

CHURCH GROWTH CLASSICS

Ministry Principles from Yesterday
that Still Apply Today

**"Accept the fact that God
wants His lost children found,
brought into the fold and fed."**

- Donald A. McGavran
The Father of the Modern-Day Church
Growth Movement

Sparks of revival are in the air in North America and various other parts of the world. It's even being covered by the traditional media, and most of it is positive! At this month's Renegade Pastors Conference (see the spread inside this issue), I talked about the difference between renewal, revival and awakening. We then continued our three-year trend of praying for revival and awakening; it was a powerful time. All of that reminded me of a few things McGavran had to say about revival and church growth. Here's some of his wisdom on revival that offers deep insight into the subject and I hope ignites your heart to pray for and ask God to fan the sparks of revival into a blazing holy fire! - NS

7 Markers of Revival that Lead to Church Growth

by Donald A. McGavran

REVIVAL BEARS a close relationship to church growth; yet exactly what that relationship is, particularly where the church is growing on new ground, is not clear to many. Under certain conditions revival may be said to cause growth. Under others, its relationship to church growth is so distant that apparently revival occurs without growth and growth without revival. Careful consideration of the subject is necessary if we are to understand the function of each in God's purpose of redemption.

No one knows more about revivals or has studied them across the world and written more extensively about them than the late **J. Edwin Orr**. He equates revivals with evangelical awakenings and defines them as follows:

An Evangelical Awakening is a movement of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Christ bringing about a revival of New Testament Christianity. Such an awakening may change in a significant way an individual only; or it may affect a larger group of people; or it may move a congregation, or the churches of a city or district, or the whole body of believers throughout a country or continent; or indeed the

larger body of believers throughout the world. Such an awakening may run its course briefly, or it may last a whole lifetime. (J Edwin Orr, 1965 *The Light of the Nations: Evangelical Renewal and Advance in the Nineteenth Century*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 265)

The dynamic of revival is so great and the potential for church growth so tremendous that all concerned with world evangelization must be deeply interested in it. The more ministers and missionaries know about the growth of churches, the better stewards of God's purposes in revival they will be. ***The same God brings both revival and great church growth.*** It must grieve him when a revival in the midst of receptive peoples remains shut up among a few churches. He has given his people power, and they have not used it to reap the harvest he has ripened. With this in mind, I shall venture to set forth seven basic ways in which revival bears on church growth. These are not exhaustive but will, I hope, prove suggestive.

The dynamic of revival is so great and the potential for church growth so tremendous that all concerned with world evangelization must be deeply interested in it.

1. Revival in the church can bring great ingathering if Christians are in living kin-contact [family connections] with a non-Christian population, provided that the spiritual power is channeled into witness with the purpose of winning to Christ. If activity is directed toward other members of the homogeneous unit in which the revival has broken out, greater growth will occur than if it is diverted to other peoples.

2. Revival in the church brings growth when a constant stream of converts is flowing into it. It is many times more likely to lead to great growth in an already growing congregation than in a blocked church.

3. Revivals in conglomerate congregations in towns have more chance of issuing in reproductive conversions outside the existing church if:

- a. Individual pastors have **church growth eyes**—that is, if they know which are the receptive units in their general population; which congregations are growing greatly and why; that group conversion is a valid form of conversion; and that the rich services rendered by church and mission are no substitute for Christ.
- b. Individual pastors carry out a consistent program over the years, single-mindedly dedicated to church growth.
- c. Churches and missions form their policies in the light of whatever means the Holy Spirit has already used to multiply churches in their kind of societies.

Revivals issue in church growth when leaders of revival are taught all we know about how God has brought about great ingatherings.

4. Revivals within people movements and web movements have far more chance of issuing in great church growth if:

- a. Focused on the winnable elements of their own population.
- b. Leaders from among the new converts are discovered and trained.
- c. As much biblical training as possible is given to entire congregations, as well as to leaders.

5. Revivals issue in church growth when leaders of revival are taught all we know about how God has brought about great ingatherings:

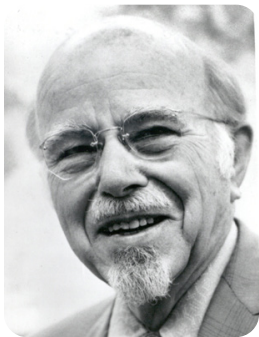
- a. The various kinds of readiness and how to discover and serve them.
- b. Right methods, which do not hinder the Holy Spirit and do not put a ceiling on church growth.
- c. Known revivals that have led to great church growth.
- d. The priorities in mission and church work that help or frustrate, respectively, the spread of churches throughout the world.

6. Revivals issue in church growth when revival is counted of great importance. If the choice has to be between revival and knowledge, Christians should choose revival.

7. Revivals issue in great church growth when revival plus knowledge is counted of even greater importance. Christians should learn all God has to teach us about church growth, and pray without ceasing for revival.

Revival is like a head of steam in a railway engine. Without it the engine remains motionless. With it, plus rails, pistons, water, oil, timetables, engineer, and other elements, the engine travels widely and fast. Great growth of the church following revival will come where all the conditions are right. So right, in fact, that people are not conscious of them. This was the case at Pentecost, which is the prime example of the bearing of revival on church growth.

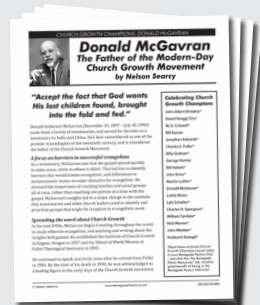
For more, see Chapter 10 (pages 138-143) of the book from which the above is adapted: Donald A. McGavran, revised and edited by C. Peter Wagner, Third edition, 1980 Understanding Church Growth: Third Edition, pages 138 – 143.



Donald A. McGavran (1897-1990) was one of the premier missiologists of the twentieth century and considered the man who sparked the entire modern Church Growth Movement. His life was dedicated to

identifying and overcoming barriers to evangelism. He also established the Institute of Church Growth in 1957 as well as the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1965 – where he eventually trained thousands of church leaders. No other person so impacted the growth of the church in North America and around the world.

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