

# Revivals and the Mid-Century Crusade

by C. William Fisher

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*The Church of the Nazarene is in crisis due to a lack of member-participation in evangelism, and must emphasize personal work and visitation to make its revivals more fruitful.*

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 7:14, Proverbs 11:30, Matthew 9:37, Acts 5:42, James 5:20

**Topics:** "Revival Movement", "Evangelism Strategies"

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## Description

C. William Fisher preaches about the crisis in evangelism faced by the Church of the Nazarene, emphasizing the need for a revival and a deeper spirituality to effectively win souls for Christ. He discusses the importance of member-participation in evangelistic efforts and the necessity of a God-centered approach in revivals. Fisher highlights the significance of personal responsibility in soul-winning and the need to conserve the results of revivals through continued spiritual care for new converts.

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## Transcript

"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." -- Acts 5:42

There is across this land a deepening and unmistakable conviction that evangelism, as we have known it, is at the crossroads. We do know that evangelism in the Church of the Nazarene is in crisis. And since our whole church program is geared to the evangelistic emphasis, the present crisis and challenge affect every layman and every preacher -- in every area of responsibility.

Our world today is in flux and ferment -- not only politically and socially and economically, but religiously as well. And the Church of the Nazarene, in its thinking and re-evaluation of emphasis, has not escaped the disturbing tides of our times. The attitudes we take today and the decisions and choices we make in the immediate future will, if Jesus tarries, determine the future effectiveness of the church for many, many years to come.

In our attempts to rethink evangelism in the light of present conditions, regardless of how hard we try, we cannot divorce revival effort from any sustained evangelistic emphasis, at least in the Church of the Nazarene today or in the foreseeable future. It is true, of course, that there have been great denomination-wide spiritual crusades promoted by some churches in the past which did not include the revival method. But the total impact of those crusades invariably resulted in the dissipation of the spiritual

and physical capital, with the whole crusade degenerating into just another campaign for church members. And if the Mid-Century Crusade in the Church of the Nazarene degenerates into that, the church would be better off had the campaign never been launched. Sheer weight is never the determining factor in effectiveness. The determining factor in the success of any cause is intensity of devotion -- and faith!

Many churches today face a real crisis in their evangelism because they have neglected, or in some cases, repudiated altogether, the revival method. Could it be that we in the Church of the Nazarene face our crisis because we have depended too exclusively upon the revival to meet all our evangelistic needs?

The true solution for effective evangelism today must lie between those two extremes. And that is why the challenge and program of the Mid-Century Crusade are so thrilling -- it reaffirms the necessity of revival, while at the same time emphatically points to the need of enlisting the whole church in the actual winning of men and women to Jesus Christ. That is not to say that revival is any less important; rather, it is to say that other methods of evangelism are vastly more important than we have sometimes thought.

There are those, of course, who blame any decrease in evangelistic effectiveness upon ineffective revivals and revivalists. It is so easy -- and human -- to lay blame. But when we are really honest with ourselves we know, and admit, that all of us -- pastors, evangelists, superintendents, and laity -- share in the blame, remembering that revival, in this sense, is merely the outgrowth of the evangelistic attitude and spirit.

There are those who apparently can afford that easy cynicism which says, "Yes, the church was born in a revival, and unless we are careful it will also die in one. And so, believing that we have really outgrown the revival, the cynics are ready to relegate the revival to some marginal activity of the church, thus enabling them to throw the full weight of their enlightened and progressive genius to some other method. Fortunately, that attitude is not widespread.

Whatever our attitude might be toward the revival method, with all its limitations, the Church of the Nazarene is committed to it -- not exclusively, of course, but as a central part of its evangelistic effort, in the Mid-Century Crusade and beyond.

Believing then that revivals have been, are today, and must in the future be a central part of our evangelistic effort, let us discuss ways in which revivals might be more fruitful within the general framework of the Mid-Century Crusade.

We are spending today in the Church of the Nazarene almost two million dollars per year in special revival effort. Each church is giving on the average from four to eight weeks per year to special evangelistic campaigns. There are approximately three hundred men and women in the

Church of the Nazarene giving their full time to the field of evangelism. Of course, that number varies from week to week -- as pastors are constrained to enter the evangelistic field, and as evangelists are constrained to enter the pastorate.

But the question comes: Are we getting value received from our program of evangelism? Do our revivals actually justify the unprecedented expenditure, the unparalleled promotion, and the untiring energies we are pouring out upon them today? In this crucial, challenging hour, are the results of our revivals as fruitful and as constructive and as abiding as they should be? And if they are not, then why not?

Some, of course, lay the blame for our evangelistic ills on the inflationary costs of religious work today. It is true that the per capita cost of conversions is steadily rising -- and in the Church of the Nazarene the cost

has been rising steadily since 1935. Yet that is neither an adequate excuse nor an ample explanation.

### Lack of Member-Participation

The real reason for the decline in evangelistic effectiveness is an alarming and tragic lack of member-participation in the actual work of winning men and women to Jesus Christ. And that, of course, implies that deeper lack of a vigorous and positive spirituality.

It is said that fifty thousand Nazarenes could die tonight and their passing would not visibly affect the church in its first task of winning souls to Christ. What is the condition in your local church? Could you lose one-fourth of your total membership without any appreciable decrease in evangelistic effectiveness?

The fact remains that whenever there are in any church more souls needing to be won than soul winners, that church is a field rather than a force for evangelism! And I submit that God does not intend His Church to be just a field for evangelism, but that God does intend His Church to be a force -- a mighty and militant spiritual force -- for the evangelization of the world!

There are, of course, great numbers of church members who are good, decent, respectable people, most of whom consider themselves real workers in the church. They can recite a stereotyped testimony. They are able to pronounce all the religious shibboleths. They long ago learned the holiness vocabulary -- even though some of them have long since lost the experience -- content of that vocabulary. They are even willing to serve on committees and boards or teach a class. They are very loyal and very devoted and very faithful -- to the marginal and the secondary. But the actual participation in the church's first task, that of winning men and women to Christ, is much too demanding and much too hard work for their soft and flabby souls.

All of us are thankful to God for those members who are spiritually alert and who are not only morally decent but spiritually dynamic -- who not only pray to win souls, but win souls because they pray. Who are not concerned chiefly with contacts, but are glad and willing to pay the steep price for conversions. Who are not only glad to deal with souls, but are willing to hold on until they win souls. May the emphasis of the Mid-Century Crusade be so stirring and so challenging that this small class of the concerned shall be increased -- by the thousands!

This type of burden and interest and passion for souls never comes easy -- and it can never be promoted nor organized nor advertised into the hearts of our people! This sincere burden and passion for souls comes as a by-product of deep devotion and consecration and an ever-increasing awareness of the glorious truths and claims of the gospel of Christ!

One thing we are learning, thank God! -- and not any too soon either -- is that artificial zeal, regardless of how loud or how sparkling or how persistent, can never take the place of genuine spiritual power!

### A Deepening Spirituality

There is one truth that all of us should rediscover and have the courage to face, and that is that evangelism is not the cause but the result of a spiritual church! On the Day of Pentecost was it the revival, the winning of three thousand souls to Christ, that made the disciples spiritually dynamic, or was it the new spiritual power that made the revival possible and inevitable? True, the spiritual tone of the church is far better after a genuine revival, but that is because revival is but the completion and renewal of the evangelistic process.

Evangelism, then, is really the outflow and the overflow of a spiritually vigorous church. Evangelism is the glow of an inner warmth, the go of an inner compulsion.

That is why a church can never be propped up indefinitely by periodic meetings. That is why no evangelist, no matter how good or how famous or how eccentric, can ever really produce a genuine revival; he can only "exploit" a spiritual condition! That is why a church that is making little or no impact should not ask, "What is wrong with our program of evangelism?" but should rather ask, "What is lacking in the spiritual equipment of our people?" And that is why Dr. E. Stanley Jones is so urgently right when he says, "Before we can go further we must first go deeper!"

Without that deepening spirituality which issues in passionate, all-out service, all of our visitation and advertising and methods -- the effectiveness of all our plans and programs and promotions will be reduced to a final and futile spiritual zero. As someone has so challengingly said: "Revival is not going down the street with a great big drum; revival is going back to Calvary with a great big sob!"

The slogan of the Mid-Century Crusade catches that same spirit: "Begin on your knees -- then go to the task!" And if we tarry on our knees long enough, we will go to the task -- we'll have to!

If our revivals are to justify the place given to them in the program of the church, and if they are to make the spiritual impact they should in this great Crusade, two changes are desperately necessary.

First, our revivals must become more God-centered and less man-centered! We don't really need more high-powered personality behind the pulpit; but we do urgently need more of the personality and power of the Holy Spirit upon the whole church.

Secondly, we must get the spectators out of the gallery and into the witness chair! There are far too many "onlookers" in our churches. There are far too many professing Christians and church members who are on the side lines. In this great task of winning men, no one can be effective as an "onlooker." No one can participate from the side lines. Soul winning is everybody's job!

Oh, that every Nazarene would make the slogan, "Begin on your knees -- then go to the task," more than a slogan, but an actual heart and life experience! Our revivals -- and every phase of the work -- would be more God-centered. Our "spectator" members would begin to participate in the soul-winning task, and our churches would receive that spiritual impetus that is so desperately and so urgently needed.

#### Revivals and the Crusade

Of course, before the revival ever starts, the pastor will be working the plan of the Mid-Century Crusade -- not just in its initial phases but in the fourth phase, that of definitely talking to and praying with men and women with the one aim of winning them to Christ. And in the remaining months of the Crusade, intensive working of that plan before each revival will tie in the whole emphasis of the Crusade into one constructive evangelistic effort. It will be impossible, of course, to keep sustained interest at that intensity so necessary for real effectiveness in all the phases of the Crusade; but if the fourth phase is worked immediately preceding each revival the results of the revivals should prove constructive and abiding.

But that personal work must not stop when the revival begins! The fact cannot be too strongly emphasized. How often it has been true that, regardless of the preparation for the revival, just as soon as the evangelist arrived and the revival started the people sat back and said by their actions, "All right, here we are; let's see you put it on" -- thinking that they could "hire" their evangelistic work done for them, and

that their responsibility was somehow suspended for the duration of the meeting. Is it any wonder that many of our revivals lack depth and constructive results? And by "constructive" results, I mean that residual work -- that you have left when all the shouting dies away.

Constructive and abiding results in any revival require more than horn-playing or special singing or recitation of poems or jokes or even unique sermons. Really constructive and abiding results stem from the deep moving of the Holy Spirit and the participation of the whole church in the whole task.

We simply cannot afford to let the plan of the Crusade in any of its phases stop when the meeting begins! Then, of all times, it is so urgently necessary to have our people trying to change some of their contacts into conversions.

### A Suggested Plan

The following plan is one that has been used for a number of months in an attempt to enlist more active participation in the actual winning of souls to Christ. It is not presented as the only plan, certainly, nor even the best plan; but I believe it does point in the right direction.

In order to continue the emphasis of the Mid-Century Crusade during the revival, all of those members who have signed up or expressed their willingness to do personal work and visitation are asked to meet after one of the early services of the meeting, there to discuss homes that can be entered and worked, and loved ones and friends who need definite spiritual help. Then the workers decide among themselves which homes they care to work and the size of the group to go -- usually two and not more than three persons to a group. Then throughout that night and next day they can pray for those into whose homes they will go the following evening.

Everyone, of course, comes to service the next evening; but during the song service, or about thirty minutes after the service has begun, those who are going out to do personal work come to the altar and prayer is offered for them in the specific task before them. Then while others in the congregation stand with bowed heads, the personal workers arise from the altar and go out of the church and into their cars and to the homes to be worked. They report back to the church after their visitation and prayer to report any conversions that might have taken place or the response of the people to their dealing and prayer. Of course the service continues at the church while the personal workers are out. This plan is carried out one or two nights of the first week of the meeting, and perhaps one night of the second or last week.

When the workers are met at the door by the prospect or prospects, the workers simply say, "We have left our revival service to come and talk with you and pray with you." Very seldom are the workers refused entrance into the home. If there are visitors in the home, the conversation is, of course, very general; the scripture is read and prayer is offered, and the workers leave the home with a strong invitation for the people to attend the revival services.

However, if the situation is "right," if the prospects are there alone, after the rather general conversation (and the prospect or prospects will usually see to it that it is kept general!), the small talk can be ended by saying, "We would like to read a scripture while we are here." And after the scripture, the workers can make the dealing very pointed and plain -- working toward a definite decision: excuses answered, and reasons given why the prospects should settle it right then and there. Finally the prospects are asked to kneel, and while all are kneeling the workers can all pray -- for that definite decision! The prospect or prospects can then be dealt with exactly as though they were kneeling at the altar in church.

After prayer the workers rise and rejoice with those who have prayed through -- or if such is not the case, promise the prospects that they will continue to pray for them, and urge them to attend the revival services; then thank them for the privilege of prayer in their home, and courteously and graciously leave.

"Sounds all right," you say, "but will it work?" Yes, thank God, it has passed that test! Not every needy prospect prays through in that type of home-evangelism. But, does every needy person go to the altar and pray through in the regular or revival services? There are at least four important advantages to this plan of evangelism -- or any other plan with the same objective.

#### Reaches Souls Not Attending Church

1. It makes possible the reaching and winning of men and women who never attend church -- much less kneel at an altar if they did come. In sober truth, great numbers of men and women living in our communities will die and go to hell if we wait for them to come to church and pray through. If they are ever won to Christ, it will be through personal dealing and prayer in their own homes.

A man past sixty years of age was not attending church -- and had not attended for years. He was hard and cynical. The members of the Church of the Nazarene in that California town had invited him to church many, many times, but he wouldn't come. His wife invited him constantly, but he wouldn't come. Finally, four men of the church went out to see him. His wife came to the door; and when the man saw the four men from the church there, he started out the back door. But they at last persuaded him to sit down, and they began to talk to him about his soul and about Christ and His wonderful love and mercy. The usual objections and excuses were given. Finally, the four Christian men and the man's wife knelt to pray. The man not only wouldn't kneel, but he sat with head unbowed, stony and resistant.

At last the wife went over and knelt in front of her husband and cried and prayed that he would get on his knees and accept Christ. "Watching" and praying, the men saw a tear trickle down the man's cheek; then all at once he was on his knees praying and crying and pouring out his heart to God. It wasn't long until the man prayed through and was on his feet saying, "Thank God for saving me! I have held out a long time, but I'm so glad that I have at last accepted Christ." Yes, the man was in the very next service of the revival -- and testified that Christ had saved him! Does it pay? Does it work? You answer that!

A mother of seven children was not attending church. She lived just outside the city limits of a Texas city, and with the children and transportation problems she easily justified herself in not attending church. Two personal workers went out to her home to talk to her and to pray with her. She continued ironing while the workers talked and witnessed. The woman was not hard nor resistant; she simply had not been able to find time to get everything else done and then get to church.

Finally, the workers asked the woman to get on her knees for prayer. She did so, and even while one of the workers prayed this woman broke out in sobbing -- crying to God for salvation. She had never been a Christian, and as she poured out her heart in prayer she told God that she was so sorry she had just neglected Him so long and that she really wanted to be a Christian mother and to set a good example before her children. God, of course, heard and answered that mother's earnest prayer. And that woman stood with tears streaming down her face, praising the Lord, saying, "Thank You, Jesus, for saving me! Thank You, Jesus, for coming into my heart. Now I know that I'll be able to meet my precious boy who is in heaven." Oh, how happy she was! How thrilled she was! A mother of seven children, a woman forty-five years of age, and a Christian for the first time in her life! Yes, she was in the next service of the revival and testified that Christ had saved her; and then, in the closing service of the revival, she, with others, stood

and united with the Church of the Nazarene.

Oh, the vast thousands of men and women and young people who never attend church services or revivals and who will be lost in hell unless someone prays with them in their own homes and wins them to Christ! With the ... attractions that keep men and women out of churches, this plan of home-evangelism will be increasingly important -- and necessary! But, the early Christians witnessed and won -- in homes!

#### Increases Dependence on God

2. This plan of visitation and home-evangelism during the revival increases the sense of dependence on God. It doesn't take a great amount of spiritual fervor to sit and listen through a revival service. But it does take real burden and a sense of utter dependence upon God to go out into a home and witness and win for Christ. Church members can come to revival services and even participate to a certain extent in those services -- without God's help. But no one can go into a home and pray and win a lost soul to Christ without God's help!

How many times have workers come back from the homes saying that they felt so inadequate as they pulled up in front of the home to be visited and worked, that they tarried in the car for a few minutes to ask God's special blessing and help! As one woman, who had been a professing Christian and a church member for years, put it, "As I rang the doorbell I was shaking all over with fright, but I asked God to help me; and by the time the people got to the door, my fear was gone and God wonderfully helped me throughout the evening." A Sunday-school superintendent said when he returned from praying with friends in their home, "I don't know just how much good it did them, but I know this: I'll never be the same!" If this plan did nothing more than to increase that sense of dependence upon God it would be gloriously worth while -- to every church member and to every church. Our work, in all of its phases, must be more God-centered.

#### Increases Sense of Personal Responsibility

3. This plan increases the awareness of personal responsibility in the task of soul winning and gives Christians, during the revival, an avenue of actual witnessing. Church members become not mere spectators in the task of winning souls, but participators, proclaimers, evangelists in their own right, which is, of course, God's plan and purpose for every Christian.

To the same degree that we have detached soul winning from the responsibilities and duties and privileges of the individual Christian, and placed that responsibility upon some "hired" evangelist, to that same degree have we departed from God's plan for winning men. Jesus said, "If you follow Me, I will make you a fisher of men." According to Jesus, every true Christian is to be a soul winner!

As workers go into the homes to pray and win, they feel in their hearts that it is their responsibility and duty and privilege -- just as much as it is the duty and privilege of their pastor or the "hired" evangelist. As a church board member put it, "I have known all along that this is what I ought to do, but somehow I just never got started until tonight." Or, as a Sunday-school teacher expressed it: "I have heard preachers talk about this all my life, but I never felt that I could do it, even though I knew I should. But I'm so glad that I have finally got started."

All of us know that this is God's plan -- every Christian witnessing and winning. All of us know that we should do it. All of us know that there are thousands of men and women who will go to hell unless they are

prayed with and won right in their own homes. But getting started! That's the difficulty! As someone has said, "The best way to start is to start!" And if we will start, God will go with us!

#### Conserves Results

4. This plan worked during the revival will help to conserve the results of the revival. If one has had a personal interest and part in the winning of a soul to Christ, that one will also be more vitally concerned about that soul staying true to God -- thus providing the only atmosphere for the successful conservation of results.

When we are honest with ourselves, we know that the results of any revival are never really conserved by any number of church socials or suppers or showers. If we spent half the time in spiritual concern for our new converts that we do entertaining them, we would see more of our converts actually hungering for holiness and more of those converts permanently won to the church. The results of any revival are never really conserved by merely adding names to the church roll. To accept into membership those who know nothing of the church or its doctrines is to lay the groundwork for future misunderstandings and trouble.

It requires the same spirituality -- the same intensity of prayer and passion and personal concern -- to conserve souls that it does to win them. No amount of organization or promotion or entertainment can ever take the place of that!

Is it any wonder that when our revivals are so man-centered -- when so much of the soul-winning responsibility is relegated to the evangelist -- is it any wonder that, when the evangelist is gone and there is no reservoir of spiritual concern or personal interest, so many of the results of the revival "evaporate." It takes personal concern plus the help of God to win souls -- and it takes personal concern plus the help of God to conserve souls!

#### Reveille or Taps

This great spiritual offensive known as the Mid-Century Crusade for Souls can mean either reveille or taps for the church. And remember, both of those can be blown on the same bugle -- by the same person! It will mean the beginning of the end if, in these days of terrific challenge, we dissipate our spiritual energies in that feverish activity which degenerates a crusade into a "campaign" for members and organizations, while high-sounding reports and imposing and flashy statistics continue to pile up, blinding us to the awful and tragic fact that our God-given mission of holiness evangelism is passing into other hands and hearts.

Oh, that God will make this Crusade a stirring reveille, awakening us to the need and to our responsibility, and summoning us to rise and meet the challenge of a world in crisis with a holiness evangelism which is at once the dynamic of the church and the only adequate answer to a confused and chaotic world!

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