

# Revival Men: Vance Havner

by E.A. Johnston

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*Vance Havner's ministry was marked by a passion for revival, a love for people, and a conviction that repentance and the Lordship of Christ were essential for true revival.*

**Duration:** 16:03

**Scripture:** Matthew 18:3, Mark 10:17, 1 Corinthians 13:1

**Topics:** "Revival Men"

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## Description

The video is a tribute to Vance Havner, a preacher known for his witty one-liners and powerful messages. He had a unique ability to combine humor and spiritual truths, making his audience both laugh and reflect. Havner's main focus was on the need for revival in the church and a return to New Testament vitality. His love for people and his deep understanding of the love of Christ allowed him to preach a hard message with compassion and effectiveness.

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## Transcript

Vance Havner once remarked, It seems today that everybody is holding revivals. It's about time somebody let loose of one. Well friends, our subject today in our series on Revival Man is the late, great Vance Havner.

He was a man, small in stature, frail in body, and weak in voice. He had a nasal twang to his voice. But once he entered the pulpit, this man was a giant, and he smoked giants in the name of the Lord.

When I think of men who impacted their generation for revival, the name of Vance Havner quickly comes to mind. Billy Graham called Vance Havner the most quoted preacher in America. And when Vance Havner died, it was Billy Graham who preached his funeral.

Brother preacher, if you died, would a Billy Graham come preach your funeral? Well, Vance Havner had a far-reaching ministry of pulpit and pen. He wrote over 30 books, and he preached on most of the big platforms throughout America in Evangelical Christianity. He was a household word at the annual Moody Bible Conference, and he was a favorite preacher to thousands of pastors throughout North America.

He preached the old-time religion with the fire of a prophet, and he preached up the lordship of Jesus Christ in a day when it wasn't popular to do so. But perhaps Vance Havner will be best remembered for his frothy one-liners and loaded sentences that could both amuse and convict at the same time. Comments

such as, If we have such a dynamite gospel, why are so many of us living firecracker lives? Too many church members have been starched and ironed without being washed.

Parents no longer use the word lost as my boy or girl is lost. Now they say, well, my Johnny is a good boy. The rich young ruler was a good boy, but he wasn't God's boy.

In these days of electrical gadgets and contrivances, everything in the modern home is controlled by a switch except the children. A man had changed denominations several times and was about to do it again. When he asked his pastor about it, the pastor replied, I guess it would be all right.

I never thought it would do any harm to change the label on an empty bottle. Walking is a lost art. Any pedestrian along a country road these days is presumed either to be out of his head or out of gas.

A true preacher is best measured not by how many bouquets have been pinned on him, but by how many brickbats have been thrown at him. Prophets have been on the receiving end of mud more than metals. Well, Vance Havner still makes me smile.

But when I think of Vance Havner, it was the theme of revival and the need to return to God and repentance that consumed much of his useful ministry. He called congregations all over the land to return to their God, and he said it with a prophetic voice with the conviction of, thus saith the Lord. Havner had a knack for crafting the right words to get his point across in his homespun country way.

Often he came across as just a good old country preacher from the sticks, but don't let him fool you. He was a deep thinker who knew the deep ways of God. Vance Havner walked with God in a close, intimate fellowship, and he delighted in getting along with God until he heard that still, small voice speak to him personally so he could go out and be a voice for God to his generation.

So few today in ministry follow Havner in that regard. Vance Havner loved to take long walks through the woods, down deserted country lanes, or alongside quiet streams so that he could shut himself up to God and have his own personal River K-Bar. He understood that if a man was to have power with God, he had to spend much time with God.

He had this to say about modern preachers who failed to have a deep walk with God. If all the preachers whose eyes are glued to Sunday afternoon television were on their knees in repentance and prayer, revival would be a lot nearer. Listen, friends.

Vance Havner was used of God because he was a man of God, and God would often use him as an instrument for revival. My late mentor, Stephen Offord, preached with Vance Havner on many a platform, and there was a real move of God under their preaching, particularly in 1968 at a Baptist conference in North Carolina. There was such a presence of God there and such conviction of the spirit that pastors flooded the front of the platform sobbing out loud over their sins.

One pastor approached Vance Havner after one of his preaching sessions and said to him, Brother Havner, your preaching is tearing me up. To which Havner replied, if it's having that effect on you, imagine what it's doing to me. When Havner was a young preacher boy, he met R.A. Torrey on a train.

At the time, R.A. Torrey was a shaky old man with a long prophet-like beard, and the young Havner boldly approached him and asked him for advice in ministry. Well, Torrey never smiled and looked at Havner with his penetrating eyes and replied, Stick to one thing, boy, and don't ever stray from that. Vance Havner

took that advice and preached up the blood and rune and redemption and repentance and regeneration and made the book of Amos his preaching platform, calling the church to repentance in his day.

Revival was his main theme all his life, that if the people of God would only humble themselves and turn from their wicked ways and pray and seek God's face, that he would hear and heal their land. Well, Vance Havner was a wordsmith who could combine humor and spiritual things in such a way as to get his audience to both laugh and cry tears of repentance at the same time. Listen to his pithy quotes.

A deacon stood to pray and commented about the previous night's meeting. He prayed, Lord, we had such a wonderful meeting last night. Lord, we had just such great blessings.

Oh, Lord, you should have been there. Paul speaks of spiritual babes who won't grow up. A lot of babies in the church today are not in the nursery.

Some of these 150 to 200 pound church babies keep the pastor busy, running around with a milk bottle when they should have been on beefsteaks years ago. When the church calls a new pastor, these infants may be heard to complain, I don't like the new preacher, he changed my formula. God is on the lookout for a man who will listen, but he must not only be quiet enough to get a message from God, he must be brave enough to give it.

And that was Vance Havner, friends. He was a man who had the courage to be a mouthpiece for the Most High to his generation. He preached the Lordship of Christ.

He preached the need of repentance. And he had this to say about professing Christians whose lives did not reflect a true born-again experience under the Lordship of Christ. But not all who are willing to crown him with their lips are ready to obey him in their lives.

I think we preachers have unwittingly created an artificial distinction between accepting Jesus as Savior and confessing him as Lord. We've made two things out of it. And it's not two things, it's all one thing.

If we take Jesus for all we know him to be at that time, God will save us. No one can take Jesus as Savior and at the same time willfully and deliberately and knowingly refuse him as Lord and be saved. We sing, standing on the promises.

But in truth, we're just sitting on the premises. God saved you to make you like Jesus. How is he coming along? Are you any more like Jesus than you were ten years ago? Were to be like him, it's not how pious you look at the Lord's table once a month, but how you act at the breakfast table each morning.

Vance Havner had a knack for reaching the conscience with zingers that stung when they hit home. But when I study the ministry of Vance Havner, I see a man consumed with desire to see revival in his day. He wore himself out over 70 years of public ministry going all over this land, calling the people of God back to a right relationship with God.

He preached the old gospel in a day when the church wanted to hear a newer version. He preached the need of repentance and regeneration with the voice of a prophet. And he brought people face to face with the God of revival and pleaded with them to believe that God for revival.

He said of revival, if we ever have a real revival again, we'll know it. A genuine work of God is always self-authenticated. It bears its own credentials, and you won't need a conference of experts to identify it

when it comes.

Vance Havner's great theme was a longing for revival, for the church to be revived, to return to New Testament vitality once again so the church could move once more in this world and turn the world upside down. Vance Havner lived and breathed revival, but his great usefulness lay in his ability to love people from all walks of life. He got away with preaching a hard message because he loved people so they could sense that love of Christ in him as he preached to them.

The following sermon illustration, which he loved to preach often, best sums up the life and ministry of Vance Havner. Listen to his words and catch the spirit of the message and ask God to breathe that same spirit of love toward others in your own life. Here now is his story, which typifies his life and ministry.

I was once a pastor of a little country church. Some men who preceded me had gone on to become prominent preachers, but I didn't hear much about them. I kept hearing about Josiah Hilliard, so I thought he must have been something.

I've got to find out about him. I went back to where my old friend John Brown was farming. John was the slowest man I ever saw.

He had time to talk. I would spend afternoons with John just talking when I ought to have been visiting, and he ought to have been plowing. But we were just talking.

Then the next morning I'd go over to where John was plowing, and we just took up where we left off. I knew John would give me the lowdown about Josiah Hilliard. I asked him one day, I said, John, I don't hear about any preacher here before me but Josiah Hilliard.

What was he like? What was the secret of his grip on all these people? John leaned on the plow handles a little bit, and he said, he just loved us. He went on plowing, and I made my way back through the old cypress swamp to the highway while the wood thrush was singing his vespers to the end of a perfect day. All I could hear was, though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and half-knot love, I am sounding brass and clanging cymbal.

Good Lord, I prayed, help me, as a young preacher, to settle down in the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians and stay there. That's a good place to live. Well, friends, that was the key to Vance Havner.

He preached a hard message, hot from the heart of God, and the people of God heard him because he took time to digest that message, and they could say of Vance Havner, he just loved us. How about you, brother preacher? How much of the love of Jesus is in you when you preach to others? I remember reading about D.L. Moody and the great change which took place in his life and ministry when he came face to face with the love of God, and he said, my cold heart began to thaw out. Well, Vance Havner loved the souls of men.

He loved the souls of men so much, he was willing to confront them with their sins, to rouse them from their indifference, and call them to repentance and prayer, to seek God in a fresh way for revival in our day. He was honest enough with men to warn them to flee from the wrath to come, and he loved them enough to deliver the message with love. He knew the love of Jesus in laying down his life for Him.

Oh, dear God, give us a touch of Your immense love. Melt our cold hearts, thaw them out. Oh, Lord, give us a passion for the lost with that kind of love.

Send a mighty outpouring of Your Holy Spirit in a demonstration of Your power, and fill our sanctuaries with Your presence in our spiritually bankrupt day. Let us demonstrate the love of Christ in our own lives, and bring us to a place of solitude where we can spend time with Thee to get on our heart what is on Your heart. Oh, for a burden for souls, wake up Your sleeping bride with a move of Your grace, and revive us again, O Lord.

Arouse us, great God, and empower us with Your Spirit to reach this generation of lost sinners with the love of Christ and with the warnings of a future judgment to come. All for Your great glory, O Lord. I pray these things in the strong name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

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