

PRAYING FOR A CHRIST-AWAKENING

God With Us



DR. DAVE BUTTS

SCRIPTURE STUDY

MATTHEW 1:23
MATTHEW 18:20
GALATIANS 2:20
COLOSSIANS 1:27

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,
 Thank you for coming to earth.
 Manifest Your holy presence in
 our midst. We long to know you
 better.
 In Jesus' Name,
 Amen

... and they will call him Immanuel, ... God with us.
 (Matt. 1:23)

The heart of God working in the heart of man doesn't look the same on everyone when it happens. But whether in the quiet stirrings of our spirit or in the gushing fount of our own visible emotions, we are rarely left to wonder when the Lord is passing by.

And in churches large and small all across our land—in ways that are as unique as we are, and as creative as our God is—He is making Himself known. He is speaking. He is calling. He is drawing us, even in these days . . . drawing us to a Christ Awakening, to a time when our hearts truly become thirsty enough to want and welcome the power of God from on high, first purifying us, then igniting us to lives of impassioned worship and service.

And, oh, how we need Him. If ever we thought we could subsist on anything less than the clear Word of God, times like these reveal how desperately we need to hear His voice. May our hearts be open, vessels willing to be filled, servants waiting to be led. Pray today for . . .

Increasing Testimony of the Manifest Presence of God

I no longer live; but Christ lives in me. (Gal. 2:20)

Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Col. 1:27)

Is spiritual awakening something God wants to do for His people today? To answer this question, we need to understand that God has always worked in the area of spiritual awakening with His people. From the earliest days of Israel, on through the history of the Church, God's method of dealing with His people has been to grant periodic times of special blessing in which His presence is made manifest and His people are drawn back to Him. The result of that is a changed society.

Perhaps the clearest view of spiritual awakening can be seen by looking back at Israel in the Old Testament. You typically see something like this: Israel, as a people, called by God to make a difference . . . called to be a light to the

Gentiles. You see them under a leader such as Moses or David, people who are living a life that causes them to be set apart from the people around them. They are worshipping God; they're holding on to His Word; they are doing what God wants them to do. Then, typically, after a generation or so when a leader has died, you see Israel begin to slide. You begin to see them move farther and farther away from obedience to the Word of God. They begin to accept idolatry from the tribes around them. Pagan practices begin to come in, with acts of immorality and all the problems associated with that—eventually times of war and even slavery. Typically at this point of decline there arises a remnant of people who begin to pray. They begin to cry out to God asking the Lord to save them. Then, in His own timing, God sends a leader and there comes a time of spiritual awakening when they begin to throw off their idolatry and paganism and restore once again the true worship of Jehovah. They begin to again hold onto the Word of God. The nation experiences a time of national prosperity, spiritual excitement, and religious significance that lasts for about a generation. Then you see the cycle begin to happen again.

As you move into the New Testament, you see a group of people who were born in a time of spiritual awakening. But we know historically that it did not last. Through the history of the Church, you once again see the exact same pattern of awakening and decline. Down through the years many countries have experienced periodic times of awakening. Within the United States we have experienced three times of national revival, known as the Great Awakenings.

Extending Worship

One of the characteristics of the awakenings was extended times of worship. They never wanted to end the service. Now obviously people had to leave—they had to take care of physical things; they had jobs that they had to go to—but as soon as they were done they were back because that was where God was. They wanted to be in on the action. They wanted to be where God was. They wanted to experience His presence.

We are desperate for that in our nation today. In a very real sense, we are at this wonderful point of despair. We are at a wonderful point of hopelessness in which the Church is beginning to recognize that we have been doing everything we know how to do and it is not working. It is time for spiritual awakening. It is time to humble ourselves before God in prayer and ask Him to make Himself known in the midst of His people so that our nation can be saved and our world impacted for Christ.

Praying for His Presence

How does awakening come? Any student of spiritual awakening will tell you that there has never been awakening without a movement of prayer. God always calls His people to prayer in anticipation of awakening. We need to shift our prayer focus to the issues that are close to God's heart, especially that His people, His Church, would wake up and discover the presence of Jesus in our midst. When that occurs, our lives become different. When Jesus is there, suddenly things that we accepted before are no longer acceptable. Some of the things that go on in our church and in our society are changed because it is the Lord who is present. That is why in those great awakenings in the past, there was a bit of emotionalism. Suddenly they came into a church service and there was Jesus. Now they did not see Him in the flesh, but there was a powerful sense of the presence of Jesus. What do you suppose occurs if you come into a church service during a revival and there is a strong sense of the presence of Jesus and you've been sinning all week? When you come into the presence of the awesome holiness of God, suddenly there is weeping, crying out, and sometimes even falling down before God in repentance.

Being Christ-centered

True spiritual awakening is not man-centered but Christ-centered. It is not about a type of music or special experience but a fresh revelation of Christ in the midst of His people—people often grown sleepy or slow-moving and desperately in need of a fresh awakening touch from their Savior.

The heart of awakening is when Christ shows up for church. It is when we begin to experience what we already know is true biblically and theologically concerning the presence of Christ. Biblical truths that had perhaps grown stale are suddenly infused with new life. The love and life of Jesus are lived out in fresh new ways as the Church gathers.

This same experience ought to mark the life of individual Christians as we begin to experience spiritual awakening. Colossians 1:27 says, “Christ in us, the hope of glory.” Is there a more astonishing verse in Scripture—that the Son of God has actually come to take up residence within the individual Christian? What a difference it would make in our lives if we truly lived out the truth of Christ in us, the hope of glory; walking daily with Jesus—aware of His presence, His love, His strength, and His direction. Rather than asking the question in abstract, “What would Jesus do?” we would often throughout each day directly ask our indwelling Lord, “Jesus, what are You doing?” What an awakening of changed life, character, and witness we would see among believers.

Thanksgiving

_ We are grateful, Lord Jesus, that when we gather in Your name, You Yourself are present in a very special way in our midst.

_ Thank You that our lives are hidden with Christ, that we are seated with Christ, and that we have the privilege of following Him.

_ We celebrate Your faithfulness, God, for granting periodic times of special blessing in which Your presence is made manifest and Your people are drawn back to You, resulting in a changed society.

Confession

_ Sunday after Sunday we go through the motions without crying out to God and a real awareness of Jesus actually being there with us. Forgive us, Lord, for ignoring You.

_ Praising God has grown stale and the notion of extending worship does not excite or thrill our souls. We repent of rejecting Your presence.

_ We fail to initiate praying for His presence. Cleanse us, Lord.

_ We are more comfortable being self-centered rather than being Christ-centered. Jesus, change our focus.

Petition

_ We wish to walk in the Spirit and thus be continually conscious of Christ in us.

_ Lord Jesus, please show up at church so that Your love and life will be lived out in fresh new ways as Your Body gathers.

_ Awaken us again, do it again in our day. Lord, this is what You have done and is what we want You to do in our life and in our nation.

Crying Out to God

Lord, we cry out for Your presence, for You are “Immanuel, . . . ‘God with us.’”

(Matt. 1:23)

Extending Worship

Jesus, might we, starting with me, no longer live but You live in us, for “the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20).

Praying for His Presence

Lord, as we gather in Your name, we trust Your presence, for “where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them.” (Matt. 18:20)

Being Christ-centered

Father, allow us to experience the “fullness of Christ in us, the hope of glory.”

(Col. 1:27)

David Butts has served, and continues to serve, in numerous leadership capacities and on boards of directors and committees. He is most recently chairman, America’s National Prayer Committee; secretary/treasurer, Denominational Prayer Leaders’ Network; chairman, Pioneer Bible Translators Board of Directors; and executive committee, Mission America Coalition. David has authored articles on prayer and missions for PRAY!, The Christian Standard, Lookout, and Horizons magazines. He is the author of The Devil Goes to Church, Pray Like the King (with his wife, Kim) and Asleep in the Land of Nod and has completed a videotape presentation on “Leadership for a Praying Church.”

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