

Why We Need Awakening

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AWAKENING
LIBRARY



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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

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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 which both results from and leads to deep wholeness in people, renewal of the church, evangelization of a generation, and transformation of society.

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You may be starting this with the thought: *Well, I'm definitely a Christian. I gave my life to Jesus a long time ago. I go to church, and I try to be a good person.* But the question is not if you became a Christian somewhere along the way. The issue is whether you are awake now. Are you growing in faith or is it behind the glass on the fire alarm that says, “Break Glass in Case of Emergency”? Is faith something to get you through the difficult times or is it the orienting reality and organizing principle of your whole life? It's important to be honest about this.

There is a difference between belief and faith, though the terms are often conflated. Many a Christian has some level of belief in God, yet they have fallen asleep at the wheel of

faith. They acknowledge the Christian faith, but they do not trust Jesus Christ or relate to him in any meaningful way.

It shouldn't surprise us. Before the ink on the scrolls of the New Testament was dry the followers of Jesus were already drifting off to sleep. It's why Paul wrote things like: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you" (Eph. 5:14).

He was writing to believers who had fallen asleep at the wheel of faith.

Is Our Gospel Too Small?

Is it any wonder so many have drifted off to sleep in recent times? Over the past century or so, the gospel of Jesus Christ has been caricatured. Many accepted the gospel as an eternal-life fire insurance policy to be invoked upon death. Others bought into it as a ticket to health and wealth. Still, others subscribed to the teachings of Jesus as a social or ethical creed stripped of its supernatural substance. Most Christians at the dawn of the twenty-first century said yes to Jesus and took up the mantra, "I'm not perfect, just forgiven," absolving themselves of the glorious yet costly call of discipleship. The overwhelming majority of Christians have gone halfway with the gospel but not the other half.

In short, our gospel is too small—way too small. It is no wonder so many have drifted off to sleep and gotten on

with their lives. These caricatures are honestly not worthy of awakening.

So, what is a proper estimation of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the singular, yet comprehensive, solution to all that is broken in our lives and in this world.

This is not a naive overstatement of grandiose faith. Every manner of human brokenness, family dysfunction, abuse of power, criminal act, injustice, deceptive motive . . . all of it comes back to our broken and distorted human condition.

We all face many challenges and problems. They are deeply personal, yet when joined together, they create enormous and complex chaos in the world, from our hearts to our homes to our churches and our cities. All this chaos traces to two originating problems: sin and death. Sin, far beyond mere moral failure, describes the fundamentally broken condition of every human being. Sin separates us from God and others, distorts and destroys our deepest identity as the image-bearers of God, and poses a fatal problem from which we cannot save ourselves. It results in an ever-diminishing quality of life and ultimately ends in eternal death.

The world will only be redeemed and transformed to the extent human nature can be redeemed and transformed. This is why we call it the gospel (good news).

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a competing spirituality in the pantheon of religions. It is not a self-help therapy. It

is not a philosophical construct. The gospel is not a spiritual solution to a material problem, nor is it a material solution to a spiritual problem. The gospel is a profoundly integrative and comprehensive solution for a deeply complex and dis-integrated world. The vision of the gospel is not a socially engineered utopia, but the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. Structural and systemic evils will change only when human beings are transformed.

The good news is that Jesus Christ redeems and transforms human nature. This is what it means to say, “Jesus saves.” It is not a heavenly transaction, but a real, down-to-earth transformation. When human beings—the God-ordained stewards of the whole creation—change, the world changes.

When enough people rise up into this kind of faith, we will see the greatest awakening the world has ever known.

What Does Awakening Mean?

Put simply, awakening is the transformational process and outcome of following Jesus Christ. It is a personal, communal, and societal movement from:

darkness to light;
death to life;
chaos to order;
despair to joy;

anxiety to peace;
poverty to flourishing;
brokenness to wholeness.

Awakening is the outcome of following Jesus, by which the love of God the Father is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Awakening results from and leads to the renewal of the church, the evangelization of a generation, deep wholeness in people, and the transformation of society. As the common thread of the Christian story and the great urgency of our day, awakening unfolds in small ways that produce vast blessings to all of creation. It comes most readily to those who are desperate for more of God, to any disciple of Jesus thirsty for a manner of prayer and quality of relationship that bear the marks of plain, scriptural Christianity—the measure of which is holy love. The church cannot manufacture awakening; it is ultimately a work of God and a sign of his presence. We can, however, sow for awakening, remove impediments, and posture ourselves to receive it.

While awakening is personal, communal, and societal, there is a sequence and yet a simultaneity to the way it tends to happen. It flows in a fluid ecosystem between the heart, home, church, and city. The church, or the body of Christ, serves as a type of estuary between personal awakening and societal awakening.

A Framework for Awakening

While there is no formula, we do have a framework that can help with understanding the economy of awakening.

- *Personal Awakening: Hearts*

Justification: Salvation from sin and death (first half of the gospel).

Sanctification: Restoration to the image of God (second half of the gospel).

- *Communal Awakening: Homes and Churches*

Renewal: Resurgence of life and faith in homes and local churches.

Revival: Overflowing life and faith in homes to neighbors and local churches to communities.

- *Societal Awakening: Cities, Regions, and Countries*

Reformation: Increase in faith; decrease in social toxicity; resurgence of new followers of Jesus Christ; and mending and reconciliation of broken relationships.

Restoration: The flourishing of every sector of society, manifesting in a veritable renaissance of truth, beauty, goodness, and unity—the contagion of scriptural holiness spreading across the land.

How Does Awakening Happen?

It's a mystery. Great awakenings are even more of a mystery.

So where does awakening start? The truth is it can start anywhere. Still, it is a person-by-person reality.

Awakening happens as we follow Jesus Christ, ever focusing and refocusing our attention on him. This is the awakened life. He is the Great Awakener. As we follow Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, he brings awakening to the world for the glory of God.

Forty days following his resurrection from the dead, Jesus held his last meeting on earth with his disciples. Here is what he said: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Jesus told us about how he would be with us through the Holy Spirit, saying things like:

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you." (John 16:13-15)

Jesus reminded them one final time about the Holy Spirit, and then this happened:

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9–11)

Ten days following his ascension, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, the church of Jesus Christ was born, and the rest, as they say, is history. To this day, the Holy Spirit is working all over the world, in every single person, willing and wooing them to awaken to faith in Jesus Christ. The Spirit works through whispers and wonders, through miracles and signs, through gifts and graces, and all of this in the supernatural power of the love of God in Jesus Christ and through his body—the church.

Where is Jesus now? Jesus is here with us through the intimate presence of the Holy Spirit, nearer than our breath. Jesus is also ascended, far above all earthly rule, and sits at the right hand of God. It sounds foreign to our enlightenment worldview, but a human being now resides in heaven. He reigns as Lord over the heavens and the earth.

The favorite Bible verse of the apostles and early Christians may strike you as an unlikely one. It is Psalm 110:1, which says: “The LORD says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”

It is by far the most-quoted verse of the Old Testament in the New Testament. It shows us the essence of the early church as an apostolic awakening movement. They were not running from darkness and evil, nor were they trying to explain it. They were participating with the ascended Lord Jesus Christ in his ongoing defeat of darkness and evil. We are too. This is the awakened life.

Living in the Age of Awakening

The Bible understands time in two primary epochs: the present evil age and the age to come. With the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the end of the age has now broken in on the present evil age. In other words, this trilogy of events signals to us that we are now living in the last days. The only event remaining on the awakening calendar is the return of Jesus Christ—at which time he will raise the dead, inaugurate the new creation, and, finally, fully establish his kingdom on earth.

The Bible makes clear how the story will end. Paul describes the endgame of awakening as follows:

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Cor. 15:22–26)

The resurrection of Jesus is the beginning (the firstfruits) of the defeat of death. It will be completed upon his return with the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. The last stanza of the great creed of the apostles does not mince words as it pulls all the threads of the awakening tapestry together:

He ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Indeed, we live in the overlap between the present evil age and the age to come; between the two advents (or comings) of Jesus Christ; in the age of the outpoured Holy Spirit; the era of the long-awaited in-breaking kingdom of God. We live in the protracted period of the mercy of God, in the age of great awakening.

Why Do We Need Awakening Now?

We live in a time of unprecedented cultural chaos, civil unrest, political divisiveness, and spiritual confusion. Neither the public, private, nor non-profit sectors combined can muster the kinds of solutions that will make the difference the world most needs. There is only one body on the planet against which the gates of hell will not prevail: the body of Jesus Christ—the church. And though our local churches live far beneath their God-given potential, they do possess the potential.

Two thousand years and more than two billion followers of Jesus later, the awakening movement of Jesus Christ and his church stands stronger than ever. Billions of ordinary people the world over have discovered in Jesus Christ an awakened life they never imagined possible. They have overcome challenges, defeated addictions, endured untenable hardships and suffering with unexplainable joy, and stared death in the face with the joyful confidence of eternal life. They have healed the sick, gathered the outcasts, embraced the oppressed, loved the poor, contended for justice, labored for peace, cared for the dying, and, yes, even raised the dead.

C. S. Lewis, in one of his more playful but no less serious works, *The Screwtape Letters*, penned a series of letters written from a seasoned demon to a junior demon on how to effectively thwart the work of God in human beings. This bit from one of the letters in chapter 2 comes to mind:

My dear Wormwood . . . One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes even our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately, it is quite invisible to these humans.¹

In fact, the church alone possesses the potential. How can I make such a sweeping claim? Remember the foundational claim on which all of this is built: the gospel of Jesus Christ is the singular, yet comprehensive, solution to all that is broken in our lives and in this world.

We know we face problems and challenges of such serious scope that only God could affect such change. We know the gospel of Jesus Christ holds not just spiritual answers but material solutions to the challenges we face. And we know the church is poised to share these solutions with the world.

Here's what else we know: though the gospel is more relevant than ever, our churches seem more irrelevant. It is not for lack of effort. We are as tired of the last program as we are of the next one. We are weary of singing the newest song. We want our children to see a different kind of church than the one we are passing on to them. All the while, the

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (HarperCollins, 2001), 5.

upcoming generations search for faith in something beyond the American dream with a little Jesus overlay.

We know a remodel or renovation will not get it done. Nor do we need a revolution that burns everything down and tries to start over as though we could somehow get back to some idealized version of the first-century church. What we need is a renaissance of sorts, a Holy Spirit renaissance, a new creation renaissance. What we need is a great awakening.

It is like we have slowly drifted into a dulled sleep brought on by the seduction of a thousand small indulgences in a sea of a million flashing distractions. History has known these moments before. Times like these call for something beyond a passing revival or spiritual refreshing. Though we are driven by purpose and smothered in platitudes, desperate times call for desperate measures.

Times like these cry out for great awakenings.

Living the Awakened Life

We are brought to the pressing question: How shall we now live?

The New Testament has no category for passive belief—only active faith. The awakened life happens as we follow Jesus Christ. Jesus leads us to the heart of the Father. He baptizes us with the Holy Spirit. He interprets the Scriptures for us. Indeed, he fills us with all the fullness of God.

How do we live the awakened life? It is all at once simple and comprehensive. It is as simple as following Jesus. And, yes, it is as comprehensive . . . as following Jesus. Before the followers of Jesus were called Christians, they were called “People of the Way.” It makes sense. After all, Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

The way is not a map or a set of instructions. The way is a person—Jesus Christ. The truth is not a set of abstract principles or precepts. The truth is a person—Jesus Christ. The life is not a lifestyle or standard of living. The life is a person—Jesus Christ. If I am being elementary here, it is because we never get beyond this elementary reality. We must journey deeply into it, but never beyond it.

It’s why the writer of the letter to the Hebrews put it so plainly:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (12:1–2)

The New Testament describes the awakened life with great urgency in exquisite detail:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:1-3)

In case that is not clear enough, consider this explicit exhortation:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Col. 2:6-7)

If the awakened life means fixing our eyes on him, setting our hearts and minds on him, and living our lives rooted and built up in him, how might we go about this? The gospel is far more comprehensive in its vision for our lives and far more expansive in its capacities to empower us to live fully into that vision than we have imagined. There is always more of God to love and more of ourselves to surrender.

To live the awakened life is to be anchored in the Word of God, animated by the Spirit of God, embedded in the people of God, and expanding the kingdom of God. It is to be moved by the mind of Christ and directed by the will of God.

Read, Pray, Band, Sow for Awakening

The awakened life is nothing more or less than plain, scriptural Christianity. It is a compelling life of consistent action lived in common with others. We read a common text, follow a common calendar, keep a common prayer watch, band together for second-half-of-the-gospel discipleship, and sow together for awakening.

WE READ TOGETHER

We believe in the ancient practice of reading a common text from the Bible. *Common* means reading together, where our fellowship helps to illuminate the Scripture in our lives. We encourage you to do this in your family as well as in a local church community. Christians all over the world and for hundreds of years accomplish this through a common lectionary reading which cycles through a rhythm of scriptural passages across the breadth of the Bible every three years. We invite you to join us if you don't have a reading community by enlisting in the Wake-Up Call. (seedbed.com/wakeupcall).

WE PRAY (AND FAST) TOGETHER

The life of prayer refers to all the ways a person is perpetually in touch with God. It includes those prayers emerging from Scripture and the life of the saints, which are rhythmic and liturgical, as well as travail, which expresses our great need for God to move among us. These prayers arise from life's

general and specific circumstances. In every sense, biblical prayers defy casualness and mere formality and emerge rather from a heart that is oriented entirely to God and wholly to acknowledging our dependence on him. Fasting strengthens prayer, it intensifies and fortifies it, sharpening and giving focus and passion to our intercessions. Followers of Jesus are commanded to fast; it isn't optional. That's because fasting is a primary way we are disabused of our disoriented appetites and taught to desire the things of God and his kingdom.

WE BAND TOGETHER

Unlike any small group or community group you've ever been a part of, a discipleship band is a group of three to five men or women who read together, pray together, and meet together to become the love of God for one another and the world. Though it's not new, it has fallen out of practice over the last hundred years. We are finding it to be one of the big keys to sustaining and growing awakening for the long haul. Visit www.discipleshipbands.com for help in starting your own band.

WE SOW TOGETHER

Sowing is participation in the kingdom of God lifestyle. It is what keeps the gospel from growing stale in a human heart. It is the outward push when the overflowing love of God and the Spirit-filled life touches the lives of those around us. This includes the spheres of heart, home, church, and

city. It covers the breadth of church planting, fresh expressions of church, and the entirety of gifts and offices which the Spirit of God uses to build his church into a dynamic, life-giving movement.

WHY DO WE NEED AWAKENING?

Awakening is the movement from darkness to light, from death to life, that the world needs now.

And those who pray for it, look for it, listen for it, and embrace the awakened life Jesus invited us to experience, life “to the full” (John 10:10), will carry good news in their hearts that is the solution to all that is broken in our lives and in this world.

If this is your desire, would you lend us your hand? Would you take a step forward, even as you finish reading this, to say, “Lord, I accept your invitation to the awakened life, and I invite you to teach me what awakening is all about that I might pray for it, believe you for it, trust you for it—for the sake of your honor and glory and the world you love (John 3:16).”

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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