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# REVIVING LOVE

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## GROUPS GUIDE

R E V I V A L



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**Special thanks to Marshall Perry and Greg Breazeale**

**Reviving Love: Groups Guide**

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**Note on *Reviving Love: Groups Guide***

God's reviving love is powerful! It is not ineffectual, but eternally transformative. Isaiah says:

“For you shall go out in joy  
and be led forth in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall break forth into singing,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.  
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall make a name for the LORD,  
an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” (Isaiah 55:12-13)

God's reviving love changes us, and it changes the world! The whole earth rejoices as God's reviving love reshapes it for His glory.

The *Reviving Love: Groups Guide* is a seven-session study that aims to meditate on and revel in God's reviving love. The guide corresponds with The Austin Stone's *Reviving Love* sermon series and The Austin Stone's mobile app content. The sermons focus on the first chapters of Acts, in which we see the extraordinary workings of God through a people wholly dependent on Him and His life-giving, life-changing power. In these chapters, ordinary people seek God—and turn the world upside down as a result! The mobile app provides 50 days of reviving prayers and meditations, and they can be used alongside the group guide.

The group guide's sessions are not restatements of the sermons or the meditations, although the sessions are based on the sermon and meditation topics. The topics featured in the sermons, meditations, and this group guide are:

- Reviving Spirit
- Reviving Prayer
- Reviving Repentance
- Reviving Community
- Reviving Boldness
- Reviving Holiness
- Reviving Service

The following pages include everything needed to lead *Reviving Love* in your small group, from Scripture passages and activities to teaching notes and discussion questions.

While the guide is written for groups of 8-12 people, it can be used in smaller groups. The material also includes time stamps. You can choose to follow those directions, but you should always consider the needs of your group. If you find that people want to dwell on a particular question, dwell there! The goal here is not to get through the entire guide. The goal is to experience God's reviving love—which happens as we focus on His Word and sit still long enough to hear from Him.

DO IT AGAIN, LORD! SEND YOUR  
*REVIVING LOVE*, WHICH REVIVES  
OUR LOVE. AWAKEN US WITH YOUR  
LOVE, THAT WE MIGHT LOVE YOU  
AND THOSE AROUND US ALL THE  
MORE, EVEN TO THE END! AMEN.

## SESSION 1 | REVIVING SPIRIT \_\_\_\_\_

*Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.*

Heavenly Father, send Your reviving love!

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm 103:1-5)

Revive our love, heavenly Father—for You and for those around us. Amen.

### GOD REVIVES HIS PEOPLE BY HIS SPIRIT

*Read the following text aloud.*

Throughout all times and places, God acts. He sometimes moves directly, as He did in the incarnated person of Jesus. Other times, God works through ordinary people—cashiers and teachers, programmers and stay-at-home moms—to accomplish extraordinary ends. Yet these people are not ordinary. They are revived in Christ. And **revived people depend on the Holy Spirit.**

As revived people, we no longer try to earn God's love. We already have His love, demonstrated most fully on the cross! We also cease from relying on ourselves. **Revived people depend on the Holy Spirit.** We cry with the prophet Zechariah, "Not by might, nor by power, but by [God's] Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6).

### SCRIPTURE STUDY *10 minutes*

*Either read the text aloud or invite a volunteer to read.*

<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

<sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ... <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:16-18, 22-26)

*Discuss at least one of the following two questions.*

1. We sometimes think we're responsible for becoming more patient, kind, good, et cetera. But Paul says such qualities are "the fruit of the Spirit." If the Spirit is the one who bears fruit in your life, where does your responsibility for spiritual growth begin and end?
2. Read Galatians 5:25 and 26 again. Why do you think Paul pairs these two verses? What point do you think he is trying to make?

**Revived people depend on the Holy Spirit.** We "live by the Spirit" and "walk by the Spirit." As we do, we bear His fruit.

## ACTIVITY *10 minutes*

*In smaller groups of 2-3 people, discuss the following situation.*

Share a time when you experienced a physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual limitation. For example, maybe you tried to put away eight-foot tables and realized you needed help. Or maybe you had an adverse reaction to a medication. What happened when you encountered that limitation? What did you think about the limitation at that moment? How about now?

## DISCUSSION *10 minutes*

*Return to the large group to discuss the following question.*

- In what ways could our limitations push us to depend on the Spirit and on each other—for our good and God's glory?

## CONCLUSION

**Revived people depend on the Holy Spirit.** *They look to God, their good Father, who refreshes their spirits and renews their strength.*

*Ask a volunteer to close with prayer.*



## SESSION 2 | REVIVING PRAYER \_\_\_\_\_

*Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.*

Father God, fill us with Your reviving love during our time together!

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God ... We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:7, 19)

Revive our love, Lord, for You and for those around us. Amen.

### GOD REVIVES HIS PEOPLE THROUGH PRAYER

*Read the following text aloud.*

**Revived people are devoted to prayer.** When revived people pray, we declare that God, the Maker of heaven and earth, of things visible and invisible, exists. But prayer proclaims more than God's existence. It professes God's active presence in the world. God is not distant but intimately near to us and His creation.

Prayer also *reasserts*. It preaches the good news to the person who prays and to the person who hears the prayer. Prayer—that often quiet, perhaps unspoken, word to God—defies everything for which the world rages and roars. Prayer restores the heart, revives the mind, and renews the spirit. **Revived people are devoted to prayer**, because in prayer, we are reoriented to God and His reality.

### HISTORICAL STUDY *10 minutes*

*Either read the text aloud or invite a volunteer to read.*

Monica, mother of Augustine, was born in 331 and died in 387. Augustine describes Monica in his *Confessions* as God's handmaid and as a woman who "lived a life of constant prayer."<sup>1</sup> She did. Monica devoted her life to praying for Augustine. She longed for her son to know the living God.

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London, England: Penguin Books, 1961), 276.

Augustine eventually believed in God and became a thought-provoking theologian. Reflecting on his mother's life after her death, Augustine remarked, "And yet, O God, who made us both, how could there be any comparison between the honour which I showed to her and the devoted service she had given me?"<sup>2</sup> Augustine recognized his mother's priceless gift to him—the gift of unceasing, hope-filled prayer.

*Discuss at least one of the following two questions.*

1. In what ways does Monica's example convict, challenge, or encourage you?
2. Who are some people for whom you could give the "devoted service" of prayer?

**Revived people are devoted to prayer.** To pray is to hope. Prayer says that God is in control, God is working all things for His glory, God is working justice for the oppressed, and God is making all things new.

## ACTIVITY *10 minutes*

*In smaller groups of 2-3 people, pray for one another.*

Share your current needs and hopes with one another, along with your current thanksgivings. Have one person conclude your prayer by thanking God for the gift of prayer.

## DISCUSSION *10 minutes*

*Return to the large group to discuss the following question.*

- What would you like to be different about your prayer life going forward? Why?

## CONCLUSION

**Revived people are devoted to prayer.** We meet with our loving Father God, awaiting His answer and comfort.

*Ask a volunteer to close with prayer.*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 292.

## SESSION 3 | REVIVING REPENTANCE \_\_\_\_\_

*Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.*

Heavenly Father, may we read and heed your warnings to us.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

(Revelation 2:4-5)

May we follow your commands, knowing they are for our good and Your glory. Amen.

### GOD REVIVES HIS PEOPLE THROUGH REPENTANCE

*Read the following text aloud.*

Nothing robs our intimacy with God more abruptly and destructively than our decisions to sin against Him. As we choose our own way, we grieve the heart of our loving Father. We also become more desensitized to the Holy Spirit's conviction, slowly fading further and further away from God. We need a pathway back to God! That pathway is repentance. **Repentant people become revived people.**

Through repentance, God cleanses us. He lifts the burden of our guilt, softens our hearts, reconciles broken relationships, stirs our hope, and restores a joy we thought was lost forever. **Repentant people become revived people.** We yearn for His presence, hunger for His Word, hate sin, serve, care, forgive, love and befriend sinners, and pursue conformity to Christ—the beautiful fruits of repentance (2 Corinthians 7:11).

### SCRIPTURE STUDY *15 minutes*

*Either read the text aloud or invite a volunteer to read.*

Repentance is a journey of aligning our thoughts and feelings about our sin with God's. Consider the prodigal son who asks for his inheritance early and then goes out and squanders it:

<sup>17</sup> “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back

to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.  
<sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father.” (Luke 15:17-20)

*Discuss the following question.*

- In what ways did the son change his *mind* concerning how he was living?

Repentance also involves a change in feelings. Look at how David responds to God after the prophet Nathan confronts David about his sin (2 Samuel 12):

<sup>16</sup> You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;  
You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.  
<sup>17</sup> My sacrifice, oh God is a broken spirit:  
A broken and contrite heart, you God will not despise. (Psalm 51:16-17)

*Discuss the following question.*

- In what ways did David's *heart* change concerning his sin?

## **ACTIVITY** 15 minutes

*In smaller groups of 2-3 people of the same gender, reflect on how revival is the fruit of repentance.*

One way we can experience revival in our lives is through confessing our sins to other people. Naming our sins helps free us from condemnation and allows for healthy accountability. Once you form your same-gender group, work through the following points:

- Identify one sin struggle.
- Describe what you believe God thinks and feels about your sin.
- Evaluate how closely your thoughts and feelings about this sin align with God's.
- Share what you believe God is asking you to do to experience freedom from this sin.
- Pray for one another.

## CONCLUSION

**Repentant people become revived people.** We thank God for His grace and deliverance from sin.

*Ask a volunteer to close with prayer.*

## SESSION 4 | REVIVING COMMUNITY \_\_\_\_\_

*Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.*

Heavenly Father, Your love revives us so that we might love You.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31)

Father, revive our love! May we love You and each other with all that we are and hope to be. Amen.

### GOD REVIVES HIS PEOPLE IN COMMUNITY

*Read the following text aloud.*

**Revived people live in community.** As we continue life in this fallen world, our spiritual vitality weakens. Satan attacks us, worldly schemes tempt us, and life experiences drain us. Discouragement, rejection, aging, loss, illness, failure, and so much more sap our desire for God and the things of God.

But there’s good news. God saw our hurt and provided a remedy! One way God restores our spiritual health is through relationships with other Christians. **Revived people live in community.** As believers, we are adopted into God’s family, becoming brothers and sisters in Christ with all the other believers.

### SCRIPTURE STUDY *10 minutes*

*Either read the text aloud or invite a volunteer to read.*

God provides instructions for how we can revive one another, much of it found in Scripture’s “one another’s.”

- Live in harmony with one another. (Romans 12:16, 1 Peter 3:8)
- Accept one another. (Romans 15:7)
- Serve one another in love. (Galatians 5:13)

- Bear one another's burdens. (Galatians 6:2)
- Bear with one another in love. (Ephesians 4:2)
- Be kind and compassionate to one another. (Ephesians 4:32)
- Admonish one another. (Colossians 3:16)
- Comfort one another. (1 Thessalonians 4:18)
- Encourage one another and build one another up. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24)
- Offer hospitality to one another. (1 Peter 4:9)
- Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another. (1 Peter 5:5)

God's instructions reveal our needs as human beings. God designed each of us to need encouragement, comfort, acceptance, and support. In fact, to choose self-reliance and discourage others from meeting these needs in our lives would be to disagree with and disobey God. **Revived people live in community.**

*Discuss at least one of the following two questions.*

1. How do you feel about others meeting these needs in your lives?
2. How has God used other believers to restore your spiritual vitality?

## **ACTIVITY** 10 minutes

*In smaller groups of 2-3 people of the same gender, meet one another's needs.*

Review the list of "one another's" above. Consider what you need most right now (encouragement, comfort, support, acceptance, etc.) and share it. Then let the people in your group meet that need.

Example: "I could really use some encouragement. I've been pretty down on myself after receiving some criticism at work."

## **DISCUSSION** 10 minutes

*Return to the large group to discuss the following questions.*

1. What thoughts and emotions did you experience during this activity?
2. Did you find these interactions beneficial? If so, in what ways?

## CONCLUSION

**Revived people live in community.** In God's adopted family, we are cared for, and we care for others.

*Ask a volunteer to close with prayer.*



## SESSION 5 | REVIVING BOLDNESS \_\_\_\_\_

*Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.*

Father, send Your reviving love!

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. (Psalm 51:12-15)

Your love, heavenly Father, gives us confidence. Let us be bold because of Your love! Amen.

### GOD GIVES BOLDNESS TO HIS PEOPLE

*Read the following text aloud.*

**Revived people speak with boldness.** They also *live* with boldness. Consider Joshua, Gideon, Rahab, or Hannah from the Old Testament. They all exhibited boldness. Their boldness did not originate in themselves; rather, it arose from their relationship with God.

The same is true of us, people who believe in Jesus. Jesus' great, sacrificial love frees us to love Him and others! **Revived people speak with boldness.** As early church father Peter Chrysologus says, "The force of love makes a person brave because genuine love counts nothing as hard or bitter or serious or deadly ... If love is present, it conquers everything."<sup>3</sup>

### SCRIPTURE STUDY *10 minutes*

*Either read the text aloud or invite a volunteer to read.*

<sup>1</sup> Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. <sup>2</sup> Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. <sup>3</sup> She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas C. Oden and Cindy Crosby, *Ancient Christian Devotional: A Year of Weekly Readings, Lectionary Cycle B* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 119.

the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”<sup>4</sup> So Naaman went in and told his lord, “Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel.”<sup>5</sup> And the king of Syria said, “Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.” So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. (2 Kings 5:1-5)

*In 2 Kings 5:6-14, Naaman follows the little girl's suggestion. He goes to God's prophet Elisha, obeys Elisha's instructions, and is healed of his leprosy.*

*Discuss at least one of the following two questions.*

1. Where do you see boldness or confidence in this narrative?
2. What effects does that boldness have on people?

Boldness is not being contrarian or confrontational, although contrariness and confrontation may be required. Boldness is living a life of love. **Revived people speak with boldness**, because we know how much God loves us, and we long for others to experience His love.

## ACTIVITY *10 minutes*

*In smaller groups of 2-3 people, share the good news that God loves you.*

Share the ways you have experienced God's love in both good and bad times this past year.

## DISCUSSION *10 minutes*

*Return to the large group to discuss at least one of the following two questions.*

1. Reflect on the experiences you shared in your small group. How could you boldly share those experiences with people who don't know Jesus?
2. Consider biblical figures like the little girl in 2 Kings 5. She exhibited boldness, boldly declaring God's power to heal. How does her example reshape what boldness looks like for you?

## CONCLUSION

**Revived people speak with boldness.** We joyfully declare God's steadfast love—to one another and to the world!

*Ask a volunteer to close with prayer.*

## SESSION 6 | REVIVING HOLINESS \_\_\_\_\_

*Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.*

Father God, revive us with Your perfect love!

“Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11)

Revive us, O Lord, revive us. Renew our love for You and for those around us. Amen.

### GOD REVIVES HIS PEOPLE IN HOLINESS

*Read the following text aloud.*

**Revived people are holy people.** But this holiness isn’t our doing. We can’t make ourselves holy. Isaiah says our best, most altruistic deeds are filthy rags when set beside God’s holiness (Isaiah 64). God makes us holy, and He *keeps* making us holy. His Spirit works within us, shaping our desires toward holiness.

While we receive holiness, we are not to become idle. **Revived people are holy people.** We prize holiness, because God is holy. We seek to lead holy lives that glorify Him and bless others.

### HISTORICAL STUDY *10 minutes*

*Read the text aloud or invite a volunteer to read.*

In 1536, John Calvin published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which he revised throughout his life. In the second edition, Calvin included a chapter titled “On the life of a Christian man.” It contained instructions concerning the Christian life, such as the following ones:

To begin with, what better foundation can Scripture give for the pursuit of righteousness than to tell us we should be holy because God Himself is holy? Moreover, when we were scattered and wandering like sheep, lost in the maze of the world, God found us and gathered us to Himself. When we contemplate this relationship between ourselves and God, let us remember that holiness is the

bond of our union with Him. Not, of course, because we enter into fellowship with Him by the merit of our own holiness. Rather, we first of all cling to Him, and then, having received His holiness, we follow wherever He calls us. For it is characteristic of His glory that He has no fellowship with sin and impurity. Holiness is the goal of our calling. Therefore we must consistently set our sights upon holiness if we would rightly respond to God's calling.<sup>4</sup>

*Discuss at least one of the following two questions.*

1. John Calvin spent his life acting on his contemplations about God and the things of God. What does this tell you about the normal activities of the Christian life?
2. Calvin says, "Holiness is our calling." What thoughts and emotions does that statement produce in you?

God's reviving love changes us. **Revived people are holy people.** God implants holiness in our hearts so that we might "follow wherever He calls."

## ACTIVITY *10 minutes*

*In smaller groups of 2-3 people, share a time you experienced awe.*

God's holiness causes humans to tremble and fall with wonder and fear (Exodus 3, Isaiah 6, Acts 5:1-11). We experience something similar in the presence of beauty. The Grand Tetons stun us speechless. A newborn baby can produce both terror and unbounded love. We are moved and often forever changed by experiencing wonder and awe.

Share about a time you experienced awe, what prompted that experience, and how were you changed by it.

## DISCUSSION *10 minutes*

*Return to the large group to discuss the following question.*

- How could feeling awe move you to worship God and pursue holiness in your everyday life?

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *A Little Book on the Christian Life* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2017), 6-7.

## CONCLUSION

**Revived people are holy people.** We long to delight the holy God who loves us, so we set and keep setting our sight upon holiness.

*Ask a volunteer to close with prayer.*

## SESSION 7 | REVIVING SERVICE \_\_\_\_\_

*Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.*

Heavenly Father, revive us with Your love!

Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous. It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. (Psalm 112:4-6)

Father, we are revived in Your love! May we display Your love in our relationship with You and our relationships with others. Amen.

### GOD INVITES HIS PEOPLE TO SERVE OTHERS

*Read the following text aloud.*

**Revived people are servants.** Jesus redefines our status, telling us that the greatest are those who serve (Luke 22:24-27). To serve is not demeaning. Rather, it is an honor to serve others. Jesus' disciples absorbed Jesus' teaching and expounded upon it in their letters to the early church. "Bear with one another," Paul says (Colossians 3:12-17).

James replies, "What good is faith without works?" (James 2:14-26). Both men illustrate that faith in Jesus is demonstrated through self-sacrifice. **Revived people are servants.** We model our lives on Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:6-7).

### SCRIPTURE STUDY *10 minutes*

*Either read the text aloud or invite a volunteer to read.*

<sup>1</sup>For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery ... <sup>13</sup>For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup>For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup>But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. (Galatians 5:1, 13-15)

*Discuss at least one of the following two questions.*

1. How does Paul define freedom?
2. In what manner are freedom, love, and service related to one another?

**Revived people are servants.** We receive God's love by grace through faith. In gratitude, we respond with love—love for God, for neighbor, and for the world. We serve, because we have been revived by the Spirit of Christ.

## **ACTIVITY** *10 minutes*

*In smaller groups of 2-3 people, talk about serving others.*

Identify ways you can serve in your neighborhood, church, and/or city. What needs do you know of? How can you meet those needs?

## **DISCUSSION** *10 minutes*

*Return to the large group to discuss the following two questions.*

1. What needs did you identify?
2. Which needs interest you the most? What next step will you take to meet those needs?

## **CONCLUSION**

**Revived people are servants.** They follow Jesus, who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life for His people.

*Ask a volunteer to close with prayer.*



