In 1857 something happened which caused the greatest revival in American history. It began, as all true revivals begin, in simplicity. But it swept through the country like a prairie fire. It did not commence with a big evangelistic campaign, nor even with a group of preachers, but with a few earnest, humble laymen.

The North Dutch Church in Fulton Street, New York, had once been a very popular church, but in 1857 its congregation was depleted, many having moved to other areas. Some other large churches nearby had already closed their doors.

The consistory of Fulton Street Church, however, felt that an all-out effort should be made to interest the immediate residents, most of whom were newcomers from other parts of the world. A lay missionary, J. C. Lanphier by name, was employed to visit every home in the area. It was a somewhat discouraging task, for there seemed little interest. Undaunted, he decided to organize a noon-hour prayer meeting. Making known his plan, he set the date for opening—September 23, 1857. The first half hour Mr. Lanphier was alone. Then one by one others straggled in until there were six in all. They prayed and pledged to meet the following week. The second meeting saw a growth; twenty were present. The next week there were forty.

What happened during the next four months seems almost unbelievable. That upstairs room soon proved too small; so they moved into the large lecture hall. In a little while that, too, was inadequate. So they went into the main auditorium. Instead of a weekly meeting it became a daily prayer session, and all three meeting places were required to accommodate the growing group. Soon other churches opened their doors. They too became crowded to capacity. It is claimed that as many as 10,000 businessmen in New York were meeting daily for prayer.

But the spirit of revival swept into other areas. New England, Pennsylvania, the Middle West, and Texas were soon caught up in the mighty movement of the Spirit. More than 2,000 businessmen were meeting for prayer every day in the Metropolitan Hall in Chicago.

Within months important developments were taking place outside America. Countries which for centuries had been closed to Christian missions opened their doors to the gospel. In 1858 China signed the treaty of Tientsin, which opened her ports. In the same year David Livingstone made his great trek into the “Dark Continent,” opening the way to the millions of Africa. During those two years more than a million new converts were added to the churches in the United States.

Those fires of revival were kindled not by some new program, but by a praying layman. The work was carried forward essentially by businessmen who felt the burden of intercessory prayer.—By R. Allan Anderson, These Times, June 1957.

Quote: A father who had lost his son in the second world war complained bitterly to the minister of his church, “Where was God when my son was killed?” “The same place He was when His own Son was killed,” replied the minister.—By Richard H. Utt, These Times, April 1965.

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Quote: A young man who sent the following definition of the word “money” to a London paper won the prize. It may be well for us to memorize it. “Money is an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider of everything except happiness.”—By George S. Belleau, Signs of the Times, January 1, 1926.

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A poor woman stood at a gate and looked over into the vineyard. “Would you like some grapes?” asked the proprietor. “I should be very thankful,” replied the woman. “Then bring your basket.”

Quickly the basket was brought to the gate. The owner took it and was gone a long time among the vines, till the woman became discouraged, thinking that he was not coming again. At last he returned with the basket heaped full. “I have made you wait a good while,” he said, “but you know the longer you have to wait the better the grapes and the more.” So it sometimes is in prayer. We bring our empty vessel to God and pass it over the gate of prayer to Him. He seems to be delaying a long time, and sometimes faith faints with waiting. But at last He comes, and our basket is heaped full with luscious blessings. He waited long that He might bring us a better and fuller measure.—By J. R. Miller, Signs of the Times, May 5, 1931.

Quote: “There is plenty of heavenly music, if one tunes in.”—By Charles G. Bellah, Signs of the Times, November 12, 1929.

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A schoolmaster in a village school had, says the London Public Opinion, been in the habit of purchasing pork from parents of his pupils on the occasion of the killing of the pig. One day a small boy marched up to the master’s desk and inquired if he would like a bit of pork, as they were going to kill their pig.

The schoolmaster replied in the affirmative. Several days having elapsed, and having heard nothing of the pork, the master called the boy up to him, and inquired the reason he had not brought it. “O, please, sir,” the boy replied, “the pig got better!”—Unknown, Signs of the Times, January 10, 1900.

Quote: “Live near to God, and so all things will appear to you little in comparison with eternal realities.”—By R. M. McCheyne, Signs of the Times, November 12, 1885.

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In the summer of 1866, 19-year-old Eugene Farnsworth wasn’t happy to see the preacher coming across the New Hampshire cornfield where he was working. For he was an ambitious young man with a lot of living to do and not at all inclined to listen to someone urging him to “give his heart to the Lord.”

The preacher picked up a hoe and began working beside Eugene along the rows of corn. They talked inconsequential talk, and then the preacher casually asked, “What do you plan to do when the crop is in, Eugene?’ What are your plans for the next few years?’”

“I plan to get an education and make something of myself.”

“And what then?” the preacher asked. “Have you chosen a career?”

“Yes, I want to be a lawyer.”

“You might do worse. And what then?”
"I intend to be the best lawyer in New Hampshire!"
"And what then?"
“Well, I want to be married and have a family.”
“Good, and what then?”
“I’d like to become wealthy with a large income.”
“And what then?”
"Why, I suppose I'll grow old,” replied the boy, sensing where the conversation was headed.
“And what then?”
“I'll die like everyone else.”
Straightening up, the preacher fastened his eyes upon the boy and asked once more, “And what then, Eugene?”
We all bump up against that same question at some time or other.—Unknown, Signs of the Times, August 1988.

Quote: A tiny boy, two years old, stood in a ray of sunshine that came through the trees in the front yard. In a few minutes, he cried out, “Me standing in God's smile, mamma.”—By Sherman A. Nagel, Signs of the Times, November 20, 1923.


A story about the philosopher George Santayana touches on the matter of balancing work and leisure. One radiant spring morning he stopped in the middle of a sentence during a lecture. "I am afraid," he said, "that sentence will never be finished. I have an appointment with April." He gathered his papers together and left the lecture theater to go off into the country.

Now, Santayana was an eccentric in many ways, and following his example to the letter might not be advisable. But the point he made is valid.

Many of us, you see, are slaves to what we do.—By Vivian M. Loken, Signs of the Times, April 1991.

Quote: “Our thoughts are heard in heaven.”—Unknown, Signs of the Times, April 26, 1910.

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Two men were riding in a sled behind two spirited horses. They became lost. It was very cold, and although the men were well wrapped in furs, they were freezing and knew that unless they soon found shelter they would die of the cold. Suddenly one of them saw another man struggling in the snow. He wanted to help him, but his companion said that if they got out of the furs they would freeze to death, and probably wouldn’t be able to help the other man anyway.

However the first man got out, brought the other man to the sled, and remarked to his companion that he had not only saved a life but had become warm himself. But his companion didn’t answer. The extreme cold had taken his life. Yes, there is warmth in helping others.—By M. E. Erickson, These Times, September 1952.

Quote: “The Bible means to me that there is a God, that He has purposes for men, and that each of us has the task to find and immerse himself in the stream of the divine purpose.”—By John Foster Dulles, These Times, May 1953.

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