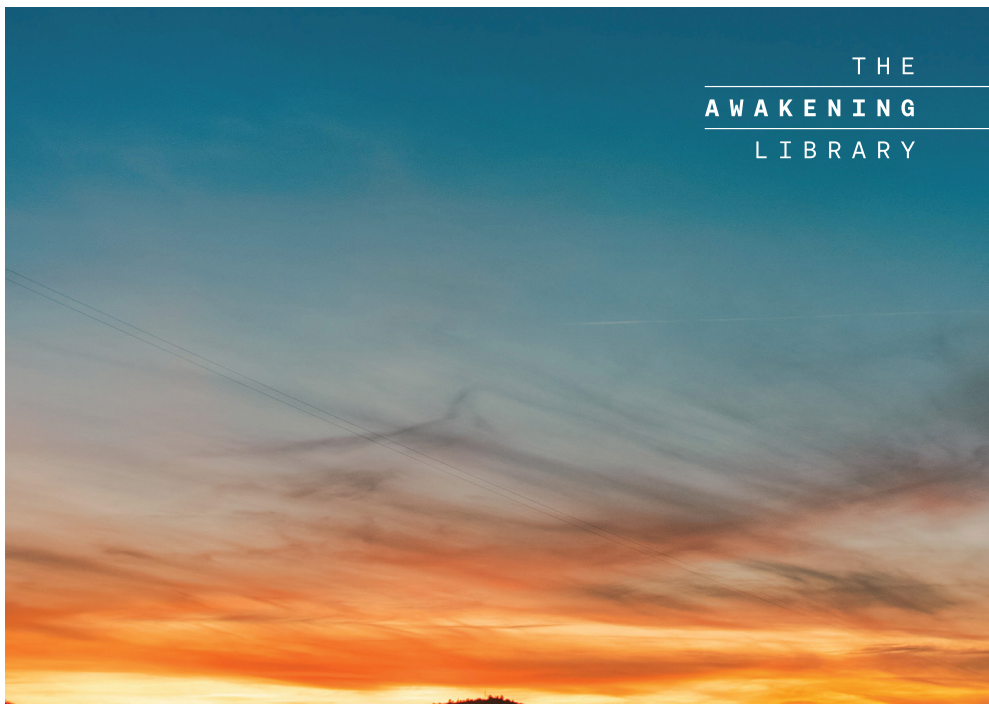


How to Prepare for Outpouring

THE
AWAKENING
LIBRARY



THE AWAKENING LIBRARY

Why We Need Awakening

What Is Awakening?

How to Pray for Awakening

How to Host a Meeting with God

How to Minister in Prayer

How to Prepare for Outpouring

How to Lead Worship for Encounter with Jesus

How to Develop Leadership Culture for Awakening

How to Cultivate Relationships
That Sustain Awakening

How to Prepare for Outpouring

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The Awakening Library represents collected learnings from more than a decade of ministry as Seedbed and New Room. These pieces have been contributed by writers, leaders, and practitioners in fellowship with the goal of providing practical insights for individuals and churches desiring awakening—an encounter with God that both results from and leads to deep wholeness in people, renewal of the church, evangelization of a generation, and transformation of society.

With special thanks to David Thomas for his contribution to this resource.

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HOW TO PREPARE FOR OUTPOURING

Since the outpouring of God's presence that occurred at Asbury University in February of 2023, many people have been asking two important questions: Is there any way something like that could happen here where I live? And if or when it does, how could we be prepared to steward it?

Right from the start we should be quick to acknowledge a crucial subtlety in these questions and the title of this resource. Exploring how to prepare for outpouring does not assume that a movement of grace is the result of any kind of formula or recipe, as though our preparation can cause it to happen. Preparation for outpouring is not about merely meeting a set of conditions that then guarantee and require God's response. Sowers of awakening have wrestled

with this for centuries. In 1737, Jonathan Edwards published his account of the early days of the First Great Awakening under the title *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. And awakening is that: surprising on many levels, never manufactured or self-generated, always the action of God’s sovereignty. Yet by contrast, during the Second Great Awakening, Charles Finney catalogued in his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* seven indicators for recognizing “when a revival of religion is needed” and several more signs of when a revival may be expected. And awakening is this, too: recognizable in discernible patterns over time. “The Word of God presents to us side by side these two foundation stones of every revival,” Arthur Wallis wrote, “the sovereignty of God and the preparedness of man.”¹

We know who is actually pulling the weight in the yoke of Jesus he invites us to share. That’s why this yoke is easy, and his burden is light: Jesus himself is carrying the load. But in the economy of the kingdom, he has invited us to be “co-workers in God’s service” (1 Cor. 3:9)—the mystical union through which God accomplishes his purposes in the earth. Outpouring is not a kit we can buy or a program we can plug in and play. We will never restructure or whiteboard our way into awakening. But we can remove impediments to it. We can posture ourselves to receive it. We can cry out to God for it. And we take all of these up from a perspective

1. Arthur Wallis, *In the Day of Thy Power: The Scriptural Principles of Revival* (London: Christian Literature Crusade, 1956), 60.

of no time to waste—the essential preliminary move in knowing how to prepare for outpouring.

Now

A massive study in 2018 by the Pinetops Foundation called *The Great Opportunity* concluded that if current trends continue, more than one million youth at least nominally in the church today will choose to leave each year for the next three decades. That would mean, current patterns continuing, more than 40 million youth raised in families that call themselves Christians will say that they are not by 2050. According to the study, if we could merely slow that bleeding, if we could revert to retention rates and evangelism patterns we saw with Generation X, just two decades ago, that number could be reduced to a loss of 20 million. And that 20 million people difference: that would be greater than all those who came to faith in the First Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, the Azusa Street revival, and every Billy Graham crusade *combined*. That's why these researchers labeled their product *The Great Opportunity* of only deteriorating more slowly, not even taking into account the possibility of awakening.

We know that most people make their faith commitments by age twenty-five, and millennials are already through that window. Gen Z, the largest generation in American history, will begin exiting that window in about a decade. The youngest Gen Z will be older than thirty-five by the

year 2050, the age after which religious preference generally remains constant. How to prepare for outpouring begins with the acknowledgment that the time is *now*. For every church, every one of us, now is a sell-the-farm, push-all-the-chips-to-the-center-of-the-table moment, beginning with the removal of anything that could hinder God's renewing intent in our lives and those we love.

REMOVE IMPEDIMENTS

As worship and prayer continued at the altar of Hughes Auditorium on Wednesday, February 8, at Asbury University, it became clear through that afternoon that something unusual was happening, something with the potential of continuing and deepening if given the breathing room. A half-dozen university administrators and community pastors eventually met that afternoon in the basement of Hughes to acknowledge this, making the decision in that moment to arrange for security and then volunteering themselves to stay, even through the night if students wanted to keep lingering. That small group of men and women had no idea that they had just fallen into a lifeboat they would stay in for the next sixteen days and nights. But they did know what they had taken with them into that raft: well-forged trust among one another that had been built over years of common convictions and tested in multiple furnaces of challenge. Their stewardship

of the outpouring continued to emerge over the next two weeks out of a commitment to wrap covenantal cords around those friendships—remaining unoffendable, keeping short accounts, and making quick apologies day-by-day. Decisions were being made by the hour, each with mounting significance compounding the impact and stress. The risk of fracture never abated but only intensified to the end. Relational integrity and durability were mission-critical.

We have come to understand how *awakening advances at the pace of friendship*. The quality of our relationships is not a sideline issue when it comes to our hope for the outpouring of God's presence. And, of course, this is nothing new to us. Jesus made it unmistakably clear that he would manifest his presence where two or three gather in his name; that if just a few of us will agree in what we ask of Jesus he will do it (Matt. 18:20). And not just a cursory agreement or half-hearted coming together, but a vulnerable, deferential love for one another expressed in heartfelt unity. Sometimes I have wished Jesus would have made anything else a condition for his presence other than the caliber of our friendships! Trusted unity is just about the hardest thing we ever attempt to develop or maintain. But that is how Jesus has designed it.

Preparation for outpouring mobilizes out of self-examination to remove anything in our lives or relationships that could be an impediment to open channels of love between us. Now is a time for walking in forgiveness and blessing, for living at peace with one another as far as it depends on us. We have

spoken for years about how we are simply a fellowship of thirsty Christians, men and women who are becoming desperate for what only God can do. “Exquisite distress” Charles Wesley called it in his hymns. The “crystallization of discontent” Jon Tyson said at the 2019 New Room Conference. However we frame it, the unsettling and shattering and undoing we endure to upend any obstacles blocking the free the flow of God’s grace *is* awakening. Repentance and longing are what awakening looks and feels like when it starts.

Steve Seamands has often described how the call to “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” was the same message brought both by John the Baptist and Jesus, only weeks apart. The breaking of pride, the inbreaking of redemption: both are awakening. In our hearts and homes, across the line of race, within our churches and throughout our communities, outpouring knows no detour around the disruptive, winnowing, John-the-Baptist stage of removing impediments.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “No one builds the church but Christ alone. . . . We do not know his plan. We cannot see whether he is building up or pulling down. It may be that the times which by human standards are times of collapse are for him the great times of building. It may be that the times which from a human point of view are great times for the church are times when it is being pulled down.”²

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes, 1928-1936, from the Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Volume 1* (London: Collins, 1970), 212.

Uprooting and reconciling and confronting are what awakening is like, at least in its unavoidable preparatory stages. And the biggest challenge we may face is to go on and let this fall on us, to enter into the desperate zone of what can feel so vulnerable, to let go of demanding or expecting things to get better until our inner lives have been sifted, our relationships put right, and impediments removed for all that God will want to do.

Posture Ourselves to Receive

Who can stay? That was the key question around the lifeboat in Hughes basement when the outpouring of 2023 was just beginning. And there began the yes series of responses God used to create what he wanted to give. There was no planning or skill, no prior experience in executing what would become a Herculean logistical and spiritual undertaking. The only clay on the potter's wheel when the outpouring began was trusted friendship and *willingness*. There was a willingness to be inconvenienced, an openness to take on the interruption, an inclination to see possibilities for the next several hours beyond what had been anticipated only hours earlier. The Potter put his heavy hand on that little lump of humility, spun the wheel, and formed a vessel for his glory.

Somewhere between the Ascension and Pentecost, the disciples were transformed from “who is the greatest” (Luke 22:24) to “constantly devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). And every outpouring of the Spirit has been

given to the same posture when humility takes primacy. Willingness is humility in action, the willingness to lower oneself in imitation of God who has condescended to us in love. Humility in awakening, Raneiro Cantalmessa wrote, “is as important as insulation in electricity.”

The higher the level of current that goes through a wire, the thicker and more efficient the insulation needs to be; otherwise, there is a short circuit! . . . Insulation is made of inert, worthless material, but it is as absolutely indispensable as the copper wires that carry the current. The wires carry the current, but the insulation protects it.”³

God encases his presence in the humility of people willing to linger and wait for him. That is what those fifteen or so students did after a typical Wednesday morning chapel service at Asbury. They were spiritually hungry and humble enough to willingly interrupt their routine for a time of lingering and waiting, unknowingly becoming the forerunners of outpouring. Nothing would have happened unless those young adults had been humble to wait—the posture we have virtually forgotten how to embody in the American church. Our lives and ministries, our churches and meetings are so heavily planned and tightly produced that we can squeeze God out of offering him any moments where

3. Raneiro Cantalmessa, *Sober Intoxication of the Spirit: Filled with the Fullness of God* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2005), 34–35.

he could encounter us. One of the first steps to take in posturing ourselves to receive from God would be to make new room for waiting on him in our gatherings. We can offer a soft close for those who need to go while allowing others to linger a while. We can provide opportunities outside of Sunday meetings for people to meet in an experimental attitude of waiting on God. As pride is dismantled and self descends, hunger rises and our spirit becomes ready to receive. We posture ourselves in the bearing God is drawn to, “for though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he perceives from far away” (Ps. 138:6 NRSV).

Cry Out

Having removed impediments to outpouring, and posturing ourselves to receive it, we can then cry out for it. This was the testimony day after day during the outpouring. As people were streaming in from everywhere, locals would thank them for coming. “You are from Nevada? Norway? Argentina? Alabama? Wow, we appreciate so much you coming all the way to Wilmore.” But so often the appreciation would be reversed. “Do not thank me. I had to come. I had to lay eyes on what I have been praying for all these years.” Many had come on pilgrimage to see on earth what they had seen with spiritual eyes for decades, having become personally invested through the heartcry of prayer.

The call to intercession for outpouring is explored in the Awakening Library resource titled *How to Pray for*

Awakening. But here let's underscore a few key dimensions of this aspect of preparation, beginning with the manner of our prayer and the condition of the petitioner's heart. I remember when our kids were little and they would speak in ways that were disrespectful, we would say, "You know better than to talk to me like that." And I have wondered at times if our Father hears our prayers in a similar way. Of course, he delights in our voice. Any prayer is better than none. But we know better than to speak to him while we are continuing in known sin or with broken relationships left unreconciled. Psalm 66:18 teaches, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." Outpouring-readiness involves doing the hard work of self-examination to resist presuming on God in our petitions.

One of the best things we can do in preparation is to pray about our prayer. Petitioners in the Second Great Awakening would speak of gaining "sympathy with God," asking him for the discernment to see the situation as he sees it rather than opining and informing and skimming around in our prayers as though we can inform God of anything. When God authors prayer in us by his Spirit, we can then give it utterance, add our faith to it, wrap unity with other believers around it, and then we will watch God go to work.

Often our prayers can languish in casual ineffectiveness because what we are asking of God is actually attainable in our own power. Preparation for outpouring involves lifting the sights of our intercession to Christianity at its

best—to God’s best. We are confronted by the gap between the church we have fallen in love with in the New Testament and the church we are faced with in our everyday experience. Refusing to cut a deal with the way things are, we step in to close that gap in prayer.

Steward What God Does

And then there is that second question: If or when it there is an outpouring of God’s presence in our context, how could we be prepared to steward it?

Sadly, the church, in many contexts, has tended for generations now to imitate the world in this dimension of preparation. We have cut our teeth on leadership principles of casting vision, setting goals, establishing metrics, getting buy-in, and charging ahead. The New Testament knows nothing of this approach. Awakening leaders *observe and respond*. We travail in prayer with eyes for the small stirrings and seedlings and promptings of God all around. And catching sight of them, we respond to scaffold what God is doing, earnestly seeking to stay in step with the Holy Spirit. We summon all our experience and training and EQ and intuition to pay close attention to the rooms we are in and the people we are leading. And we keep an ear attuned to the voice of God all the time to listen for his whispers of revelation and direction. What we observe we bring into a plurality of vetted and trusted leaders for consideration unto consensus, and from that we lead on.

Sow righteousness for yourselves,
reap the fruit of unfailing love,
and break up your unplowed ground;
for it is time to seek the LORD,
until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.

Hosea 10:12

The Awakening Library is a series of
print and digital resources that represent
collected learnings of Seedbed and New Room.

This suite of resources shares practical
experience and accessible teaching with
Christians seeking to partner with the Holy
Spirit in sowing for a great awakening.



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