

“Give Me Life According to Your Word”:

Personal Revival

Sermon Notes

- **The 21st century American church is ailing, revival is critical - and it begins with each and every individual**

**Though revival is inescapably communal, it's also intensely personal. Therefore as individual Christians...*

1. We are sufferers aching for revival through the Word
(vv. 107, 154, 156)

2. We are sinners desperate for revival through the Word
(vv. 25, 37)

3. We are saints longing for revival through the Word
(vv. 40, 88, 149, 159)

Next Week: Isaiah 63:15-64:12 - “Oh That You Would Rend the Heavens”:
Corporate Revival

MEFC Community Group Study Guide

For the week of March 9th-15th

Getting Started

1. Have you known anyone in your life who has walked away from the church over the last 25 years? Perhaps someone in your family, your circle of friends, a neighbor, a classmate, or a colleague at work? If so, take a moment to share their story with the group. Do you stay in contact with them? If so, how? If not, why not?

Digging Deeper

2. If you've noticed something of a change in the church-going habits of Americans around you over the last quarter-century, you're not crazy. There's plenty of hard data that backs up your experience. In their 2023 book *The Great Dechurching*, authors Davis, Graham, and Burge tell us that: "What we have witnessed in the last twenty-five years is a religious shift [absolutely unparalleled in the history of this nation...Over the last quarter century] about 40 million people have stopped attending church. [Now, brace yourself for this statement] More people have left the church in the last twenty-five years than all the new people who became Christians from the First Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening, and Billy Graham crusades combined."¹ How do those statistics land on you? Take some time to discuss them as a group.

¹ Jim Davis & Michael Graham (with Ryan Burge), *The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI. 2023. p.5.

Open Your Bible to Luke 8:4-15...

3. In the final chapter of *The Great Dechurching*, Davis, Graham, and Burge offer “Five Exhortations to Church Leaders”. They write that: “The sheer number of people departing the church right now can be hard to digest, leaving us to wonder if they can be brought back. We have to be careful not to write them off, but also not to write off the clear instruction we are given in the Bible either.”² *Exhortation 1: Don’t Be Surprised When People Fall Away*. Read through Luke 8:4-15 as a group. How does Jesus’s parable of the sower help us to frame our response to the great dechurching? Note, too, the Apostle John’s word to the wise in 1 John 2:19. Why are truths like these so crucial for us as we seek to interpret this shift in the American church?

4. *Exhortation 2: Extreme Responses Hurt People*. Davis, Graham, and Burge explain: “...we need to be careful not to swing to one of two extremes. We can’t throw up our hands and stop striving for the purity of the church on one extreme, but we also can’t become overly strict and rigid, expecting that we will make the church perfectly pure on the other.”³ Notice that the first extreme comes from the left while the other extreme comes from the right. How does the series of exhortations in Ephesians 4:1-32 help us to lean away from the first extreme? How do Jesus’s words in Matthew 23:1-36 help us to lean away from the second extreme?

² Davis, Graham, and Burge, pp.227-229.

³ Davis, Graham, and Burge, pp.229-231.

5. *Exhortation 3: Be Patient.* This portion of Davis, Graham, and Burge's chapter isn't their strongest moment in the book. Not because patience isn't absolutely crucial, but because of the way they quote and interpret various biblical texts to make their point. But that doesn't mean that patience isn't a huge piece of the puzzle here. For example, consider the wisdom of James in James 5:7-11. Take this passage and apply it to what it means to exercise patience with the local church. Or consider Jesus's parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:24-30. What wisdom is here for us as we think about the local church in the 21st century?

6. *Exhortation 4: Shepherd the Flock.* Turn to 1 Peter 5:1-11. How are pastors and elders mission critical in this matter of the great dechurching? At the same time, how is this passage a call to all church members (not just to leaders - consider especially v.5)?

7. *Exhortation 5: Equip the Saints.* Similarly to what we saw above in Ephesians 4:12-13, take a look at Paul's example of Christian leadership in Colossians 1:28-29. Break these two verses down. What is his great work (v.28a)? How does he do it (v.28b)? What is his ultimate goal (v.28c)? In what strength does he carry it out (v.29)? Be careful with your answer in Colossians 1:29...it's a two-part answer. What broad applications are there for each of us in the local church in the 21 century (not just apostles in the 1st century)?