

Revival - Break up your Fallow Ground

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[0:00] People think about seasonal messages this summer year as Christmas coming, but thinking about a new year to come and often it's a time to think of change and reconnect and perhaps asking ourselves a question how can I grow spiritually in 2025 how can I be more effective how can God use me more how can I be more in his will and we're going to go to Hosea chapter 10 and verse 12.

So just after Ezekiel there, Daniel and Hosea. Hosea 10 verse 12. Just one verse to lead in to consider these truths today.

Sow to yourselves in righteousness. Reap in mercy. Break up your fellow ground for it is time to seek the Lord until he can't and rain righteousness upon you.

In the book of Hosea, God's warning Israel. Israel is compared verse 11 to like a well-trained heifer. Like this young cow that likes to tread out the grain. They're in this place of comfort and prosperity. And also through the book we see that Israel's acted like an unfaithful spouse. They've turned from worshipping the true God to worshipping idols. And so there's backsliding here.

[1:21] And in Hosea 4 verse 6 the people have rejected the true knowledge of God. Where it reads, my people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge. So they honoured God with their lips but their heart was far, far from him.

And God extends love and compassion still. But yet their sin brings this judgment. And so Hosea uses this imagery, if you like, of ploughing and sowing. We can think of it.

I know for my own gardener, I'm not much of a gardener. If you were to scrutinise me. But there's the need of ploughing and sowing. And the Bible uses lots of images through the word of farming. And we see the timeless principle of that sowing and reaping. It's really the principle of consequences, isn't it? You reap what you sow. And if you sow righteousness, you'll reap blessings from that.

If you sow sin, you'll reap sin's consequences. So in Hosea's day, the hearts of the people were grown hard. And rock hard. Like this uncultivated, unplowed, unproductive, overgrown kind of soil.

[2:29] And what about us? We can think about us as we think about that year, year ahead, 2025. What's it going to be for us as we think spiritually of our own selves?

In Hosea's time, the people's hearts have grown cold and hard. And what about us, though? What about us? Is this fallow ground? You see the picture there of a ground that's hard, that's lost fertility. It's stagnant. It's not growing. There's no growth there. What's hindering our own relationship individually with our Lord? These are questions we can all think about.

And preachers often use this verse for really a message about revival. And there's a breaking up of that spiritual, our fellow ground. It's when we get our hearts right with God.

I don't know if any of you have visited Moonser. I know this one time I went to Moonser and the old Salvation Army, Citadel, the chapel there was open. And I popped my head in.

[3:34] And this is a building that's, you know, hundreds, well, it's 1911, I think, was the year that the Salvation Army was active in Moonser.

And it was times of revival there in the Copper Triangle. And in Moonser, in the Salvation Army chapel, across the front, they've got this wooden kind of altar rail.

And it's emblazoned with these words in gold. Get right with God. And I thought, that's still true today as it was back those many years ago.

And really in that time of considering revival, get right with God. It's a good slogan to make our life kind of motto, isn't it? So, moving on, what is fallow ground?

There's this layer you could say is this fallow ground. And fallow ground, if I could kind of explain it, is that ground that's got hard, it's neglected. It's like a farmland that's hardened.

[4:30] It's hard and unyielding. And this land, it used to be fruitful. But this soil now has not been ploughed for a long time. It's been left unused. And it's got hardened.

It's neglected, uncultivated, barren. Like a hardened heart. And this field, it used to produce fruit. But now, it's stopped producing. And it's unproductive.

Fallow ground. It's like it's unploughed ground. It's hard soil. You can't plant or grow anything. This fallow ground, it's covered by this hard layer that prevents growth. And it's overrun.

You could think of it as like a land that's covered with weeds and thorns and stones. And to be honest, it's a lot like my garden in some places. I don't know about you. But we see that soil that's been left unturned.

And it's got hardened. And it's resistant to the plough as well. You could compare that fallow ground with a heart that once was receptive to God. And yet now, it's growing cold, complacent, distracted.

[5:32] This heart is now hardened. Like that hardened soil. By sin, neglect, life's trials. It's stagnation. And it can happen to all of us. It can happen to me. And, you know, it's a true saying that really often an active life is a healthy life.

When we stop being active, you know, I don't know about you, but you tend to put on a bit of weight. You tend to get less healthy. But keeping active spiritually so is important too, isn't it?

For us to grow, for us to be a growing believer, a growing church, to have that healthy life, that healthy activity. Spiritually so too, because slothfulness is dangerous, isn't it?

Think of slothfulness. Because really neglect brings decay. We see in Ecclesiastes 10 verse 18, it says, By much slothfulness, the building decayed.

And through idleness of the hands, the house dropped a three. It's got this picture of a house that's been left to its own devices. It's kind of been neglected.

[6:33] Work hasn't been done on it for a while. And the idleness of hands, the house dropped a three. It's like the roof starts to cave in and the walls start to crumble. It's a picture, isn't it, of slothfulness.

And where is the fallow ground in our own lives? We've all asked that question, can't we? Can't we ask that question, what about me? What about areas in my life that are maybe neglected spiritually?

I've got hardened in some way. And the Bible here is very clear. It says, break up this fallow ground. All right? We must break it up. Those habits, our mind, our heart.

And we see Hebrews 12, 15 talks about where a bitterness can come in. It talks about looking diligently, lest any men fail at the grace of God, lest any roots of bitterness springing up from you, and thereby many be defiled.

Think of bitterness. I know when you have a go trying to pull a tree out of the ground that you want to get rid of, those roots can grow deep, can't they? God doesn't want us to be like that kind of tree, but to be a fruitful tree.

[7:36] And where we've got a deep roots in our spiritual living. And we see this picture here of this barrenness, this fallow ground.

It's like a picture of idleness, of apathy. And I don't know about you, but we can have those moments when we get apathetic, to be careless. And like with the farmer's field, it gets uncultivated. And neglect leads to unfruitfulness.

And I started off this message by saying, do you want to grow in 2024? And we want that, don't we? We want that fruitfulness. But neglect leads to fruitfulness. We see in Proverbs 24, verse 33, 31, it says, the man says, I went by the field of the slothful, in other words, the lazy, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding.

And lo, it was all grown over with thorns. And nettles had come to face thereof. And the stone wall thereof was broken down. I remember one of the most horrific moments of my childhood, actually. The worst experience as I had as a little child at one time was we were staying somewhere with my boats and we went out the backyard and it was like a little walkway.

[8:51] And I slipped off and fell into these nettles. This clump of nettles. And ouch, it hurt for days. And it was very embarrassing having to pull out all the nettles out of my backside.

Weeds are a pain, aren't they? Think of nettles, it's not something you want to be growing in your backyard, is it? You want to root them out, uproot them. And this fallow ground, if you think of it as in Hosea's day, it was like this land that had been left to itself.

And uncultivated, unploughed, hardened. Think of that soil, picture of a hardened heart. It's not going to grow anything. And this fallow ground, it's just got this picture of this heart resistant to God. And you can think, when you think about this spiritual picture, what does that look like? What does that kind of ballet grudder arms look like in my life? Could it be a neglected prayer life?

A lack of passion for God's Word? An indifference towards sin? A loss of zeal for our Lord? Think about where we used to be and maybe where we are now. Is it on the up and up or slips lying?

[10:00] We think the soil that used to be soft and fertile and fruitful, but without the touch of the Master's hand on that soil, it's gone hard. Now the farmer's hand touched the soil, hasn't it, and worked that soil.

Now the good ground is still there, but it's unproductive. There's now this hard laying. It's thrown over. And think about how that happens in our backyard, where we just, we let it go, we just maybe don't take the time and effort.

And before long, there's thorns and weeds, it's just all grown over this hard layer. It builds up, doesn't it, over time, the hardness, where we don't cultivate the ground. Think of my vain efforts to grow veggies and the veggie patches that we've prepared as younger people, and yet we didn't work on them, and so we wonder, no wonder there's nothing growing.

And this hard ground is like how some of us can be as God's people. We can get that way, if we're honest, going, we can get that way spiritually so too. There's this build up of layers, of this valley ground.

It was once good ground, soft and fruitful at one point, but now it's grown hard and producing nothing. And brothers and sisters, if we're honest here this morning, we can let things slip, can't we?

[11:19] We can let things slip spiritually. Not meaning to, but it's not where we're meant to be at, and that could be, so for example, Hebrews 2, verse 1, it reads, therefore we ought to give them more earnest, he, to the things which we have heard, lest that any time, we should let them slip.

It's like Paul says to them, Galatians 5, 7, he says to the Galatians, you did run well. Who did hinder you, that you should not obey the truth?

And sometimes we can blame others for hindering us, but who's the main person to hinder our walk with God? The person looking in the mirror, isn't it? It's me. And what's hindering each one of us in our gospel race?

If we take, stop, what does it look like? You start missing church, dropping out of things, drop out of the midweek, drop out of the evening time, drop out of the Sunday night, you drop out of the outreach, drop out of the prayer meeting, and before long, you're really on a slippery slope.

That's backsliding, honestly, that's what it is. And we can all face that, the reality of that. We can let things slip. And neglect has consequences.

[12:44] We see in the parable of Matthew 13, the parable of the sower, it shows this truth, that the type of the soil determines the harvest, doesn't it? And Matthew 13, 7, as the man went out to sow the seed, which represented the word of God, and some of that seed, it says, fell among the thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them.

Well, he cares. And this place priorities, they can strangle, have this choking effect on the word, that it won't grow, that fruitfulness is lost because of the choking.

And in verse 22, it says, he also that received seed among the thorns, it's he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unbredful.

A parable passage from Mark 4, 19, talks about the lusts of other things, other things, desires, other things. And those other things, well, they could be manifest, couldn't they?

Manifold. Some hearts get pardoned by life's trials, the deceitfulness of riches, the cares, the flesh. It hinders us. God doesn't want that for you, for me, in 2025.

[13:56] It's a good time to take stock, to watch out for the danger of hard hearts. And hard hearts, they lose this receptivity to the word of God, to God's truth.

It leaves that receptivity as we resist it. And it makes me think, I know, I don't know, some of you might have chooks in your backyard, but when you throw that seed, that seed's not going to be planted.

The chooks are going to get it, and it just becomes bird food, doesn't it? When the ground is hard, it's just bird food. And we don't want that to happen with the word of God, do we?

But when the preacher preaches, when your pastor tries to minister, it's being like that soft soil.

Yeah, I want to receive this. I want to receive the truth. Not being like that hard soil, where the seed just becomes chook food, bird food.

And so seeds are powerful, but we've got to be right as the soil. We might hear good preaching, but if the soil's not right, the seed's not going to be planted, and so we're not going to grow.

[15:01] So what is it that keeps you and me from having revival? As we look forward to 2025, for this church, for our fellowship, for this ministry, as we go forward to 2025, we can think about, am I letting my heart grow cold and hard?

Do I care about reading God's words to get fed? And how do we get fed? Come and fellowship.

Come where the word's been preached. Don't miss that. It's easy to get flags.

I know it can happen. I know as a visiting preacher, I can talk maybe more strongly than I might talk to my own congregation, but I might have a liberty. You might like to pop me back, but to say, hey, it's time to actually think about, have I let things slip, or could I actually get a bit stronger, get back to where I used to be, to be that soil that can be soft and sensitive to God.

The seed is powerful, but the soil needs to be ripe. So we've got to prepare it for the planting. Let's get our heart right. Get right with God. What is it that keeps me and you from having revival?

Do we spend that time in prayer? Or do other things crowd out? What to be the time we give to God? Do other things capture our hearts?

[16:19] Bow to ground. It speaks of ineffectiveness too. So the next scripture, Hosea 7 verse 16, talks about an ineffectiveness. So in Hosea's day, they are a repute for being really unfit for use, ineffective.

It says there, Hosea 7 verse 16 in part, they are like a deceitful bow. Like a bow that's faulty. If you imagine the arch there, stretching the bow, but it's crooked, it's faulty, and it's a picture of being ineffective.

It's not going to hit the target. And many believers are like this, that they're ineffective. They've been hindered from God's calling, from his purpose, from fulfilling his will for their lives.

And we're useless in our service because our heart isn't right. Let's face it, for our own sister tonight today. So there's a lack of fruit and a loss of care for God's kingdom, for souls.

And we can get ineffective. The problem is our heart, the ground, fallow ground. Next we see we must take action. Notice the command here, as Hosea says, break up your fallow ground.

[17:22] The command is, break it up. So a wild, uncultivated field must be cleared and prepared. You've got to plant something in your yard, you've got to do the work and get the cultivation happening.

In a way, if you want some propagation, first you need to do the cultivation, then God will send the precipitation. All right? That's to be, here's some big words there.

In other words, if you want to plant something, get the ground on, and God will send the rain.

Amen? And so our Lord transforms people at salvation, doesn't it? We get saved. But then there's more.

Yeah, there's more. Wait, there's more. There's need for growth. And this process is a cultivation thing. So the metaphor here is of this soft, cultivated heart, open to God's word, receptive, full of faith, producing spiritual fruit.

But over time, layers can build up where that sensitivity gets lost and our heart can get hard and like foul ground. And this hardness can block the Holy Spirit's work.

[18:24] And we get the spiritual dryness where we lose that ineffectiveness. So may we ask the Lord as we look forward to 2025, Lord, search my heart. Like the psalmist says, search me, Psalm 139, search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting. What are the weeds in our lives?

What are we planting? Is it sowing wickedness instead of righteousness? Is there inward sin? We need to get it by, don't we? We constantly face the danger of worldly influences.

We think of Hollywood. And no, it's everywhere. We're constantly barraged with it, aren't we? The world, secular culture, planting seeds of sin, normalising immorality. Now, I was kind of saddened in a way, I'm aware of as a church, up my way, up all the way, they bought a cinema.

What a great idea. And they're showing, they're screening films for the community. There's a lot of good that that could be. But I was saddened when one of the films that they've screened lately is called Wicked.

[19:36] People want to hear about contemporary film that's out there now. And there's so much potential for good, but then they go and screen something like that and think that's a big shame.

Full of wickedness, witches and woke themes. Think, what a missed opportunity that that church has. I'm sad for them. The potential for good that has been lost.

And we must go to our own hearts and minds, growing sisters. Revival. That's what we want, isn't it, for 2025. And it's got to take a plowing of the heart, the soil of our heart, a breaking up of the self, of pride, how to do the work.

Think about growing stuff in your garden. The work has to happen for that to work. And we need to also, spiritually, let the Holy Spirit work its work.

As we plant God's Word, as we seek that brokenness before Him, like the woman with the alabaster box of workmen, had to be broken, didn't it, for that worship, for that fragrance.

[20:40] And it's the same for you and me. Sometimes we've got to be poured out, like the alabaster box, she poured it out upon the Savior. She poured out everything in worship.

And so God works through that brokenness as well, for each one of us. And He can heal, He can bless, as we're broken. Break up the fallow ground. No, it's break up your heart.

Over time, our hearts can get insensitive and distracted. Jeremiah 17, 9, we know the truth that the heart is the sea of lying desperately wicked.

Who can know it? And so, a heart and heart. Also, it's compared to Job 41 of the life dance, compared to like a millstone, this rock, rock hard, like this millstone that's resistant to change, a symbol of hard and rebellious hearts, isn't it?

Is our heart like that, like a millstone? Are we resisting the Spirit's convictions when God points the finger at something? In contrast, a softened heart is one that's receptive, not rock hard like a millstone, but like this fertile ground.

[21:49] Receiving God's word. Ezekiel 36 talks about a new heart. I'll give you a new spirit. Well, I put within you, I'll take away the stony heart, that rock hard heart, my foot, it says, in you a heart of flesh.

The thing about this picture of revival, it begins with repentance and says, have that sensibility, to our Lord, to be aware of what we're sowing, to think of sin, and sin can come, for example, in sins of omission, and we see the things that we, we want to do that we don't do.

The love of God and apathy for service and neglect of prayer of the word, skipping fellowship, keep skipping and before long you're hardly there.

And backsliding, it happens like that, bit by bit, doesn't it? Creeps off on us and then you've got sins of omission, in other words, active disobedience, so things like bitterness, hypocrisy, pride, self-sense of living.

We just outward disobey God. Sometimes it could be more of what we don't do that we should do, but sometimes it's what we do do that we obviously shouldn't do or be like.

[22:57] So to prepare for revival, we need to ask the Lord to work in all of that, don't we? Ask for His help to think differently. We know that we're only one Romans 12 too, and be not conformed to this world, but be

transformed by the renewing of Him on it.

We have proved what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God to line up our thinking with God's work. But this should dictate what we think and what we should do and that His truth and His priority would be the guiding truth for our lives.

So let's recognise the layers, that foul soil. It builds up bit by bit. Maybe just over time, you think layer upon layer of neglect. Recognise the layers of hardness in our mind.

They're really strongholds, aren't they? We ought to tear down. You've got to be bitterness, guilt, undesolved hurts. Ask the Lord, Lord, deal with this hardness in me. Break up that fellow ground. Ask Him to help you. And we break it up by prayer, don't we? That spiritual sensitivity to reach out, that our lives be yielded. We can know God's forgiveness and His help to refresh our plan.

[24:06] Think of the farmer as they root out that tree, that tree stump. By my own experience, how hard it can be to tear out even just a small tree when the roots are deep.

Ever try to pull out a tree? It takes some work, doesn't it? And what about spiritually? The effort we ought to have for our own life to remove things from our lives that we know, hey, I've been having this problem for a long time.

Get the axe out, the pickaxe, and start to, by God's strength, He'll help you to uproot that which you ought to pull out. It's going to take work and effort, brother, sister, and God wanting us to remove things from our lives.

And that way, spiritual growth can happen when we think of that picture of that fowl ground. Think of that fowl ground, that hard ground, resistant, it's overrun, it's unyielding.

Or will we rather have a cloud heart where our hearts soften and sensitive, where we're receptive to the Lord's call, ready for God's word to work. If we're over in the fowl ground, we can be like the people that make all kinds of excuses why they're not seeking God wholeheartedly.

[25:21] There's this spirit of a backsliding heifer is the picture in the word of God in Hosea. And look, here's an actual picture of a pastor trying to help some people in his church.

And not this church, of course. But we think of a heifer which is a young cow and they can be so stubborn. It's not like anyone here I'm sure.

But a young cow can be obstinate, you know, willful, stubborn, resistant, difficult to manage. It's an example of resistance, isn't it? And we might say, Lord, direct my steps, but in reality we're like this young cow that's refusing to go forward, having this immovability.

And so, brothers and sisters, you know, here's a tip for you, a pro tip, if you like. I know some of my folks need to hear this too. Believe me, here's a pro tip for you now for 2025.

Listen to your pastor. It can save you a whole lot of trouble. Alright? I know by personal experience. We can get like that, can't we? Resisting our Lord, when God's trying to make us go forward, we just like this stubborn cow, this refusing to obey God's call, refusing to let God change us in those areas that he's speaking to, that immovability in spiritual matters, isn't it?

[26:50] We resist, we make all kinds of excuses. Why are we not yielding to God's call to conviction? Spiritually stuck, valley ground, isn't it?

How to break that, break that pride that's stopping us from moving forward in our faith? And have humility. You see, James 4, verse 6, of God, he giveth more grace, wherefore he saith God, and it suits the proud, but he giveth grace unto the humble.

If we want grace, we've got to have humility. If we want growth, we've got to break it up, valley ground. And let's face it, when we think about valley ground, the areas of hardness, layer upon layer, neglect, be honest with God, acknowledge your sin, the lewd warmness, creeps off on us, doesn't it?

Ask the Lord for forgiveness, for yielding, to obey him. Ask God to soften, soften your heart, and commit to do what God asks of you.

And some of that's very clear. And sometimes it's difficult, isn't it? It's difficult, but it's still necessary. We can get stuck in the spiritual softfulness of, like, just carelessness.

[28:02] There's a big cost to that, though, of sloth and idleness. We see, Proverbs warns us of this folding of the hands. When you have a little afternoon sleep, like, to fold the hands, and, you know, there's a danger when we're really lazy, and idleness, and friends ruin.

We've seen Proverbs 24, 33. Yeah, it's a little sleep, just a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, and it's a disaster.

And we can get spiritually drawn, we can get spiritually like that, can't we? Just sitting there on a couch potato, like this neglected field, hardened, overgrown.

You want to grow, but somebody's stopping you. Maybe it's the idleness, that frowniness to be lacked spiritually. Can I urge you this morning to cultivate, and get the, get the pickaxe out, get the spade, the hoe, the cultivating going on, to cultivate your spiritual life.

Make it an intentional thing, to determine so, as we're on the threshold of a new year, to clear away all the weeds, cultivate that sensitivity to your Lord, break up your habits, and Haggai, the prophet's, calls us to consider our ways.

[29:17] Now therefore, thus say to the Lord of hosts, consider your way, it's like you're on this, at this fork in the road, going to go God's way, or the world's way. Inshare the people that please themselves, that forgotten God that are spiritually empty.

And the Lord says to this people, he says, consider your ways. How we have it that are hindering our spiritual growth, other besetting sins. We've got to cultivate that sensitivity to our Lord, don't we?

To get out the spade, the plough, the rake, get the soil right, plant some good seeds, go to the words of worship, and we need to pray. Really, prayer is the plough.

You see that, really, when you think about it, that cultivating, it's seeking God, isn't it? It's seeking up to God to pray, pray through. Prayer is the plough. And prayer is the thing that breaks up that valley ground that makes that ground that is hard, become soft and sensitive again, go beyond the surface level, have a deep, deep work, a heartfelt communion with God.

And get things right with the Lord. Pour out your heart in prayer. Some things we can do, confess sin, in thought, word and deed, cast your burden, burden after burden, keep casting, and make obedience God's call, make obedience to God's call your priority.

[30:39] And if you were to read this prescription, if you like, from Dr. Jesus, down the bottom it says, repeat daily. Repeat daily.

It's got to take a continuous cultivation to allow God to do that hard work so that not harden again. You guard against that.

Next, we see back to our text, the important trick here is to sow and reap. To sow and reap. And sow to yourselves in righteousness, it says.

It matters what we're sowing. We can sow lots of things into our lives as it talks about in the New Testament. You can sow to the flesh and you can sow to the spirit. It talks about sow in righteousness.

So next we say, begin to plant some right seeds of God in living, to obey God's word. So some tips here. I think it's the next slide. Yeah, there it is.

[31:34] Turn from sin and distractions. Seek God's guidance. Prioritise time with God. Let God's word work in you. And take every opportunity, every opportunity and fellowship.

You know, support your church. It's important. The church needs everyone to do their bit. And we will reap in mercy. And all the time we've got to watch out for the danger of indifference.

We can get indifferent. We can grow cold and callous. Unresponsive. Half-heartedness is a big problem. We see Hosea 7, verse 8. We see Israel, Ephraim, has mixed himself among the people. It's like this cake not turned. So this picture of, I don't know, ladies or some of you gents might bake something in the oven or whatever, but you haven't turned it. And so it's only half-cooked.

And think of that, it's kind of a picture of really half-heartedness, isn't it? You ever bent into such a thing? Oh, yuck. It's not been cooked right. It's only half-cooked. And it's the same with this picture of these people that they've got a half-heartedness.

[32:39] There's an apathy of soul. And half-heartedness is going to hinder our spiritual growth too. Next we see, back to our text, the urgency at the call here.

It's saying it is time to seek the Lord. It is time to seek the Lord till He come. There's an urgency here. Notice the time, God's timing is now.

Think of saying, I've made a mistake myself. I'll get around to it. I'll think about it in another season and another time. But the urgency is here.

It's now. The time to seek the Lord is right now. Right here, right now. Today. Now is the time. See the call to salvation in 2 Corinthians 6 verse 2. It reads, Behold, now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation. And the time for revival is the same timing.

[33:39] It's God's timing. Whatever that time is on your timepiece, now. Now's a good time. Now's the best time. Now is God's time. There's a need for urgency.

Seek the Lord. It's not a one-time effort too. It's a persistent seeking. It's a continuous effort. You see, also we need to depend upon our Lord for His restoration, His effectiveness.

Jeremiah 25 says, Turn ye now. Let's turn to God. Ask for His help for that breaking up of the fallow ground. When we seek the Lord, seek Him with all of your heart.

You see, Jeremiah 29, 13, it's a lovely scripture where God promises this. He says, And ye shall seek me and find me when ye shall search for me with all you.

All you. What we seek after God, not half-heartedly, God delivers on His promise. He will find me. Right? We see this need of persistence, of spiritual discipline.

[34:41] Think of the saints of old. In times of revival of old, what did they do? They fasted and prayed. They prayed and prayed. They prayed persistently, especially for loved ones. And they prayed and they kept on praying and they saw results.

And so can we. So can we. I know it's true of really every church. The prayer time is sometimes neglected, isn't it? And really, that's the powerhouse.

And God wants us to pray. And to seek the Lord, that's really a very important truth, isn't it? And it's a whole heart to seeking. What's stopping us from seeking the Lord?

Let's think about that. Consider some hindrances to revival. One of these hindrances, you could say, is divided hearts. We see that in Hosea 10, verse 2. It reads, their heart is divided.

It's kind of this split of loyalty. They're not wholeheartedly following the Lord. They haven't let go of their idols. Through the book of Hosea, we see, not only they have an unfaithfulness, they weren't really fair to think of them.

[35:42] What about us? Are we seeking the Lord wholeheartedly? Or are we guilty of being self-centered? We're distracted by our own ways. Now, I'm going to come to the part of the sermon where everyone's going to get annoyed with me and people are going to get defensive and argue and justify.

It's when a preacher touches on something, for example, talking about drinking or whatever it is, something that, oh, they'll justify. They'll justify what they're doing. And one of these, the next one here, it's kind of a bit tongue-in-cheek, but think about, you know, in Hosea's day, they had this divided loyalty.

There was this, they had like all their idols and so there's this kind of divided loyalty. I kind of thought of this, I saw this somewhere and I made this little slide up about Baal worship, Baal worship.

And of course, I'm being quite tongue-in-cheek here, so, you know, take it or leave it and I'm not saying there's anything wrong with sports, okay? Let me be clear about that.

Of course, there's good healthy sports and it's a good thing oftentimes for families and young people to play a sport, get involved in something healthy and such a healthy activity.

[36:53] But the problem is when it becomes a God substitute, isn't it? If it becomes a God substitute, it can do. Don't let anything, don't let anything become a God substitute.

So some people will prioritise ball sports on the weekends more than the worship of God. Watch out lest it become a God substitute in candy, a God substitute in your life.

For example, we have foot baal, foot baal, basket baal, golf baal, cricket baal, tennis baal, volley baal, AFL foot baal, ping pong baal, eight baal, base baal, and rugby foot baal, plus many others. I'm being entirely tongue-in-cheek here, but it's a trick where it's almost like the modern-day baal, isn't it? Something that takes God's place. And seriously, it can be a real issue.

I know in our own church, there's a family and the young son join the soccer team. And he wasn't at church anymore after that.

[37:55] Now, Sunday sports can be a curse where you're a child and you want the best for them, you want them to have some healthy team, you know, a healthy kind of active activity.

But they join the Sunday sports team, whatever it is, soccer, you name it. They go and watch the 36ers or whatever it is that ties up their time on a Sunday and you never see them in church again. It's a real trap. I'm just putting it out there that it can be a trap, can't it? It's a hindrance. It can be. And I know there's a godly family in our church and they made the decision when their sons were looking at joining Adabelle football, they joined a team that only played on a Saturday. So it wouldn't be a conflict. It wouldn't be a problem. And we can make those wise decisions as parents, can't we? Actually, I'll choose a sport that they can play on a Saturday. It's not going to be a conflict.

So I can still get to church. So another hindrance can be this idleness of our spiritual things. Many start strong but then they abandon the pursuit of God's word.

[38:59] Other things, could be harmless things, what we consider harmless things can intrude on that pursuit of the Lord's work in our lives.

So it's that picture of that digging up, that cultivating of the ground. Think about our own heart, the pursuit of God's word. Open the sword of your heart today to receive his word.

Don't wait for a crisis moment. Some people wait for a crisis or things get better that better get back to where I'm meant to be with God. The longer we delay, the harder our hearts get.

And we need that urgent action, don't we? Revival. We cannot wait for convenience. Our Lord is on the doorstep. Who knows whether we won't even see in 2025. Hesitation leads to lost conviction too.

Some resist when God moves. They put it off. Oh, I'll get around to seeking God. And it never happens. They miss out on God's blessing. So God's judgment looms and that's the picture in Hosea's time too where there's this destruction looming and the time would come where the Assyrians would serve as a yoke to bring Israel to repentance.

[40:11] And God's going to get a hold of us one way or the other. Come on, then it's you to get a hold of God. Amen. You see James 4 verse 8 it reads, draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you.

Cleanse your hands you sinners. Purify your hearts to God and mine. Talk to the Lord. Speak to the Lord. We're living in a time where it seems many people are always on their mobile phones aren't they?

Always busy texting, messaging, but they're not talking to the Lord anymore. It's time to talk to the Lord. Amen. It's time to talk to the Lord. Brothers, sisters, many churches lack revival because Christians are spiritually inactive.

We ask why are there dead and dying churches? Because they're dead Christians. Why is there no soul winning? Because there's no soul winning Christians. It starts with you and me individually.

Each one, sit here, each one of us as God's people can see the Lord working.

Each one of us will make us stronger as a church and God's longing for that closeness, that intimacy. We've got to take individual action to seek the Lord. It starts with me.

[41:15] The revival starts with me. You see what efforts people make. I know when someone famous comes to town, especially Adelaide, people go crazy, don't they? They've got to go and see such and such, whether they're performing or whatever it is.

They've just got to go and make every effort, no expense spared, to see some famous person. But what do we do when God's inviting us to meet with him? Can't we see how important that is? Far more important than some king or queen or prime minister or president coming to Adelaide is to seek the Lord, the King of kings, the King of glory. Can we see how important it is to meet with our Lord?

And that's why we have, when we have a fellowship time, that's another opportunity to meet with the Lord. That's something precious, that's something important. And we've got the promise of his presence, since we've drawn near to God, he will draw near to us.

But like Israel, we can get complacent, comfortable, careless. Revival happens when we take it seriously. Seek the Lord. Seek the Lord. Seek his face.

[42:16] Do you want to grow in 2025? Seek 2 Chronicles 7, verse 14 is a familiar one. People often tend to in the theme of revival. If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways.

Then, while I hear from heaven, they will forgive their sin, they will heal their land. Will we seek after God like it really matters, like it's really important, with an urgency?

Will we allow the Lord through his word and spirit to work? We've got to soften and prepare our hearts. Ask Lord, what is it in me that's hardened?

What is it in me that's resisting? What is it in me that's maybe blown idle or laxed? Overturn that half-heartedness that's in me.

And plant his desires. Of prayer, of word, of fellowship. When the ground is broken, it's going to be ready to receive the rain.

[43:21] And he must have the rain. That's a nice outpouring label of the tangible rain. What about the spiritual rain? Go to the next, back to the text again.

And as we break up the fallow ground, as we seek the Lord, there's a result here. God's going to rain. It tells us that God will rain righteousness upon you.

The work of breaking up the ground is difficult, but it's necessary. And God promises blessing. God wants to rain this righteousness upon us, doesn't he?

Think of the rain, what a beautiful thing it is, just the physical rain, and the blessing that it brings, the freshness, the fruit. God wants that for us, doesn't he?

He wants that for this church, for every Bible believing church, he wants to see the rain, he wants to pour out upon us. And there's an assurance here as we yield to God for that deep transformation, there's an assurance here, there's a promise for you, brother, sister, there's a promise for each one here today.

[44:26] As we yield to God, there's an assurance of fruit as we seek him. When we break up the fallow ground, get there and cultivate it, dig it up, get to work, as we cultivate that softening of our heart, as we're more receptive to his word to work, God promises to bless, he promises it, he promises that he'll rain righteousness on those who seek him.

And here's God's promise, it says, if you trust me, he says if you repent, if you come to me and turn to me, as you reach out to me, as you earnestly seek me, he says, you're sowing righteousness and he's going to rain righteousness upon you.

So there's a refreshing and renewal, it's like rain upon a parched field. Think of that rain, just bring such freshness and blessing and there's growth there, there's new life, vitality.

It's the picture there of revival, isn't it? What a picture. And it's a picture of a personal transformation that God can touch each one of us individually, touch our lives and then in consequence, others lives through us.

it's when we break up the valley ground, that's where it's got to begin. And as we then sow his word, we water it with his grace, there's a harvest, a harvest that he promises of righteousness and God promises a transformation as our lives are changed, our hearts are softened, God's going to shower his people.

[45:58] What a picture of the bouncing, the blessing, the abounding, the overflowing of God. God's going to shower his people with righteousness. And what a picture of overflow too.

I think if God's going to pour out and rain his righteousness, isn't it going to be floods? Isn't it? It's not just going to be a little sprinkle. Don't you think?

If God's going to pour out his rain, it's going to be a deluge. Isn't it? He's going to pour it out such that we can't contain it. It's going to be an overflow. And reviving one heart is going to spread to the other.

So in conclusion, how can I grow? How can I grow in 2025? It's a big question. We're on this threshold. We're just about to jump into a new year. It's a good time to think where am I at now?

Where ought I to be in my faith, in my growth? What's stopping me from growing? Am I willing to break up the fallow ground? Am I willing to do the work that needs to be done?

[46:59] There's things that need to shift. There's layer upon layer of neglect of missing God's best. I need to do some cultivation.

Think of my backyard. I'll get around to it. I'll get around to the veggie patch one day. But the weeds just keep growing. It's just all stony and hard. I've got to get the cultivating tools out and get to it. And it's the same spirit you're in, isn't it? You're sitting away. Will you let the Lord cultivate your life today and daily? It's going to take some stepping out of the comfort, isn't it?

It's going to take maybe a bit of perspiring, a bit of effort, a break up, maybe layer upon layer of habits, of mindset, of heart that have built up over time, that resistance to God, being like that cow. God's trying to yank us in his direction, but we just keep resisting, don't we? Is my heart like with God? It's a big question, isn't it? Can I ask the Lord, break up my heart and heart, help me Lord to see those things that ought not to be, and to plant seeds of righteousness, rather.

[48:13] Are you ready for a deeper work of God? Brother, sister, can I assure you God's promise you this morning, we can know a deeper work of God.

For God's work deeper, we've got to dig a bit deeper, and do the work, and don't wait for a better time. I think, I know some that think, they've put it off for years, or when I retire, or this or that, and before they know it, the season where they could have done more has passed, and they're missing out, they keep putting it off, oh, when I've gone to Bible school, or when I've done this, or done that, and it ends up that hardly ever comes to fruition, because they keep putting it off.

Don't wait for a better time, act now. And that's not to be presumed to us, or to be careless, to be prayerless about your decisions, but it's a good time to think, no, I'm going to make the steps, take the steps, now, I'm not going to keep waving, break up a family ground in your life, and sow the seeds that will produce a good fruit, let the Lord do a deep work in our heart, and I'm preaching to myself to, look, I'm not arrived yet, I don't think any of us have, we all need to keep on digging that ground up, the spiritual soil of our own lives, to trust the Lord for a fresh outpouring of his blessing and purpose, guard your heart, brother, sister, check your heart, regularly, and we sometimes go down to the doctor and get a heart checked, what about spiritually, so, cast my heart, spiritually, ask the Lord to plan the hardness of your heart, other areas of complacency, bitterness, the layer upon layer, let God's word act like a mirror, it's called, in

James it talks about it, doesn't it, as a mirror, it's a good way to actually soft reflect, reflect, in the mirror, God's word, isn't it, to reveal both your flaws and your potential, the word of God, it's like a mirror, commit to seek the Lord daily, communion, so it's not just a step you take now, but it's an ongoing mindset, isn't it, to cultivate that desire for a closer walk, and alignment with his will, so the Lord's moving in life and heart, and so, engage in your church life actively too, there's opportunities galore, I'm sure, I know, I like to think and challenge in my own church, look, there's no reason for you to feel bored as a Christian, right, there's no reason for you to feel bored, or to feel inactive, I'm sure if you went to your pastor and told him, look, count me in,

I'm volunteering, he'll find something to give you to do, I'm sure he will, he'll know what would be the right fit for you, so really cultivate that desire, engage actively, and commit to ongoing accountability and growth, serve in the church and be accountable, now when you're given a ministry to do, actually listen to the pastor, it's going to work much better for you that way, and just do your own willy nilly thing and then you end up getting off track, and let the Holy Spirit convict you, the areas that he can prompt you to change, lay down the distractions, the attitudes that are hindering you from being that cultivator from him, and don't delay revival, respond to him today, let's rekindle your love for the Lord, I think sometimes as a younger Christian I have probably a bit more zeal at times I think I was more zealous then than even now, we can do well to revisit that, can't we, what's priority, is it

[52:20] God's wealth, or is it just my own wealthful ways, am I seeking out opportunities to grow, am I just becoming like the couch potato, a bit too laid back, am I taking those opportunities to serve, to witness, to fellowship, to grow, brother, sister, let me lead you with this thought, revival starts with you, starts with you, look back in church history, because we know there's supposed revivals of some proclaimers, usually quiet, far-fetched, and really unscriptural goings-on, with all

