

Memoirs of the Revivalist (The Earliest Years Part 1)

by Robert Wurtz II

Charles Finney's preaching methods, which emphasized the importance of prevailing prayer and powerful preaching, led to a revival in the Second Great Awakening.

Scripture: Matthew 9:38, Luke 18:1, Acts 1:14, Ephesians 6:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 5:16

Topics: "Revival Preaching", "Prevailing Prayer"

Description

Robert Wurtz II preaches on the importance of prevailing prayer and powerful preaching in bringing about revival, drawing inspiration from the methods and results of Charles G. Finney's preaching during the Second Great Awakening. Finney emphasized the need for genuine love for God and neighbor, leading ministers to pray and preach fervently for the salvation of souls. Despite facing opposition and criticism for his unorthodox theological positions, Finney's compelling preaching under the anointing of the Holy Spirit led to deep conviction and conversion. The partnership between Charles Finney and prayer warrior Daniel Nash exemplifies the impact of prevailing prayer in ministry, as Nash's dedication to prayer brought about remarkable transformations in individuals and communities.

Transcript

PRAYING THAT YOU MIGHT PREACH

It has been over 150 years since Charles G. Finney began preaching the great revivals that would eventually be part of what we know as the Second Great Awakening. Charles Finney believed that 2 things were required for revival: prevailing prayer and powerful preaching. As we learn from his, 'Lectures on Revivals', preaching is done to influence men, but prevailing prayer is done to influence God.

It is important to rightly understand the meaning of genuine love for God and our neighbor before we proceed looking at some of the accounts of Charles Finney's preaching methods and the results. Love for God and his Christ will cause you to place His glory above all other motives in life. As a minister, love for your neighbor will drive you to pray and preach until you prevail with God and man for the salvation of their eternal souls. This is genuine love- that Christ would receive those for whom He died.

A lot of things have been said about Charles Finney and his methods of preaching revival. People didn't like them then and many do not like them now. Charles Finney did not believe in preaching assurance of

salvation apart from obedience to God's word. His theological positions would seem to many to be unorthodox. He believed that when a Christian sinned that they were on the same footing with a sinner before God. This led to preaching that demanded that people live upright before God if they were expect to ever see a moment in Heaven.

Jesus told us to go into the highway and hedges and compel the people to come in. This is exactly what Charles Finney did under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He compelled them and the Spirit of God convicted them. And when the people were thoroughly convicted of their sins after sometimes many days without an altar call, Charles Finney would show them Christ and they would reach out for pardon in faith. For the revivals of the Second Great Awakening, the compulsion that led to conviction yielded conversion by the Spirit of God. God calls His servants to compel- that HE might convict and convert.

THE EVANGELISTIC TEAM

Daniel Nash was a former pastor of a small church in the frontier of New York for six years, that later traveled as a prayer warrior with Charles G. Finney for seven more years until his death. Daniel (Father) Nash was deemed too old to preach at his church; so, on September 25, 1822, a strange church meeting was called at an unusual time and he was voted out by a vote of nine to three. The only reasons surviving to this day in the records were that they wanted "a young man to settle in." At the age of 46 they felt him too old, and resented his traveling. God still used this former pastor to send revival, but he was not reinstated. God blessed this rejected pastor. Through all of this God was breaking and preparing the heart of His man to leave a public ministry of preaching for a life of private prayer.

The Plight of the Prayer Warrior

If there is one thing that has a crushing effect on a person it is rejection. For Daniel Nash, he had been to his own personal garden of crushing (Gethsemane) in the time following his removal by the church board. About the same time in 1824 Charles Finney was to be examined for a license to preach. This would be their first encounter. They ministered together for 7 years as he and a man named Abel Clary would go before Finney and pray until they prevailed. J. Paul Reno writes, "It is said of Finney that, "his evangelistic party consisted of prayer partners, who went before him and sought the Lord in some secluded spot. And when Finney was preaching Father Nash (Daniel Nash) and Mr. Clary were hidden away somewhere praying for him. No wonder cities were stirred and a vast harvest of souls reaped." This concept of an evangelistic party made up of praying men has nearly been lost in these days of organizers, promoters, big names, etc. Such praying men not only sustained Finney's ministry, but explain the power in preaching and long-lasting results. This partnership in ministry lasted roughly 7 years and after the passing of Daniel Nash, Charles Finney took a position of pastor within 3 months at Chatham Chapel. J. Paul Reno summarizes Daniel Nash's life, death, and ministry, "His tombstone is in a neglected cemetery along a dirt road behind a livestock auction barn. His church no longer exists, its meetinghouse location marked by a historical marker in a corn field; the building is gone, its timber used to house grain at a feed mill four miles down the road. No books tell his life story, no pictures or diaries can be found, his descendants (if any) cannot be located, and his messages are forgotten. He wrote no books, started no schools, led no movements, and generally, kept out of sight." Daniel Nash entered his prayer closet in secret and the God who answers by fire rewarded those meetings openly. Reno continues, "The majority of prayer for those who would be so used must be in private. They do not seek either the eye nor ear of men, but rather the ear of God. They seek a closet alone with God. Nash used a cellar, a room in a boarding house, a nearby house, or a grove of trees where he could pour out his heart to God alone or with just a few others of

similar burden and heart." Daniel Nash died on his knees in prayer.

THE SIX-MONTH MISSION

At the age of thirty-one years, roughly three months after Charles Finney was ordained to preach by the St. Lawrence Presbytery, the female missionary society in Oneida County, New York commissioned him to preach for a six-month term in the counties to their north. Charles Finney had no regular training for the ministry and he did not expect or desire to labor in large towns or cities, or minister to cultivated congregations. He intended to go into the new settlements and preach in schoolhouses, and barns, and groves, as doors opened.

Charles Finney went first into the northern part of Jefferson County in northwestern New York State, and began his ministry at Evans' Mills, in the town of Le Ray. The village of Evans' Mills is situated within the Town of Le Ray, in Jefferson County, New York. Here he found two churches, a small Congregational church without a minister, and a Baptist church with a minister. He presented his credentials to the deacons of the church, they gladly accepted him, and he began to minister. The churches had no meetinghouse; but the two churches worshipped alternately in a large stone schoolhouse, large enough to accommodate all the children in the village. The Baptists occupied the house one Sunday, and the Congregationalists the next; so that I could have the house but every other Sunday. Finney could use the School House in the evenings as often as needed. Because of this he divided his Sundays between Evans' Mills and Antwerp, a village roughly 12 miles to their northeast.

Entertained but not Converted

Charles Finney began to preach alternately from week to week in the schoolhouse at Evans' Mills. The people were very interested, and thronged the place to hear him preach. They celebrated his preaching; and the little Congregational church became very hopeful that there would be a revival. However, no general conviction appeared upon them corporately. Finney was very dissatisfied with this state of things; and at one of the evening services, after having preached there two or three Sundays, and several evenings in the week, He told the people at the close of his sermon, "I have come here to secure the salvation of your souls; my preaching, I know, is highly complimented by you; but, I did not come here to please you but to bring you to repentance; it matters not to me how well you are pleased with my preaching, if after all you reject my Master; something is wrong, either in me or in you. The kind of interest you manifested for my preaching is doing you no good; and I cannot spend my time with you unless you are going to receive the Gospel." Charles Finney then, quoted the words of Abraham's servant, saying to them, "Now will you deal kindly and truly with my master? If you will, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left." He wanted to know whether or not they were going to receive Christ as Lord or resist the Gospel. If they had determined to resist he was going to leave; if they were going to receive Christ he would stay. He said to them, "You admit that what I preach is the Gospel. You profess to believe it. Now will you receive it? Do you mean to receive it, or do you intend to reject it? You must have some mind about it. And now I have a right to take it for granted, in as much as you admit that I have preached the truth, that you acknowledge your obligation at once to become Christians. This obligation you do not deny; but will you meet the obligation? Will you discharge it? Will you do what you admit you ought to do? If you will not, tell me; and if you will, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."

Who is on the Lord's Side?

Charles Finney was not an entertainer. He had one objective- to see the people turn to God and walk upright before Him. He was not looking for the praise of men. He pressed this congregation by telling them to stand up if they wanted Christ. They remained seated. He sent them home to ponder that they had rejected the Lord. Reflecting back on this Finney writes, "I said to them, "Then you are committed. You have taken your stand. You have rejected Christ and His Gospel; and ye are witnesses one against the other, and God is witness against you all. This is explicit and you may remember as long as you live, that you have thus publicly committed yourselves against the Savior, and said, 'We will not have this man, Christ Jesus, to reign over us.'" This is the purport of what I urged upon them, and as nearly in these words as I can recollect. When I thus pressed them they began to look angry, and arose, en masse, and started for the door. When they began to move, I paused. As soon as I stopped speaking they turned to see why I did not go on. I said, "I am sorry for you; and will preach to you once more, the Lord willing, tomorrow night."

Who in our day would take such a stand for Christ? Who would be willing to press so hard upon the minds and hearts of men as to move beyond the emotions to move the will? This type of preaching came with a large price tag. Finney continues, "But for that evening and the next day they were full of wrath. Deacon McC and myself agreed upon the spot, to spend the next day in fasting and prayer separately in the morning, and together in the afternoon. I learned in the course of the day that the people were threatening me--to ride me on a rail, to tar and feather me, and to give me a "walking paper," as they said. Some of them cursed me; and said that I had put them under oath, and made them swear that they would not serve God; that I had drawn them into a solemn and public pledge to reject Christ and His Gospel."

The time came for the service to begin; they left the woods and went to the village. The people were already thronging till the house was filled to its utmost capacity. As was always his method, Finney did not have a sermon written out to preach and in this case had not even thought about what he should preach. Finney recounts the start of the meeting, "The Holy Spirit was upon me, and I felt confident that when the time came for ACTION I should know what to preach. As soon as I found the house packed, so that no more could get in, I arose, and I think, without any formal introduction of singing, opened upon them with these words: "Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. WOE to the wicked! It shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him." The Spirit of God came upon me with such power, that it was like opening a battery upon them. For more than an hour, and perhaps for an hour and a half, the Word of God came through me to them in a manner that I could see was carrying all before it. It was a fire and a hammer breaking the rock; and as the sword that was piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. I saw that a general conviction was spreading over the whole congregation. Many of them could not hold up their heads. I did not call that night for any reversal of the action they had taken the night before, nor for any committal of themselves in any way; but took it for granted, during the whole of the sermon, that they were committed against the Lord. Then I appointed another meeting, and dismissed the congregation."

Compelled and Convicted

This is where 99% of ministers would have made an altar call. But not Charles G. Finney. He sent the people home again to ponder their estate before God. Before he was through ministering, the fallow ground of their hearts was thoroughly plowed and mellowed if they were but yielding to the Holy Spirit at all. And in that brokenness God can plant the seed of His good word. Many ministers in our day stop well short of such brokenness in their preaching and the results bare this out.

You may wonder what kind of an effect this type of preaching has on a person? One account Finney gives is very telling. He writes, "As the people withdrew, I observed a woman in the arms of some of her friends, who were supporting her, in one part of the house; and I went to see what was the matter, supposing that she was in a fainting fit. But I soon found that she was not fainting, but that she could not speak. There was a look of the greatest anguish in her face, and she made me understand that she could not speak. I advised the women to take her home, and pray with her, and see what the Lord would do. They informed me that she was Miss G, sister of the well-known missionary, and that she was a member of the church in good standing, and had been for several years. That evening, instead of going to my usual lodgings, I accepted an invitation, and went home with a family where I had not before stopped over night. Early in the morning I found that I had been sent for to the place where I was supposed to be, several times during the night, to visit families where there were persons under awful distress of mind. This led me to sally forth among the people, and everywhere I found a state of wonderful conviction of sin and alarm for their souls. After lying in a speechless state about sixteen hours, Miss G's mouth was opened, and a new song was given her. She was taken from the horrible pit of miry clay, and her feet were set upon a rock; and it was true that many saw it and feared." She later told her testimony that she had never really known the Lord and had believed a false hope. She was saved for the first time in her life though she had been many years in church.

Is it Love?

I must take a moment to reflect on this one question, "Is it love to allow people that we esteem as friends or family to go on believing a lie and be damned?" Or "Is it cruel to minister in a way that would leave a person unable to speak or in agony of soul for days if that was the only way the person would be converted?" Keep in mind that this woman was the wife of a missionary and had heard countless messages in her life that never brought her to genuine repentance and faith. What would have happened had Charles G. Finney not been sent by God to that church?

Great Opposition

Anytime God is doing a work the enemy is working through people to bring all sorts of distractions and resistance. This was also true in this revival. Finney recounts, "There was one old man in this place, who was not only an infidel, but a great railer at religion. He was very angry with the revival movement. I heard every day of his railing and blaspheming, but took no public notice of it. He refused altogether to attend a meeting. But in the midst of his opposition, and when his excitement was great, while sitting one morning at the table, he suddenly fell out of his chair in a fit of apoplexy (brain hemorrhage). A physician was immediately called, who, after a brief examination, told him that he could live but a very short time; and that if he had anything to say, he must say it at once. He had just strength and time, as I was informed, to stammer out, "Don't let Finney pray over my corpse." This was the last of his opposition in that place."

There are accounts of various people resisting the word of the Lord and refusing to repent and going out into eternity in that condition. One woman was a Universalist who did turn to Christ. Her husband was a Universalist also and when he heard that Finney had preached the true gospel to her and she was converted he went into a rage. This man swore he would "kill Finney." He armed himself with a loaded pistol, and that night went to the meeting where he was to preach. Finney did not know he was there. The meeting that evening was in a schoolhouse out of the village. The house was packed, almost to suffocation. Finney describes that night, "I went on to preach with all my might; and almost in the midst of my discourse I saw a powerful looking man, about in the middle of the house, fall from his seat. As he

sunk down he groaned, and then cried or shrieked out, that he was sinking to hell. He repeated that several times. The people knew who he was, but he was a stranger to me. I think I had never seen him before. Of course this created a great excitement. It broke up my preaching; and so great was his anguish that we spent the rest of our time in praying for him." The man went home sorely distressed, but was miraculously converted and met Finney in the road early in the morning a new man.

Binding Together with the Prince of Prayer

When Father Nash (Daniel Nash) came to Evans' Mills he was full of the power of prayer. He was another man altogether from what he had been at any former period of his Christian life. Finney writes, "I found that he had a praying list, as he called it, of the names of persons whom he made subjects of prayer every day, and sometimes many times a day. And praying with him, and hearing him pray in meeting, I found that his gift of prayer was wonderful, and his faith almost miraculous." He had come just in time to help pray for a village tavern owner that we shall call Mr. D. The tavern owned by Mr. D

was the refuge of all the opposers of the revival. The bar room was a place of blasphemy; and Mr. D was himself a most profane, ungodly and abusive man. He went railing about in the streets about the revival; and would go out of his way to swear and blaspheme in the presence of Christians. A young Christian lived across the way from him; and he told Finney was moving out of that neighborhood, because every time Mr. D saw him he would come out and swear, and curse, and say everything he could to hurt his feelings. Actually Mr. D. knew little about Christianity and the revivals.

Father Nash got word of Mr. D's behavior and immediately put his name on his prayer list. He remained in town a day or two, and moved on to another place God had called him. Finney remarks on what happened next; "Not many days afterward, as we were holding an evening meeting with a very crowded house, who should come in but this notorious D? His entrance created a considerable movement in the congregation. People feared that he had come in to make a disturbance. The fear and abhorrence of him had become very general among Christians, I believe; so that when he came in, some of the people got up and retired. I knew his countenance, and kept my eye upon him; I very soon became satisfied that he had not come in to oppose, and that he was in great anguish of mind. He sat and writhed upon his seat, and was very uneasy. He soon arose, and tremblingly asked me if he might say a few words. I told him that he might. He then proceeded to make one of the most heart-broken confessions that I almost ever heard. His confession seemed to cover the whole ground of his treatment of God, and of his treatment of Christians, and of the revival, and of everything good. This thoroughly broke up the fallow ground in many hearts. It was the most powerful means that could have been used, just then, to give an impetus to the work. D soon came out and professed a hope, abolished all the revelry and profanity of his barroom; and from that time, as long as I stayed there, and I know not how much longer, a prayer meeting was held in his barroom nearly every night."

What can close a bar room and convert the hardest of sinners? REVIVAL! What can move the hand of God in days of declension? Prevailing Prayer! What weapon can God use in His hands to smite the hardest of hearts? Powerful preaching! When the compelling words of the preacher are backed by the anointing of God through prevailing prayer- men and women are converted. When the preacher is patient enough to allow the Holy Spirit time to do His work- even if it takes days or weeks- God will change lives. May we find those qualities of ministry in our lives. May we learn the virtues of being patient and staying the course until God moves.

NOTES:

- 1) AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY THE REV. CHARLES G. FINNEY, 1792-1875
- 2) LECTURES ON REVIVALS OF RELIGION by The Rev. CHARLES G. FINNEY; LECTURE IV: PREVAILING PRAYER
- 3) Daniel Nash: Prevailing Prince of Prayer J. Paul Reno Copyright 1989
- 4) A BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES GRANDISON FINNEY. G. FREDERICK WRIGHT, D.D., LL.D. Professor in Oberlin Theological Seminary, OHIO 1891
- 5) "The Oberlin Evangelist" December 16, 1840 Lecture XXIV. SALVATION ALWAYS CONDITIONAL by the Rev. C. G. Finney Text.--1 Cor. 10:12: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/robert-wurtz-ii/memoirs-of-the-revivalist-the-earliest-years-part-1/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net