lives of the people within your group?
5. How could a fresh encounter with God be the beginning of revival in your life, and in the lives of your group members?
6. How might you lead your group members to have a greater realization of God's work on their behalf? How is God working on behalf of your group right now?



Chapter 2

**COMEBACK
GROUPS
RESPOND**

One of the greatest revivals we read about in all of Scripture occurs in 2 Chronicles 15. The revival began with Asa and his people humbling themselves before God. (See chapter 14.)

I have heard it said, "When you are down, there's no place to look but up!" Sometimes God allows us to experience difficulties so that we, in our desperation, look to Him for rescue. That is exactly what Asa and his people did, and it led to revival.

Asa had already begun his spiritual reforms in Judah, but there was more to be done. The act of returning to God was just the beginning. Repentance, dependence, and rededication were about to ignite into a full-fledged revival in 2 Chronicles 15.

When revival begins, God's people respond. When revival breaks out in our Bible study groups today, God's people respond.

Revival and response go together.

We Respond When God Speaks

As King Asa and his victorious army returned to Jerusalem, they carried with them the spoils of war. Every enemy soldier had fallen in battle. It was a good day indeed for the people of God. This moment was pivotal for Asa and the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah when God spoke to His people through Azariah, the son of Oded. As Asa and his men marched back to Jerusalem, God's prophet, Azariah, went out to meet King Asa and his men. Azariah had a special message from God to King Asa.

Azariah reminded Asa and his people that Israel once existed in a terrible state of affairs. Because of Israel's sin, Azariah could rightly say, "For many years Israel has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without instruction, but when they turned to the LORD God of Israel in their distress and sought him, he was found by them. In those times there was no peace . . . Nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every possible distress. But as for you, be strong; don't give up, for your work has a reward. When Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded the prophet, he took courage" (2 Chron. 15:3-8a).

We Respond by Aligning with God's Will

The work that Asa was encouraged to continue is the work he began as a young king: "Asa did was what good and right in the sight of the LORD his God. He removed the pagan altars and the high places. He shattered their sacred pillars and chopped down their Asherah poles. . . . He also removed the high places and shrines from all the cities of Judah" (2 Chron. 14:2-3,5).

As a young king, Asa grew up knowing the sacred Scriptures, and he knew that God wanted His people to have no other gods before Him. By the time he became king, Asa was well aware that God was a jealous God, and His people had been warned many times about the dangers of worshiping the false gods of other nations. "If you abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods, he will turn against you, harm you, and completely destroy you, after he has been good to you" (Josh. 24:20). Asa knew that spiritual adultery would lead to terrible consequences for the nation, so he acted swiftly and decisively to eliminate false gods, false places of worship, and their impact on God's people.

We Respond by Removing the Detestable

After hearing the words of Azariah, Asa became even more emboldened to continue his spiritual reforms. "He took courage and removed the abhorrent idols from the whole land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim" (2 Chron. 15:8).

I like to do word studies when I study Scripture. When I read the verses above, I wondered what the word "abhorrent" meant. It is not that I did not know the definition, but I wondered about the Hebrew behind it. Why did the translators choose this word? I wanted to know the meaning of the Hebrew word from which we get the English word "abhorrent."

As I did my research, I soon discovered that the word "abhorrent" is from a Hebrew word meaning "something that stinks." It is used to describe something that smells really bad. When Scripture tells us that Asa removed the abhorrent idols, it gives us a vivid picture of someone removing something offensive. The false idols were not a

fragrant aroma ascending to God. Instead, they were a stench that needed to be removed.

My wife would tell you that the best day of the week at our house is Friday. That is when I put out the trash after it has sat in our trash bin, located inside our garage, since the previous trash day. You can imagine that by Thursday night it smells awful in my garage. But on Friday morning, I set out the trash bin and immediately the garage benefits from its removal! The bad smell leaves the garage as the door raises, and it smells so much better after I bring in that empty container.

In essence, Asa was “taking out the trash.” He removed the objects of his people’s false worship. He removed the things that distracted people and drew their affections away from their God. If you want to experience revival in your life, and in the lives of your group members, a good exercise is to identify the attitudes and actions that God describes as a stench to Him, taking steps to remove them as you discover them. Ask God to forgive you for your trespasses; fellowship with Him once again. As Scripture tells us, “Because of the LORD’s faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness! (Lam. 3:22-23). The removal of sin in our lives is not something we need to wait to do until we experience revival. It is something we do as we *prepare* for revival.

We Respond to God with Others

As the revival narrative continues in 2 Chronicles 15, Asa gathered his people (the tribes of Judah and Benjamin) plus people from the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon. The people from these other tribes defected to him “in great numbers” when they saw that God was with him (2 Chron. 15:9). When people sense that God is on the move, they want to be right there. Such was the case in King Asa’s day. People realized that something special was taking place, that revival was breaking out, and they wanted to experience it for themselves after such a long spiritual drought in the nation of Israel.

One of the great benefits of being a member of a Bible study group is that we can encourage and provoke one another to “love and [do] good works” (Heb. 10:24). Our response to God’s Word can

be fueled by other believers who are on a similar spiritual journey. There is something comforting and motivating about being with a group of like-minded individuals.

Asa's people moved forward together spiritually. They were in lockstep, and we can be like that today in our Bible study groups. Revival may reach its highest potential when we experience it with others who are on a similar spiritual journey. We need each other!

Lifeway Christian Resources conducted research about Bible study groups during the Transformational Groups research project. This led to the creation of two books, *Transformational Church* and *Transformational Groups*. The data demonstrated that people who are in groups:

- serve at a higher rate than people who are not in groups;
- give more financially than people not in groups;
- confess sin more than people not in groups;
- pray more than people who are not in groups.

Being in a Bible study group matters because our proximity to one another, the relationships we build, and the experiences we have together work to motivate us to live for Christ in ways that people who are not in groups simply do not experience.

The people saw God at work, and they encouraged one another to continue what Asa had begun. Revival broke out and they were encouraged that God was at work not only in their lives, but in the lives of others around them.

Today, the best place that church members can find themselves (and their children) is in a caring, Bible-centered group. Groups are fertile soil in which God's people grow. When one person experiences revival, the flame is often fanned by others who are experiencing a renewal in their relationship with God.

We Respond by Living Differently

The Transformational Groups research project discovered eight signposts of growing disciples. One of those eight indicators of growth in Jesus's followers is "Seeking God."

A person becomes a disciple of Christ because they intend to follow Him and become like Him. A continuous hunger should arise from this life. It is referred to in Scripture as our "first love" (see Rev. 2:4), and believers are commanded at times to return to it. Transformation is seen when our desire is to know God more deeply and experience His work more fully.

Second Chronicles 15:10-11 describes how Asa gathered the people in Jerusalem to worship: "They were gathered in Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign. At that time they sacrificed to the LORD seven hundred cattle and seven thousand sheep and goats from all the plunder they had brought."

God's people gather together and worship when revival takes place. In this case, they not only brought themselves, but they brought a great number of sacrifices to the Lord. They did not withhold themselves, nor did they withhold their possessions. When revival happens, priorities change, and God's people want to be together as they pursue Him corporately. They also want to show their newfound zeal to seek Him more fully by demonstrating their commitment to Him. God's people desire to honor and please Him.

In the Transformational Groups research project, believers who were growing in Christ gave a strong agreement to the statement, "One of the main reasons I live my life the way I do is to please and honor God." These believers demonstrate their pursuit by praising God for His previous work in their lives, chasing after what He wants next for them, and seeking to do it in a way that glorifies Him.

We Respond by Making New Commitments to God

As revival takes hold in our lives, our groups, and our churches, another sign is that we renew our commitment to God, His Word, and His work. Asa and his people did just that. In fact, you might say that he and his people went to the extreme.

- The people entered into a covenant to seek God together (2 Chronicles 15:12).
- They committed to do this with all their heart and soul (v. 12).
- If anyone would not seek God, they would be put to death, whether they were young, old, man, or woman (v. 13).
- The people took their oath loudly and publicly (v. 14).
- They swore to seek God wholeheartedly (v. 15).
- They did all the above with sincerity (v. 15).
- The revival led to the people finding God once again (v. 15).

Asa's own commitment to the pursuit of God did not end here. In 2 Chronicles 15:16, we discover that he removed his grandmother, Maacah, from being the queen mother because she had made an obscene image of Asherah. Asa had the image chopped down and burned in the Kidron Valley. Talk about taking a hard stance against a family member! But when revival comes to your heart, you will remove anything that might create a barrier between you and God, and that is what Asa did. When God moves among His people, they renew their commitment to Him in extreme ways.

Renewed Commitment in Your Bible Study Group

It is true that people in revival make new, bold commitments to the Lord. It is also true that groups make new, bold commitments to the Lord when revival occurs. When this happens, what does it look like? I can think of new commitments that a group leader and/or the group members might make when they experience revival. They can also make these new commitments prior to the onset of revival. There is no need to wait!

Groups Commit to Multiplying

A truism in group life is that healthy things grow, and growing things change. We should not expect our groups today to be the groups of tomorrow. Leaders will come and go, and people will come and go. Unfortunately, the idea of permanence has snuck into some groups. You can hear it in their words when they say things like, “Don’t split up my group.” Or a group leader says to a pastor, “Don’t come and take my people.”

Truly healthy, on-mission groups know there is no such thing as permanence. They accept that things will be different as the future unfolds, and they anticipate that the group members may not grow old and gray together! These kinds of groups get it—they understand that their church and their community need new groups to reach new people, and they are good with that.

Multiplying, planting, or franchising—whatever you want to call the process of one group starting another one—is one way that people respond to a fresh touch from God. They become keenly aware of the grace they have received from God, and they want others to experience it, too. Groups in revival often go into a multiplication phase and launch new groups.

Group leaders play an important role in this process. If the group senses the leader is in favor of starting new groups, the group will support this important task. If the group senses the leader is not in favor of “splitting the class,” they will often resist the idea of planting a second group. Group leaders must remember that something healthy is going to grow, and that a growing thing is going to change. Healthy groups multiply, which of course brings about more change.

By starting a new group, the leader helps others step up into leadership roles in the new group. The leader is also more kingdom-focused, as evidenced by the group’s desire to see more people saved and brought into the caring community of the new group. Holding onto group members with a loose grip is one mark of a mature leader who wants God to use the group to multiply and reach people who are far from Him.

Groups Commit to Caring for Every Group Member

Love for one's fellow group member is another sign that the people in the group are responding to God's self-revelation. Caring for others is a sign that the group is in a healthy state. "One of the things that sets apart a healthy Sunday School or small group ministry from a struggling one is a commitment to care for every person."⁴

David Francis, my predecessor in the role of Director of Sunday School, once said that groups begin to see themselves as a caring community when they change their verbiage. They do not place group members on a class roster; they place them on a ministry list. The difference between the two terms is significant. David said that when you see people as names on a roster, the commitment you expect is from that person to the group; when you see people as objects of ministry, the commitment is from the group to that person. When that happens, it is much easier to mobilize the group to care for people.

Groups Commit to Reaching Out to Absentees

Here is another truism of group life: On any given Sunday (or whenever your group meets), about fifty percent of your group members will be present. In the groups that I have led, this was true weekly. When I have been responsible for all the groups as a discipleship pastor, this was true of the entire group ministry. The implication of this statistic is very serious.

Let us say that my group has thirty people on its ministry list, and the group averages fifteen people in attendance weekly. This means that on any given Sunday, I am missing fifteen people who should be there with the rest of us. When the clock strikes noon, the race is on for me, and others in the group who serve as Care Group Leaders, to reach out to those fifteen absentees. The next Sunday this will happen again, but there will be new people present who were absent last week, and the group will have a slightly different set of absentees to reach before the next meeting. It is a vicious cycle in group life!

A group in revival does not settle for half of its people being present, and it certainly does not settle for an attitude that says, "Those absentees know when and where we meet; they can come back whenever they like!" Instead, a group that has a revived passion for people will take on the attitude of the shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep to go after the missing one. (See Matt. 18:10-14.)

Groups Commit to Sharing the Gospel

Discipleship and evangelism go together. They are two sides of the same coin. If a group focuses on discipleship and teaching, the end result is often a group of people who know the Bible, but they do not know any lost persons. If a group focuses on evangelism and not on discipleship, it ends up with babes in Christ who need more than the milk of the Scripture. The writer of Hebrews advised us, "Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. You need milk, not solid food. Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature" (Heb. 5:12-14).

Evangelism happens when we have proximity to lost persons. For many of us, unfortunately, our primary friends are found within the context of our churches and our groups. The longer we are Christians, the fewer lost persons we tend to know. That is, unless we are intentional about building relationships with them!

The Pharisees accused Jesus of "eating with sinners and tax collectors" (Mark 2:16). Matthew 9:10-13 records one of my favorite stories about Jesus and the need for us to associate with people outside the church: "While he was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' Now when he heard this, he said, 'It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. . . . For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

Think about your circle of relationships for a moment. How many people do you relate to on a regular basis who are not members of your church or your Bible study group? Now think about the

people at your workplace, in your neighborhood, in your family, or the acquaintances you bump into regularly. How could you relate to them for the purpose of sharing the gospel? Would it take a round of golf, a cup of coffee, a meal, or a barbecue in the backyard?

Groups Commit to Serving

When the mother of two of Jesus's disciples requested they be allowed to sit at Jesus's right and left hand in heaven, Jesus explained a great truth: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26-27).

In my experience, groups that serve do so in two significant ways. First, they serve within the church. Adult groups should be a clearing house, not a storehouse, of people! The leaders for groups of kids and students come from adult groups. I have told every group of adults I have ever led that it would be my biggest joy if some of them left the group to go serve elsewhere in the church! I explained that we wanted them to become "missionaries to kids." Second, groups serve "out there"—somewhere in the community. My Bible study groups had regular times of service where we went together (we called it "Saturday Serve") and painted school playgrounds, answered phones at a crisis pregnancy center, cut the grass of elderly people, or sorted clothes and food cans at a local shelter.

Groups Commit to Building Relationships

When a group of people begin to experience revival, God does something to their outlook on others. They begin to be more sensitive to the absentees and to people who are outside of the kingdom of God (previously mentioned). That sensitivity to people who are on the outside looking in leads group members to have a heightened concern and compassion towards others.

Jim Putman, in his book *DiscipleShift*, noted that Jesus's primary method for making disciples was not large gatherings, like He had during the Sermon on the Mount. In this important book on discipleship, Putman made the following observation: "Jesus invited

people into relationships with himself. . . . His primary method was life-on-life.”⁵ Relationships were the key to Jesus’s strategy, and building relationships with people should still be the church’s strategy! Groups that are committed to building relationships:

- wear name tags;
- have greeters;
- engage guests in conversation;
- invite guests to fun fellowship-centered events.

Carey Nieuwhof recently made a bold statement about relationships and groups. He said, “Growing churches (and yes, that includes small and mid-sized churches too) will realize that connection and community will win out over content in the end, and they will focus their resources there. Nobody should be able to out-local or out-community the local church.”⁶

Nieuwhof is not saying that content is not important in a Bible study—it is! What he is helping us to see is that people have a strong need for each other—for relationships. While people can review great sermons and Bible study content online, what they cannot receive in that setting are relationships—face-to-face relationships with people like you and me. This is why the church will have a big advantage in reaching new people for Christ. Genesis 2:18 tells us, “It is not good that the man is alone.” I love that verse because it demonstrates that God has created us with a need for relationships. Bible study groups do not have to wait for God to send revival to begin caring for and reaching new people! Let that begin now, and when revival comes, we will simply be a bit ahead.

More Signs of Revival in Your Bible Study Group

Revival in a Bible study group involves a collective and individual deepening of faith, a desire for personal and corporate transformation, and an increased hunger for spiritual growth and knowledge. While the signs of revival may vary, some common characteristics of revival in a Bible study group include the following:

- 1. Increased attendance and participation.** More people attend the Bible study group regularly, and participants actively engage in discussions, prayer, and study. You may have noticed that individuals and families attend in a non-linear way these days. It has been said that churches do not have less people, necessarily, but they have people who attend less. Even before revival comes, people and families can renew their commitment to take part in the weekend worship service and Bible study groups offered by their church.
- 2. More intense prayer and worship.** There is a heightened sense of prayerfulness and worship during the Bible study sessions, with individuals seeking God's presence and guidance. We see a glimpse of this in the book of Nehemiah: "Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, all the people stood up. Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, 'Amen, Amen!' Then they knelt low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground" (Neh. 8:5-6).
- 3. Deepened understanding of Scripture.** Group members experience a greater hunger for the Word of God, leading to a more in-depth study, interpretation, and application of the Bible. In the Bible, and throughout history, revivals have often started when God's people returned to the Scripture in their pursuit of God. The revival under King Josiah began with the re-discovery of the book of the Law: "The king went up to the LORD's temple with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as well as the priests and the Levites—all the people from the oldest to the youngest. He read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had

been found in the LORD's temple. Then the king stood at his post and made a covenant in the LORD's presence to follow the LORD and to keep his commands, his decrees, and his statutes with all his heart and with all his soul in order to carry out the words of the covenant written in this book" (2 Chron. 34:30-31).

- 4. Repentance and confession.** Revival often involves a renewed sense of conviction and a willingness to confess sins and seek forgiveness both individually and as a group. When Josiah heard the reading of the book of the Law, he showed several acts of repentance: "Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this place and against its inhabitants, and because you humbled yourself before me, and you tore your clothes and wept before me" (v. 27). Confession of sin, repentance, and mourning are wrapped up in the ancient practice of tearing one's clothes. Today we no longer tear our clothes, but we can express sorrow and humility as we confess our sin to one another.
- 5. Unity and love.** Group members experience a stronger sense of community and love for one another, supporting and encouraging each other in their faith journey. When this happens, inreach and care for group members takes on a new significance for the group. People who have been chronically absent are approached by members of the group, not necessarily to get them to attend, but to discover if there are unmet needs in their lives. The goal of inreach is to demonstrate that the group is truly a caring community of believers. Done with authenticity, the act of reaching out to absentees paves the way for their return to the group.
- 6. Outreach and evangelism.** A revived Bible study group should feel compelled to share their faith with others and actively engage in outreach and evangelism. Group leaders can help group members be prepared to share their faith by teaching them two important things. First, the people need to know how to articulate their faith story, their testimony. This is comprised of three parts: their life before Christ, how

they came to Christ, and what their life has been like since coming to Christ. Second, they need to be able to share the gospel clearly and quickly. I have taught groups by using One Verse Evangelism by The Navigators.⁷ There is just one verse to memorize, Romans 6:23, and the gospel can be shared in about five minutes.

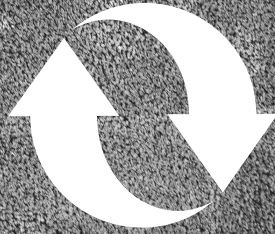
7. Transformation of lives. Revival leads to personal transformation, as individuals experience a deepening of their relationship with God and a desire to live more Christlike lives. The Eight Signposts of Discipleship are more visible in the lives of group members, and they are a sign that transformation is taking place. The Eight Signposts of Discipleship are:

- Seek God
- Share Christ
- Exercise Faith
- Obey God and Deny Self
- Serve God and Others
- Engage with Scripture
- Build Relationships
- Live Unashamed

It is important to note that revival is a work of the Holy Spirit and cannot be manufactured or forced by human efforts alone. It often starts with a sincere desire for God and a willingness to seek Him with all one's heart. Revival can be pursued through prayer, fasting, and a commitment to God's Word, but ultimately, it is a divine intervention that transforms hearts and lives.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How might a person go about removing the detestable from their life? How could a group of believers help in this process?
2. How many people are absent from your group's ongoing gatherings weekly? What steps can your group take to reclaim chronic absenteeism?
3. Would your group support the creation of a new Bible study group with members from your group? Why or why not?
4. How could your group provide a higher level of care for every member of the group? What would be your first three steps in focusing on renewed care for every member?
5. What person(s) in your life are "low hanging fruit" when it comes to building a deeper relationship with them to share the gospel? List their names below.



Chapter 3

**COMEBACK
GROUPS
REMEMBER**

As a student of the Bible, 2 Chronicles 16 has always bothered me. Why? Because King Asa was absolutely on fire for the Lord in 2 Chronicles 14–15.

In chapter 14, Asa had faced down an enemy army of one million men; the Lord answered his prayer and led him and his people to victory over the Cushites.

In chapter 15, on the heels of that victory, Asa led his people to refocus on the Lord in their worship. Revival broke out, and he and his people made incredible, significant changes in their lives as a demonstration of the changes taking place in their hearts. Things could not have been better! Chapter 15 even concludes with the words: “There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa’s reign” (v. 19). God gave King Asa and his people decades of rest—plenty of time to build up cities, establish their families, and appreciate all that God had done for them.

But when chapter 16 opens, King Asa is a completely different person. He is no longer the “good King Asa.” He is not even recognizable as the king of chapters 14 and 15, who led the nation into a period of revival. What happened to him? What happened to the revival he and his people experienced?

In a Galaxy Far, Far Away . . .

Do you remember seeing *Star Wars* for the first time? I grew up with the original three movies that were released back in the 1970s and 1980s. Then along came the three prequel movies that explained the origin of characters like Darth Vader. We discovered that Darth Vader was once a little boy, Anakin Skywalker, who was strong with The Force. He was under the care of Obi-Wan Kenobi, who taught him how to become a mature Jedi Master. But in the final movie of the prequels, something terrible happened to Anakin, and he turned away from his Jedi training and embraced evil. His name was changed by the emperor to Darth Vader, and he no longer resembled the good kid he once was. He was taken over by evil, by the Dark Side.

In a similar way, good King Asa, the boy king who worshiped and prayed to the Lord, the king who led his people to renounce their false idol worship and to return to God, was a completely

different person in 2 Chronicles 16. The revival had ended, and King Asa had changed to become his people's "Darth Vader." What in the world happened to him?

Second Chronicles 16 is a chapter about remembering the past. "Myopia" is a term that relates to our eyesight. It means that when we see things far off in the distance, they appear blurry. The term we use for this today is "near-sightedness." Although the term "myopia" is used for our eyesight, I want to apply the term to our spiritual lives. Left alone and to our own devices, we will develop "spiritual myopia," if we are not exceedingly careful. That is what happened to good King Asa. He got to the point in his life where he could not (or would not) see the past clearly. His "myopia" was accompanied by "spiritual amnesia," too. Both led to his downfall.

When revival comes to individuals and their groups, there will be a period during which worship, study, relationships, and ministry intensify. This is an outcome of revival, and a great blessing from God. But in time, things tend to cool. Our passions do not burn quite as hot, and things we focused on during a season of revival fade into the background.

For revival to have its long-term effects on us, we must intentionally pursue the Lord and remember His great and mighty work on our behalf. Seeing the past clearly is a key element in remaining focused on God in the present, while we wait for another outpouring of His Spirit.

The Beginning of the End

Let's set the stage for this final chapter of Asa's story by reviewing the first six verses of chapter 16, which took place twenty-five years after chapter 15 closed with the encouraging words, "There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign" (v. 19).

"In the thirty-sixth year of Asa, Israel's King Baasha went to war against Judah. He built Ramah in order to keep anyone from leaving or coming to King Asa of Judah. So Asa brought out the silver and gold from the treasuries of the LORD's temple and the royal palace and sent it to Aram's King Ben-hadad, who lived in Damascus, saying, 'There's a treaty between me and you, between my father and your father. Look, I have sent you silver and gold. Go break your

treaty with Israel's King Baasha so that he will withdraw from me.' Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies to the cities of Israel. They attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali. When Baasha heard about it, he quit building Ramah and stopped his work. Then King Asa brought all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and the timbers Baasha had built it with. Then he built Geba and Mizpah with them" (2 Chron. 16:1-6).

King Asa was being threatened by Israel's King Baasha. Asa was cut off from help by Baasha, so he devised a plan to apply pressure to Baasha and cause him to withdraw. Asa hired a third king, King Ben-hadad, to break his treaty with Baasha, and paid him with silver and gold from the Lord's temple. King Ben-hadad broke treaty with Baasha, putting political and military pressure on Baasha to withdraw from King Asa. Now outnumbered, Baasha left King Asa and his people to themselves.

King Asa's plan appeared to have worked. He had manipulated King Baasha by calling on another king to fight against him (the enemy of my enemy is my friend). Asa and his people were saved, and they even dismantled Ramah (a city that was reinforced by King Baasha); Asa and his people carried away stones and timber and built and fortified his own cities. Everything looked bright for King Asa. And then . . .

God sent Hanani, a seer, to confront King Asa about his military tactics, which God called "foolish" (v. 9). Instead of a message of blessing, God sent a message of rebuke. In verses that follow, we can see that Asa had miscalculated and misjudged his response to the invading King Baasha. The accusations from Hanani serve as a sobering reminder of how we should approach our relationship with God. Asa was reminded of several things; he failed to remember five things. In the context of our conversation about revival, Comeback Groups should remember the same five things.

Comeback Groups Remember That God Sees

King Asa needed to remember that God sees all. Hanani reminded him of this fact when he spoke the following words to Asa: "Because you depended on the king of Aram and have not depended on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from you" (v. 7).

As you read this book, remember that God sees all today, too. He sees you, and everything you do. He hears everything you say. He knows every thought you have. This is comforting and terrifying at the same time!

Regarding your Bible study group, God sees all that your group does (or does not do). Let that sink in for a moment. Would you say that God is pleased with what He sees, or might it give Him cause for concern? Or condemnation? Or would He give credit for the good things you and the people are doing? Is your group:

- praying for the lost?
- attending regularly?
- serving in the church?
- serving in the community?
- building relationships?
- being transformed by the Word of God?

It is a sobering reminder that God sees all. It makes me want to get it right! I want God to be pleased with my service and work inside and outside the church. I want my heavenly Father to be proud of me, my group, and the way I lead it to accomplish His purposes. Sometimes I need a gentle reminder that God still sees all.

Comeback Groups Remember God's Faithfulness

The words of Hanani stung King Asa. I know they did, because in verse eight Hanani told Asa to remember God's faithfulness in the past—the not-too-distant past of 2 Chronicles 14.

Hanani reminded King Asa, "Were not the Cushites and Libyans a vast army with many chariots and horsemen? When you depended on the LORD, he handed them over to you" (2 Chron. 16:8).

It seems implausible that King Asa could have forgotten God's miraculous deliverance from 2 Chronicles 14! It was a watershed moment that set the stage for national revival that we read about in chapter 15. But Hanani challenged Asa to confront his own spiritual "myopia" by remembering his deliverance by God from the Cushite army of one-million men.

Before we come down on Asa too hard, let's ask ourselves if we are guilty of the same thing. Is it possible that we, and our Bible study groups, have not remembered God's strong arm that has been bared for us?

Before you read on, meditate about the ways you have seen God's faithfulness demonstrated to you and to the people in your group. What stories can you tell about His activity on your behalf? Of your group members? The beginning of Asa's downfall was his "spiritual myopia" and "spiritual amnesia."

Comeback Groups Remember to Continually Seek God

The painful rebuke from Hanani continued. He next told King Asa to remember that God is always on the lookout to support His people, but there was a condition. "For the eyes of the LORD roam throughout the earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him. You have been foolish in this matter. Therefore, you will have wars from now on" (v. 9).

Continually seek God. Be wholeheartedly committed to Him. Sounds easy enough, right? It is not. It is hard work.

Bible study groups must constantly evaluate their work. Groups are people, and people in groups must remember to seek God's will as they pursue God's work. If we seek first His kingdom, we will

place His will and His kingdom's advancement ahead of our desires. We boldly place ourselves outside of our comfort zone as we serve God by serving others.

Group leaders have a tremendous influence over the people in their groups. The passion and zeal of a group leader can be infectious and cause others to seek God at a higher level. The leader's passion for daily prayer, study, and ministry can be catalytic.

Comeback Groups Remember the Brevity of Life

In 2 Chronicles 16:12, we discover that King Asa developed a disease in his feet. Over the next two years, the disease became increasingly worse. The Bible tells us, "Yet even in his disease he didn't seek the LORD but only the physicians. Asa rested with his ancestors; he died in the forty-first year of his reign" (vv. 12b-13).

I have several friends who died during the COVID pandemic. Exactly my age, they succumbed to the virus's effects, and they lost their lives. In every instance I remember thinking, *They are too young for this to have happened*. Sometimes I said out loud, "I just can't believe they are gone." These were people I knew in high school, college, or seminary days. Some were group leaders for me in previous ministry settings.

One thing is for sure—life is very short. James 4:14 declares, "Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring—what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes." So true.

Because this is true, and because life is short for all of us, shouldn't groups and group members be about sharing the gospel? All of this reminds me of the words of Peter in his second epistle. Peter's opponents accused him of lying to people about the immediacy of the Lord's return. Peter explained that the Lord doesn't count time the way we do, and that every day the Lord delays returning for His church is another day to share the gospel: "Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation" (2 Pet. 3:15).

No matter how many (or how few) days the Lord gives each of us, every day we are alive is one more day to declare His great salvation to our friends, relatives, and neighbors.

Comeback Groups Remember the Enemy of Revival

If you recall, I began this chapter by asking the question, "What happened to King Asa?" Why did this great, godly king somehow drift away from God? How did the fires of revival die out to the point he became unrecognizable in 2 Chronicles 16?

Before I answer that question, let's quickly review what had become of Asa, according to the account in chapter 16:

- Asa was "spiritually myopic" and suffered from "spiritual amnesia."
- Asa was self-dependent, not God-dependent. We see this in his dealings with King Ben-hadad.
- Although successful in his military plans, God called Asa out for his self-sufficiency and lack of prayer.
- Asa became angry and abused Hanani and others, throwing them into prison.
- Asa was prayerless, and in the face of a foot disease, refused to seek the Lord.

King Asa had now become Darth Vader, to stretch that illustration from earlier. My answer to the question, "What happened to him?" What do I believe cause King Asa to finish his life story so poorly? He did not give enough respect to the enemies of revival, which are complacency and self-sufficiency.

There Was No More War

How do I arrive at this conclusion about King Asa—that he failed to respect the enemies of complacency and self-sufficiency? Just read the last line of chapter 15: “There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa’s reign” (v. 9).

That is the last word we have about Asa until chapter 16, some twenty-five years later. God gave Asa and the people rest on every side. There was no foreign power to bother them. They built cities. They had babies. Things were peaceful. Complacency settled in. People, including King Asa, may have concluded, “Look at what we have built. Look at what we have done.” For twenty-five years the people bought into the lie that they were self-sufficient. The revival that the first generation experienced under Asa’s leadership finally faded, and people’s passion to pursue God cooled.

When things are going your way, when you are on calm seas, there is no need to look for the lifeboat. But when storms approach and the boat is rocking, people get religious very quickly! The blessing of peace and prosperity at the end of 2 Chronicles 15 was a double-edged sword. We all need a little turmoil in our lives to keep us focused on God and our need for Him. When we do not have storms in life, we can forget to continually seek God; we become the bakers of our daily bread, not God. We think that we can take care of ourselves. We feel no real need to see ourselves as God does—people who are sinful and in need of revival. Peace and prosperity can be equated with God’s blessing on godly people, and that is not always the case! We can misinterpret our standing before God and underestimate our need for revival. We do not always recognize how far we have drifted from Him.

This was the case with King Asa. Drift happens slowly and over a long period of time. It is so imperceptible that we never realize it is occurring. You have heard that if you start a journey and are only a degree or two off course, it is no big deal at the beginning. But as you near the end of your journey, you will end up hundreds of miles off course. That’s a problem.

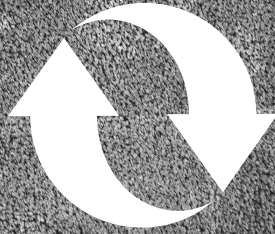
Two Degrees of Drift

I heard a story about two pilots that experienced a small amount of drift on one of their flights. I told their story in a book titled *Walking the Discipleship Pathway*. They piloted an airplane carrying 257 passengers. They left New Zealand for a sightseeing flight to Antarctica, but what the pilots didn't know, however, was that their flight calculations were off by two degrees. As the plane approached Antarctica, the pilots descended to give the passengers a better view of the landscape. Because their flight path was off, they flew into the side of Mount Erebus, an active volcano. Everyone on board the plane was killed.⁸

This marginal error illustrates the importance of staying on course, and the importance of staying on a pathway of discipleship. Drift can be dangerous, but it can also be deadly.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What can you do as a group leader to help your people keep from drifting from God?
2. How can your group members encourage one another not to drift spiritually?
3. In what ways do you see the effects of drift in your group today?
4. How have you experienced God's faithfulness to you? To the members of your group?
5. Because life is brief, how could you equip your group members to share the gospel with urgency?



Chapter 4

REVIVE US AGAIN

There's a lot of truth in hymns. God's truth. As you read the words of the great hymn, "Revive Us Again," consider all you've read in this short booklet about revival, 2 Chronicles, King Asa, and our need today for revival individually and in our Bible study groups. Let these words sink deep into our hearts and minds.

*We praise thee, O God, for the Son of thy love,
for Jesus who died, and is now gone above.*

*Hallelujah! Thine the glory, hallelujah! Amen!
Hallelujah! Thine the glory, revive us again.*

*We praise thee, O God, for thy Spirit of light
who has shown us our Savior and scattered our night.*

*Hallelujah! Thine the glory, hallelujah! Amen!
Hallelujah! Thine the glory, revive us again.*

*We praise thee, O God, for the joy thou hast giv'n
to thy saints in communion, these foretastes of heav'n.*

*Hallelujah! Thine the glory, hallelujah! Amen!
Hallelujah! Thine the glory, revive us again.*

*Revive us again, fill each heart with thy love.
May each soul be rekindled with fire from above.*

*Hallelujah! Thine the glory, hallelujah! Amen!
Hallelujah! Thine the glory, revive us again.⁹*

I love the last stanza's words: "May each soul be rekindled with fire from above." I will admit that these words describe me. I need my soul rekindled. If you are honest and remember that God sees all, doesn't your soul need rekindling, too?

I want the people in my Bible study group to seek God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength—and I want to lead the way. Revival is a personal experience, but as we have seen in the story of King Asa, it is also a corporate experience. It is good to know that God is at work in others while He is at work in me.

The Chicken or the Egg?

There is an age-old debate about which came first, the chicken or the egg. If I read my Bible correctly, the answer is, “the chicken.” For some people who do not believe the Bible is the Word of God, they might say, “the egg.” We will have to agree to disagree.

When it comes to revival, which comes first: the repentant actions of God’s people, or revival followed by repentant actions?

I ask this question because I cannot predict when God might show up in your life in a new fresh way. I cannot predict how He might manifest Himself in your life or the lives of your group members. I cannot predict when and where revival will break out.

Do we wait for God to bring revival, or do we go ahead and do the things we see in Scripture—those things that God’s people did when revival occurred? Could there be any harm in doing these things now while we wait for God’s supernatural work?

- Worshipping Him more intensely.
- Sacrificing more deeply.
- Pursuing Him with others more consistently.
- Making extreme commitments to Him.
- Removing sin from our lives.
- Remembering His mighty acts.
- Pleasing Him in all aspects of our lives.

My conclusion is no—there is no harm in doing these things now, while we wait for revival. Who knows? Perhaps committing to these things might lead to revival, as God blesses us with more of Himself.

Group leader, you are an important part of God’s church. You will be judged more strictly according to Scripture. Your people look to you for leadership. Will you lead? Will you lead your people toward revival? I believe that you will. I have confidence in you!

NOTES

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Conference Training Plan

This conference is a two-hour overview of the book *Comeback Groups*. The plan is designed to expose Bible study and church leaders to the basic concepts and ideas presented in this book.

Purchase a copy of the book at lifeway.com/trainingresources or download the free PDF version there.

The training plan was created by Ken Braddy, author of *Comeback Groups*.

Initial Planning

- Date for the training: _____
- Time for the training: _____
 - Note: Many churches experience success with gathering individuals for training if the time immediately follows the Sunday worship service.
 - Provide meals and childcare for the participants, if needed.
- Decide who will lead the training. Consider the following:
 - Senior pastor
 - Sunday School director/discipleship pastor
 - Guest presenter
 - Associational Missionary Strategist
 - State convention staff member
 - Denominational leader

Their names: _____

- Budget for the event: \$ _____
 - Meal
 - Copies of the book, *Comeback Groups*
 - Guest presenter honorarium and travel expenses
 - Other: _____

Steps to Ensure a Great Training Experience

1. Pray for yourself and for future participants.
2. Secure copies of *Comeback Groups* for each participant at lifeway.com/trainingresources.
3. Download a free PDF copy of *Comeback Groups* at lifeway.com/trainingresources.
4. Read *Comeback Groups* and make notes throughout the book.
5. Promote the training event weekly, beginning six weeks prior to the training date:
 - a. pulpit announcements
 - b. brochure
 - c. email
 - d. text messaging
 - e. website
6. Enlist a person (or team) to prepare or order the meal, if provided.
7. Enlist a person (or team) to manage the childcare (or childcare vouchers) for participants.
8. Enlist a person to help manage the audio-visual needs for the training event.
9. Arrange the training room for maximum impact:
 - a. Seat participants in semi-circle(s) facing a focal wall.
 - b. Seat participants at round tables, four people at each table, with an open space at the front, so everyone is facing the focal wall.
10. Secure name tags and pens for participants, along with permanent markers.
11. Start on time and end on time.

Two-Hour Conference Plan

Welcome (10 Minutes)

1. Welcome participants to the training event.
2. Distribute copies of *Comeback Groups*. Explain that the purpose of this training event is for participants to gain an understanding of the contents found within the book.
3. Pray, asking God to use this time to help participants better understand the importance of revival in their lives and in the lives of people in their groups.

Introduction (20 Minutes)

1. Ask your attendees to respond to the following question: "When have you experienced the power of a spiritual revival?" (Remind attendees that their answers can relate to a personal experience, or a revival at a church or other venue.)
2. Deliver a mini-lecture using content from the following sections of the Introduction, helping participants understand revival in the Old Testament and beyond. Choose the content from the sections you believe will best help your group leaders gain a more thorough understanding of revival:
 - a. God's Pattern for Revival and Spiritual Awakening
 - b. Revival in the Old Testament
 - c. But Wait, There's More!
 - d. Fast Forward
 - e. Why Comeback Groups?
3. Tell your attendees that while we hope and pray for revival in our lives, we can never know when God's Spirit will do a transformative work. In the meantime, we can still focus on elements of revival that we see in Scripture.
4. Inform your attendees that they will examine three elements of revival that took place under King Asa, highlighted in 2 Chronicles 14–16.

Chapter 1 (20 Minutes)

1. Summarize the setting of 2 Chronicles 14:
 - a. King Asa was a boy king.
 - b. King Asa worked hard to reform Judah's spiritual life by removing the objects and places of false worship.
 - c. Judah was threatened by a million-man army that came up from Egypt.
 - d. Judah was severely outnumbered; death was imminent.
 - e. King Asa prayed for God's help and deliverance.
 - f. God granted Judah a great victory over the Ethiopians.
2. Focus attention on the section titled "Realizing the Power of Prayer."
 - a. Divide attendees into three groups (doubling up if necessary). Assign each group one of the bulleted paragraphs in the section:
 - i. Godly leaders and their groups pray for opportunities to share the gospel.
 - ii. Godly leaders and their groups pray for lost people by name.
 - iii. Godly leaders and their groups pray for revival.
 - b. Ask each team to quietly read their assigned section and be prepared to deliver a short report about the content to all attendees.
3. Focus attention on the section titled "Realizing God's Work on Our Behalf."
 - a. Ask participants to share stories of God's work in their lives (or His work in the lives of people in their groups).
 - b. Remind attendees that experiencing and reflecting on God's work in our lives is often a part of the revival process.

Chapter 2 (20 Minutes)

1. Review the opening section that relates to the conversation between Azariah and King Asa, as he returned from battle. Emphasize that although Asa had already begun spiritual reforms in Judah, more work was needed to rid the land of false worship.
2. Focus their attention to the “We Respond” sections. Assign one section to each of the six different groups (have attendees number themselves from 1 to 6, repeating the process until everyone has been assigned a number). Ask attendees who were assigned the same number to do the following:
 - a. Read their assigned section.
 - b. Discuss how the assigned “We Respond” section applies to their Bible study group.
 - c. Select one person in the group to deliver a sixty-second overview for the rest of the attendees.
 - d. Suggest at least one implication for Bible study groups that come from the assigned section.
3. Conclude this part of the training by summarizing other information found in the “Renewed Commitment in Your Bible Study Group” section. Remind attendees that when a person or a group of people experience revival, they respond to God and do things that shows evidence in their newfound commitment to God.

Break (10 minutes)

Chapter 3 (20 minutes)

1. Using the introductory section, summarizing the events of 2 Chronicles 16, which details what happened when King Asa was attacked by King Baasha. Emphasize that Asa chose not to seek God’s help, but to use gold and silver from the temple treasury to entice a third king, Ben-hadad, to fight against Asa’s enemy, King Baasha. Although the plan succeeded, it displeased God, who sent a seer to hold Asa accountable for his foolish behavior.
2. Instruct attendees to reflect on ways that God has supported them or has supported someone in their Bible study group. Invite them to turn to a neighbor and share those experiences.

3. Ask attendees to identify ways that King Asa had changed from “good King Asa” in chapters 14 and 15 to the evil person portrayed in chapter 16. Invite attendees to consult 2 Chronicles 16:7-14 in their Bibles for insights into Asa’s character.
4. Emphasize the reason for Asa’s change (see the section titled “There Was No More War”).
 - a. Focus on the fact that Asa and his people experienced twenty-five years of peace and prosperity (good things, of course), but without pressures and troubles (which we read about in 2 Chronicles 14), he drifted from God. The revival highlighted in chapter 15 faded away.
 - b. Share the story titled “Two Degrees of Drift.” Emphasize that the pilots were ninety-eight percent accurate in their flight plan, but the two degrees of drift cost everyone’s lives that day when the plane crashed.
5. Ask the attendees to brainstorm ways they can lead their groups to remember the mighty acts of God on behalf of their group (or themselves). Have them suggest ways they can help the people in their groups avoid the dangers of drifting from God spiritually.

Chapter 4 (20 minutes)

1. In advance, download the hymn, “Revive Us Again.” Play the hymn from your mobile device (consider pairing your phone to a Bluetooth speaker). Invite attendees to follow the lyrics.
2. Summarize the section titled “The Chicken or the Egg.” Lead attendees to focus on the bulleted items that can be done as a result of, or prior to, revival.
3. To help attendees focus on practical ways to use the content from *Comeback Groups*, ask them to identify three actions they will commit to lead their groups to do as they pray for and await revival. Invite attendees to share their action items with a neighbor.
4. Conclude the training by leading the group to pray for revival in their lives, and in the lives of their group members.

END NOTES

1. Claude V. King, *Return to Me* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2020), 106.
2. Ibid.
3. Arthur Flake, *Building a Standard Sunday School*, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1920), 103.
4. David Francis, Ken Braddy, and Ken Coley, *Shepherd: Creating a Caring Community* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2017), 7.
5. Jim Putman, *Discipleshift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 33.
6. Carey Nieuwhof, "8 Disruptive Church Trends That Will Rule 2021 (The Rise of the Post-Pandemic Church)", September 2023, <https://careynieuwhof.com/8-disruptive-church-trends-that-will-rule-2021-the-rise-of-the-post-pandemic-church/>.
7. <https://www.navigators.org/resource/one-verse-evangelism/>.
8. Michael Kelley and Ken Braddy, *Walking the Discipleship Pathway: How a Christian Grows and Matures* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2020), 15.
9. W. P. Mackay, "Revive Us Again", Hymnary.org, <https://hymnary.org/hymn/BH1991/469>.