

Revived Hearts and Radiant Faces

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As we open this first edition of RE:VIVE, our Chair David Hull explores our foundational convictions.



The new season in which we find ourselves within both the church and the world calls for a fresh focus. Methodist Evangelicals Together becomes MET:Revive, and MET Connexion becomes RE:VIVE. It is a great privilege to contribute the opening article.

Jesus himself suggested that building work should begin with the foundations and these, of course, should be nothing less than his teaching (Matthew 7:24-27). It is a great honour, therefore, to lay out the foundations of MET:Revive as we set out together into this new season. Our foundational convictions, inherited from our evangelical forebears within the Methodist Church, continue to be threefold: Biblical Revelation, Biblical Renewal, and Biblical Revival.



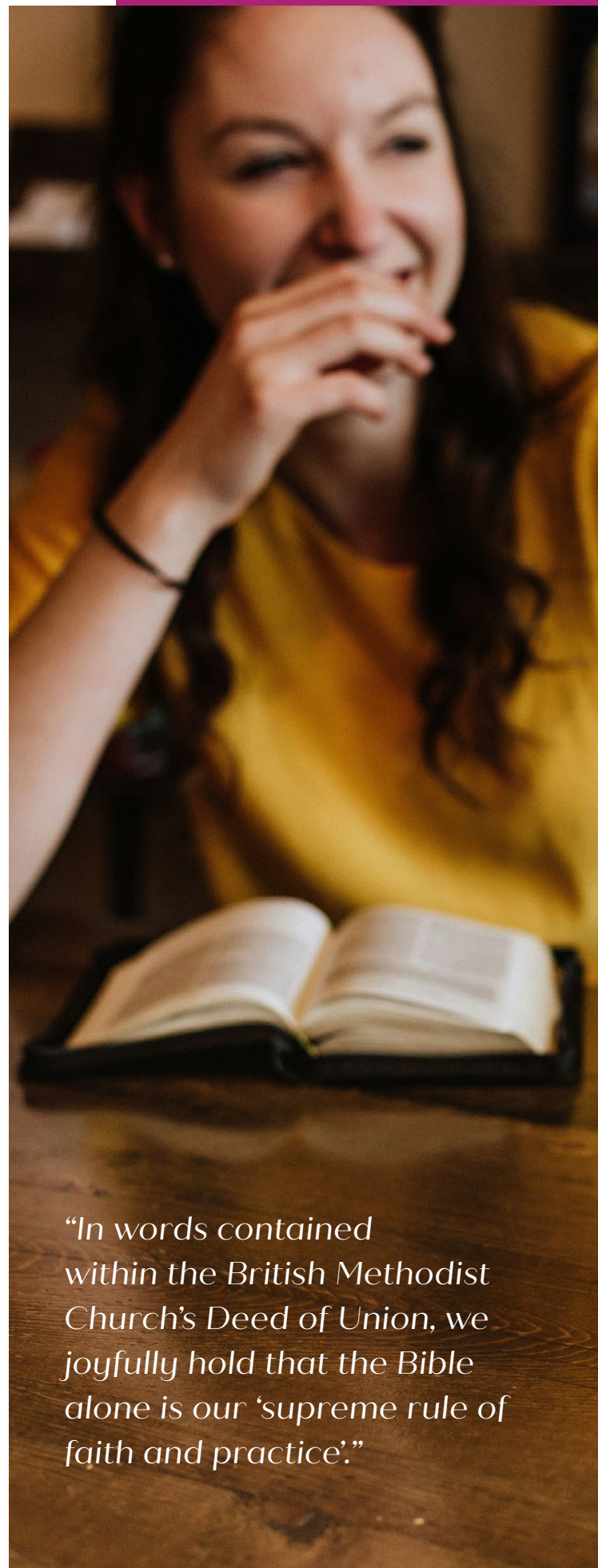
BIBLICAL REVELATION

With the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy, we gladly affirm, 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16-17). In words contained within the British Methodist Church's Deed of Union, we joyfully hold that the Bible alone is our 'supreme rule of faith and practice'. It uniquely teaches us what to believe and how to live. The conviction, of course, goes all the way back to the origins of our Methodist movement, and far beyond that to the earliest days of the history of the people of God. John Wesley described his own approach to the Bible in the Preface to the first collection of his sermons:

I want to know one thing, the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri (a man of one book). Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to find the way to heaven.

Within MET:Revive, we are people of one book. That is the heritage we are so grateful to have inherited from our predecessor evangelical movements within the Methodist Church, particularly Conservative Evangelicals in Methodism which was established to stand for the authority of the Bible within our denomination.

I remember hearing one of its founding leaders, Rev. Dr Donald English, speak movingly of the Bible's unique power as a channel of the Lord's grace into our lives. He



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said that he was approached, after a service in which he had preached, by someone who wanted to know more about Christianity. Because he was due to leave the next day for some international travel, he was unable to offer to meet with the man for a fuller conversation. Instead, he suggested that the man read the Bible, beginning with one of the Gospels. Reading a short passage each day, and working his way through the Gospel from beginning to end, he suggested that he began each daily reading with a prayer: 'Lord, if you are real, please reveal yourself to me.' Donald English said it wasn't long before he received a letter from the man, explaining that he had become a Christian. He wrote, 'As I read, I suddenly became aware that he, of whom I was reading, was present with me.'

Such is the unique power and authority of the Bible, our supreme rule of faith and practice. As we read it with openness to the Lord, we encounter him, the Living God.



BIBLICAL RENEWAL

From the earliest days of the charismatic renewal which spread across the UK from the 1960s and 70s, there has been great hope and excitement that the movement would not only produce new churches but that it would also result in the renewal of historic churches and denominations. Whilst there have been many signs of this beginning to take place, and even gathering momentum, its fulfilment is still awaited with anticipation and longing.

At the heart of this renewal movement is the belief that the experience of the filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit – of which we read in the Book of Acts – is still available to Christians today, if only we would seek it openly and persistently: 'Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord' (Acts 3:19).

This is the 'religion of the heart' that John Wesley so passionately rediscovered in the opening days of our Methodist movement. There is always a deeper, richer experience of the Spirit's presence and power awaiting our response. He too discovered that the same presence of the Spirit known in the earliest days of the Christian church could be experienced by Christians of his own day. How astonishing it is that a prim and proper Oxford don should write in his Journal of events such as this, when he gathered in prayer with his friends to see in the new year of 1739:

Mr. Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, Whitefield, Hutchings, and my brother Charles were present at our love feast in Fetter

Lane, with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his majesty, we broke out with one voice, 'We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.'

The experience certainly kindled a flame that soon began to spread like wildfire in revival. As encouraging as such an account is, I found it even more encouraging to read on in Wesley's Journal and discover what happened only six months later. Wesley's friends and colleagues soon began to realise that they could no longer sense the Spirit's presence with them in the same way. They wrote to Wesley, urging him to return to London from Bristol, and he came straight away. They gathered again in Fetter Lane, and turned to the Lord in confession and prayer. Wesley recorded in his Journal:

In that hour, we found God with us as at the first. Some fell prostrate upon the ground. Others burst out, as with one consent, into loud praise and thanksgiving. And many openly testified, there had been no such day as this since January the first preceding.

The sense of the Holy Spirit's presence returned when they realised they had drifted away and sought him again. It makes me think there might be hope for us yet!

It was with the longing for renewal within the Methodist Church that Dunamis was founded – both a movement and a magazine. It is another of our predecessor organisations, from whom we have inherited our commitment to Biblical Renewal. Lord, have mercy, we pray, and send us great times of refreshing!



BIBLICAL REVIVAL

Our fresh focus in this new season places prayer for revival front and centre once again. It is the torch that was carried for many years

by the Methodist Revival Fellowship, the third of our predecessor organisations. John Barker, its founder, believed that the need of Methodism was greater even than a return to the authority of the Bible alone. It must be accompanied by spiritual power. The Methodist Revival Fellowship therefore set out to come to a proper understanding of revival, to pray for it, and to prepare for it. They longed to be people with radiant faces because they had revived hearts.

'Revival' is a word that is used in many different ways, with many different meanings. Drawing on our own



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revival heritage, I define it as 'the recovery of authentic Christianity, accompanied by the extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit, leading to accelerated transformation'. That transformation, which more ordinarily may take a lifetime, seems to occur much more quickly in times of revival, and it is seen in personal holiness, evangelistic growth, and social change.

Our heritage as Methodists teaches us how to pursue revival: through the 'methodical', faithful use of the means of grace: corporate worship, Christian fellowship and Holy Communion, personal Bible reading, prayer and fasting. When we do these things with the primary intention of encountering the Living God, we uniquely open ourselves to his grace flowing into our lives. As we are faithful in these ordinary things, occasionally we find the Lord moving in extraordinary ways, even in revival as Christians of former generations have discovered.

Like our forebears did in their generation, we believe it is time to place prayer for revival front and centre again. We join in the prayer of the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk:

*'Lord, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord.
Repeat them in our day,
in our time make them known'*

(Habakkuk 3:2)

Read more of Habakkuk's prayer in our Bible Study on pages 22 - 24



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