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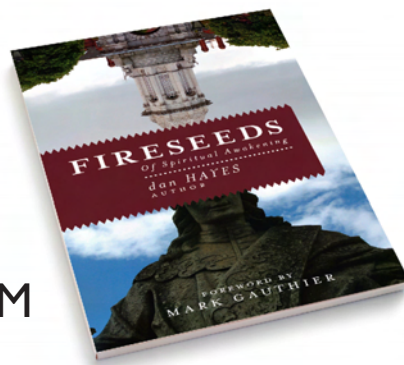
THE ROLE OF HUMILITY IN PRAYER

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This is not simply a reprint of an old classic. Fireseeds has been updated and expanded to include recent accounts of student revivals as well as stories from around the world and not simply the U.S. The new Fireseeds also recounts the contribution of women to these revivals as they are often overshadowed, and contains an additional chapter on the filling of the Spirit (including the Satisfied Prayer Experience). Last, the revised version opens with a foreword by Mark Gauthier, and a vision to trust God for movements everywhere.

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HUMILITY AND ITS ROLE IN REVIVAL

37. Resolved, to inquire every night, as I am going to bed, wherein I have been negligent, —what sin I have committed, —and wherein I have denied myself; —also at the end of every week, month and year.

48. Resolved, constantly, with the utmost niceness and diligence, and the strictest scrutiny, to be looking into the state of my soul, that I may know whether I have truly an interest in Christ or not; that when I come to die, I may not have any negligence respecting this to repent of.

65. Resolved, Very much to exercise myself ...with the greatest openness of which I am capable, to declare my ways before God, and lay open my soul to Him, all of my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, hopes, desires, and everything, and every circumstance.

—From the seventy “Resolutions” of Jonathan Edwards, 1723¹

According to Wikipedia, there was a nun in the twelfth century named Saint Humility. She took the name Humility upon entering the monastery and was later canonized. It seems to me that there would be a lot of pressure in taking on the name Humility, like a guy changing his last name to Stud. But apparently she locked herself in a cell and didn't speak to anyone for twelve years—only prayed—so I think she may have pulled it off. If I could do that, I'd tell everyone and probably write a book on it: *Perfect Humility and How I Attained It*. Which I guess answers the question why I have never changed my last name from Hayes to Humility. *Humility* is a word we attach to many attributes, such as introspection, meekness, low self-esteem, graciousness, self-effacement—many or most of which are far from the word's definition. But define it we must, for a study of history and the Word of God makes it clear that without it revival cannot occur. Thus humility is the second prerequisite for spiritual awakening.

The Definition of Humility

Let's start by clarifying. Humility is not thinking less of yourself than you ought to. It is not low self-esteem. In the symmetry of human virtues it is parallel to truth. It is a wholly accurate appraisal of yourself comprised of (at least) the following attitudes:

Submission to God and legitimate authority

Recognition of the virtues and talents that others possess, particularly those that surpass one's own, and giving due honor and, when required, obeisance

Recognition of the limits of one's talents, ability, or authority, and not reaching for that which is beyond one's grasp

Low self-esteem, negative self-image, and self-loathing do not qualify as humility, because they assess our value falsely. That is, they assess it as less than others would and as less than what we truly are. They move as far from the plumb line of truth as pride does, just in the opposite direction. As pride makes it impossible to be truly humble, so does a negative self-image. How can I humbly submit to another person if I think that person is actually superior to me (“Of course I’ll listen to you; you’re better than I am”). But if we perceive ourselves accurately and as equals, then it will take humility to give deference to someone else’s point of view.

In this vein Dr. Howard Hendricks, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, tells the story of a student who came to him and said, “Professor, pray that I might be nothing.”

Dr. Hendricks replied, “No, I won’t pray that you’ll be nothing. You take that by faith. What I will pray for is that you will believe God to use you because of how significant a person you are because of Christ’s work on your behalf.”

Packaged between the lines of Dr. Hendricks statement is a great deal of truth worth expounding, for the foundational attitude of humility is comprised of at least these theorems: (1) I am deeply flawed and sinful, yet I am loved and valued by God. (2) I cannot earn God’s favor but have received it as a gift. (3) I have been cleansed and forgiven for all of my sins and am a child of God. (4) God has given me certain gifts and abilities that I willingly surrender to His service. (5) I desperately need God’s resources (strength, wisdom, empowerment, and so on) to accomplish whatever He has called me to do, think, live, and be. (6) I am part of the body of Christ and must depend on and value the gifts and abilities of others. This is the perspective of humility, viewing our spiritual condition as it is wrapped up in Christ.

Oh, and let’s clear up one last misconception: as humility does not equate to low self-esteem, neither does it equate to a personality type. No one is naturally humble. Some personalities may seem more humble than others (quiet,

shy, introverted), but this is not an accurate gauge of the heart. Humility is not natural for anyone, but it is possible for all of us who know Jesus Christ to see this quality become more and more a part of our lives. Jesus is truth and therefore we have a relationship with the truth and this should increasingly lead us to greater humility, that is, truer and truer thoughts about ourselves.

Humility and Revival

In the context of revival and spiritual awakening, humility is seeing with great acuteness the glory and power of God and our subordinate, dependent relationship to Him. We see ourselves as creatures and see God as the Creator. We see ourselves as unworthy while at the same time having been made worthy in Christ. We understand ourselves to be weak and yet strong in Him. We see our inconsistencies, but we see them as spaces through which God's grace can flow. Humility is the lens through which we see and experience the paradoxical nature of the Christian life: Christ in us.

Having seen the need for spiritual awakening, humility bows our head before the Lord. Individually and corporately, we admit that we cannot make spiritual awakening happen but trust that God can.

Humility acknowledges not only our need for God but also our need for others. We submit ourselves to fellowship, prayer, and laboring with other believers who may think differently than we do. It means that, although our doctrines might not all be in the same slots, we are willing to focus on the same end: seeing our campus ablaze for God. In every age and time it has been this sort of humility that has ignited believers and allowed them to become channels of the Holy Spirit, drawing thousands of Christians and non-Christians to the foot of the cross and then thrusting them out into the world to exalt His name.

Isaiah 57:15 illustrates humbling ourselves before the

Lord and how it produces revival:

*This is what the high and lofty One says—
he who lives forever, whose name is holy:
“I live in a high and holy place,
but also with him who is contrite and lowly
in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly
and to revive the heart of the contrite.”*

Note here that the Lord says He dwells in two places. First, He dwells in a high and holy place. He is lofty; He is exalted. He is the Creator and we are the created. We bow before Him because He alone is worthy of our trust, love, and homage. We praise Him as majestic, as awesome, as great. He is separated from us by loftiness and grandeur. However, God has a second dwelling place. According to this passage, He also dwells with the contrite (humble) and lowly of heart. He lives next to, with, and in those who are humble of heart. His presence and availability here are real to those who admit their need.

The moment we recognize Him as high, lofty, and holy and then act accordingly (humbly acknowledging our creaturely status, weakness, and need), He transfers His dwelling place from transcendence to immanence. He is right next to us, in us, and with us, closer than any relative or friend. All of His mighty presence and power becomes our present possession when we yield ourselves to Him. Jesus Christ, the One whose heart burns for revival more than any other, now becomes our daily resource to produce revival and awakening in our situation. To those who humble themselves, God promises “to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart.”

The converse of this is that God does not revive the proud. We have usurped God’s place and cut ourselves off from His power if we, and other Christians on campus, say, “With a

new strategy, a little more hard work, materials, leaders, and money, we'll accomplish the job." We could stay on our knees until they fuse to the floor, but we would never see revival because we are not humbling ourselves. God brings awakening only to those of us who say, "Lord, we can't, but You can."

A Humble Example

This has been a significant amount of description for a virtue that is best demonstrated, not discussed. There have been many humble servants whom God has used as channels of revival, but none who have inspired a passion for humility among Christians more than David Brainerd. (You probably thought I was going to say Saint Humility, but alas, humility is tested and developed in the company of humans, not cloistered from them.)

What is immediately attractive about Brainerd is that he was expelled from Yale in his junior year for commenting about one of his tutors, "[The man] has no more grace than this chair." (Unless the word "chair" was profanity in the eighteenth century, this punishment seems a little harsh.) Upon leaving Yale, he trained for the ministry, and in 1742 (at the age of twenty-four) he was licensed to preach and devoted himself to missionary work among the Native Americans, spending most of his short ministry (a little less than five years) with the Delaware Indians of Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

As humility is a disposition of the heart, it is difficult to examine, but Brainerd's journal, which was preserved and later published by Jonathan Edwards, affords us a glimpse into the soul of the man and the revival that broke out as a result of his ministry. In the entries leading up to the revival we witness as good a picture as we're likely to find of a heart humbled before the Lord.

Friday, April 1, 1743. I rode to Kaunaumeeck, near twenty miles from Stockbridge, where

the Indians live with whom I am concerned, and there lodged on a little heap of straw. I was greatly exercised with inward trials and distresses all day; and in the evening, my heart was sunk. ... Oh that God would help me!"

Thursday, April 7. Appeared to myself exceedingly ignorant, weak, helpless, unworthy, and altogether unequal to my work. Towards night, I had the exercise of faith in prayer, and some assistance in writing. Oh that God would keep me near him!

Friday, April 8. Was exceedingly pressed under a sense of my *pride, selfishness, bitterness, and [divisive] spirit*, in times past, while I attempted to promote the cause of God. Its vile nature and dreadful consequences appeared in such odious colours to me, that my very heart was pained. I saw how poor souls stumbled over it into everlasting destruction.

Wednesday, April 13. My heart was overwhelmed within me: I verily thought I was the meanest, vilest, most helpless, guilty, ignorant, benighted creature living. And yet I knew what God had done for my soul.

Tuesday, May 10. Was in the same state, as to my mind, that I have been in for some time; extremely pressed with a sense of guilt, pollution, and blindness: Oh! the *pride, selfishness, hypocrisy, ignorance, bitterness, [divisiveness]*, and *the want of love, candour, meekness, and gentleness*, that have attended my attempts to promote religion and virtue ... alas,

what corrupt mixtures attended my best duties!”

Tuesday. Oh that God would humble me deeply in the dust before Him. I deserve hell every day for not loving my Lord more, who has, I trust, loved me and given himself for me. Every time I am enabled to exercise any grace renewedly [sic], I am renewedly [sic] indebted to the God of all grace for His special assistance. Where then is boasting? Surely it is excluded when we think how we are dependant on God for the being and every act of grace.

Lord's Day. In the afternoon I still felt barren when I began to preach, and after half an hour I seemed to myself to know nothing and to have nothing to say to the Indians; but soon after I found in myself a spirit of love, and warmth, and power to address the poor Indians.

The revival built through June of 1745, coming to a remarkable crescendo in August.

Friday, June 12. I know not that ever God helped me to preach in a more close and distinguished manner; and yet I was so sensible of my defects in preaching that I could not be proud of my performance.

June 22. Preached to the Indians again. Their numbers, which at first consisted of about seven or eight persons, was now increased to thirty. There was a solemn attention among them ... some began to feel their misery and perishing state, and appeared concerned for a deliverance from it.

August 6. There was about fifty-five persons in all. They seemed eager of hearing; but there appeared nothing very remarkable, except their attention, till near the close of my discourse. Then divine truths were attended with surprising influence ... there were scarce three in forty that could refrain from tears and bitter cries. They all seemed in an agony of soul to gain an interest in Christ ... the more I invited them to come and partake of his life, the more their distress was aggravated, because they felt themselves unable to come.

August 7. Preached to the Indians from Isaiah 53:3-10. Most were affected and many in great distress for their souls; and some few could neither go nor stand but lay flat on the ground, as if pierced at heart, crying incessantly for mercy. It was remarkable that as fast as they came from remote places the Spirit of God seemed to seize them with concern for their souls.

August 8. Their number was now about sixty-five persons. ... The power of God seemed to descend upon the assembly like a "mighty rushing wind." ... I stood amazed at the influence that seized the audience almost universally, and could compare it to nothing more aptly than the irresistible force of a mighty torrent or swelling deluge ... almost all persons of all ages were bowed down with concern together and scarce one was able to withstand the shock of the surprising operation.

August 9. The cry of these was soon heard by

others, who, though scattered, immediately gathered round. I then proceeded in the same strain of gospel invitation, till they all except two or three, melted into tears and cries and seemed in the greatest distress to find and secure an interest in the great Redeemer. For so great was their concern, that almost everyone was praying and crying for himself ... *Guttummaukalummeh, Guttummaukalummeh that is*, “have mercy on us, have mercy on us.”²

The accounts of the revival continue on in his journal, the entries ending in 1747, when at the age of twenty-nine Brainerd died of tuberculosis. In fact, he carried on a great deal of his ministry in various degrees of illness, which further added to his brokenness and dependence (“Sept 8: coughing up blood in almost the whole of the journey”; “Sept. 10: Was extremely overdone with heat and showers this day and coughed up a considerable quantity of blood”).³ As you read his journal, it is apparent that Brainerd’s physical illness and emotional disposition were not ideal for the challenges of pioneering ministry. Clearly it was his humility that qualified him to partake in the ministry as well as revival.

Women in Revival

It would be hard to find anyone who approached the ministry with greater humility than David Brainerd, except perhaps a whole class of individuals: women.

In the histories of revivals women are often mentioned only in passing or in a brief byline. For example, we can read in great depth of James McQuilkin and the hundred thousand people who came to Christ through his preaching in the Great Layman’s Prayer Revival of the mid nineteenth century. But as you trace it back, McQuilkin was a degenerate unbeliever whose life revolved around

gambling and cock fighting, until he invited into his house a Baptist missionary going door-to-door—a woman we know only by the name of Mrs. Colville. To derail the evangelistic conversation, McQuilkin asked Mrs. Colville if she was a Calvinist, to which she bluntly replied, “I do not care to talk on mere points of doctrine. I would rather speak of the experience of salvation in the soul. If one were to tell me what he knows of the state of his heart towards God, I think I could tell him whether he knows the Lord Jesus savingly.” In response McQuilkin became deeply convicted of his sin and she was able to share the gospel with him.⁴ No Mrs. Colville, no James McQuilken.

We read about that same revival (the Great Layman’s Prayer Revival) as it reached South Africa and spread through the ministry of Andrew Murray Jr. and others. But we barely catch in the accounts the revival’s true flashpoint in South Africa:

One Sunday evening, during the youth fellowship meeting, an African servant girl arose and asked permission to sing a verse and pray. The Holy Spirit fell upon the group as she prayed. In the distance there came a sound like approaching thunder. It surrounded the hall, and the building began to shake. Instantly everyone burst into prayer.⁵

In fact, Murray, who had been out of the room, came in and demanded, “I am your minister sent by God. Silence!”⁶ They ignored him (praise God) and kept praying. Amazingly, we don’t even know the African girl’s name, but it was her psalm that launched the revival.

Or consider the accounts of the Global Revival of 1905–07. A truncated history relates that the student evangelist Evan Roberts launched the revival in Wales, when the full account shows (as noted in chapter two) that it had in fact sparked

months earlier in the testimony of a young woman (Florrie Evans) who simply stood and said, “I love the Lord Jesus with all my heart.”⁷

A primary vehicle of that same Global Revival spreading to India was the unceasing prayer of Pandita Ramabai and the revival that sparked in Mukti, her home for orphans, widows, and famine victims.⁸

The list goes on and becomes even more impressive if you include the effects of prayer and discipleship of godly mothers such as Susanna Wesley (mother of John Wesley). And yet it is not fair to the godliness of these women to say that it is history that humbled them (though it certainly did), giving them only a few sentences of recognition. Rather they willfully embraced humility and were content outside of the spotlight, so long as Christ enjoyed it.

If we are looking to find the greatest examples of humility, it is to the women of revival that we should turn our attention and be awed by hearts that repudiated fame, title, position, and prominence—servants of the kingdom who in God’s economy are the greatest.

Humbling Ourselves

As a virtue, humility grows over time, through the process of walking with Christ. By growing in our knowledge of Him, through adversity and trials, through obedience, through sin and restoration, and through maturing and wisdom, we come more and more to the truth of who and what we are.

And yet there are means by which we can put the growth process on steroids—at least temporarily. In deliberate ways we can humble ourselves before the Lord.

Fasting

One of those ways is through fasting. Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, who devoted much of the last years of his life to prayer and fasting, had this to say about the discipline:

Down through the years, godly people who have done mighty things for God have testified to the necessity of prayer and fasting. The roll call of other great Christian leaders who determined to make prayer with fasting a part of their lives reads like a Hall of Fame: Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, Matthew Henry, Charles Finney, Andrew Murray, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and many others. Fasting is a primary means of restoration. By humbling our souls, fasting releases the Holy Spirit to do His special work of revival in us.⁹

Far from just putting out a theory, Dr. Bright participated in several forty-day fasts, during which he sought to humble himself and pray for revival, calling other godly leaders and ministries to join him in the endeavor.

Fasting creates a habit of reliance in our lives. Hunger, which normally arises every five or six hours (or in my case, every two or three), becomes acute every five or six minutes. When we are fasting, hunger becomes a trigger mechanism prompting us to turn to God for empowerment. All day long we call out to God for strength, endurance, self-control, and wisdom.

Fasting makes us weak, and when we are weak, we are more humble. Fasting gives us a firm grip on our smallness, finitude, and lack of power—as opposed to coffee, which makes us feel fast, smart, and competent.

It is also a plea for help, a red flare sent up from the soul for a specific reason or cause. When we are in distress and desperate for God, we fast. But with this caution: we are not attempting to manipulate God or make Him care for us more than He does—holding our breath until we're blue to get our way. Rather, we spend our passion and desire for deliverance by choosing fasting instead of manipulating, blaming, whining, or turning to sin for comfort.

In short, fasting provides a teaching aid in humbling ourselves before God.

Naked before God

The great reformer Martin Luther was asked when he came to faith. His response was that it was while he was on the toilet. Now, Luther had no aversion to crudeness, so it's quite possible that this was the actual location (thanks for that image, Martin). But scholars generally agree that he was using a metaphor for humility, one popular in the Middle Ages: "sitting on the toilet." And if you think about it, it's a darn good metaphor for humility, for if there is ever a time or place where you are completely humbled, it is sitting on the toilet. There are no pretenses, no facades, no pride, no image management. The toilet is ground zero for humanity; at that moment you really are what you are.

On a regular basis, and certainly in preparation for revival, it's important to visit that restroom and strip yourself naked before God. What I'm describing is not simply confession of sin but also an acknowledgement of your weaknesses, your hidden motivations, fears, insecurities, comparisons, arrogant thoughts, and ugliest fantasies. Lay the whole sordid mess before God, declaring, "This is who I am, God." Take an hour or two and pull away somewhere and just lay yourself naked before God. And when you're done, thank Him for His love and mercy in Jesus Christ, and thank Him for fully accepting you in light of all you are. Having laid yourself bare, wallow in the grace that is yours and trust Him anew for mighty works.

While not an everyday event, this is also not a once-a-year spring cleaning. This is an ongoing habit of humbling ourselves.

Public Confession

As confession, public and otherwise, will be the subject of the next chapter, I will only touch on it here. But typically public confession (to another person or to an entire group)

has been the spark that ignites the flame of revival, and it's easy to see why: it not only removes the hindrance of sin but also requires a profound degree of humility to make such a public acknowledgment. In public confession we are concurrently humbling ourselves, confessing, and often repenting as well.

God's Humbling Hand

Alcoholics Anonymous has popularized the saying "You will either humble yourself or you will be humiliated." In humbling ourselves we are not simply left to our own spiritual ingenuity. With a Fatherly love, God will also provide circumstances that humble us, and we need to embrace them instead of running from them or quickly moving to image management and saving face.

Having become quite a sensation in America, in 1873 evangelist D. L. Moody began a three-year evangelistic tour in the British Isles. One night, as he spoke to the students of Cambridge University, seven young men committed their lives to Christ and missions. Later known as the Cambridge Seven, these men pioneered missions in China and used their hefty fame and influence on campuses in the U.S. to propel the Great Commission.

This evangelistic lecture at Cambridge was a pivotal event in Christian missions. But what is often ignored is that Moody had only a seventh-grade education and felt terribly inadequate about this speaking engagement. Far from dispelling his insecurities, he rudely encountered his worst fear, as many of the Cambridge students ridiculed him, finding him extremely ... well, uneducated.¹⁰ It's doubtful that the coinciding of the Spirit's power and Moody's humbling was an accident, but instead it was a profound example of the principle "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

But for an example of humility clothed in God's power, we do not have to leave our own century to find a man who

humbled himself before the Lord and as a result became the fireseed of revival.

Billy Graham

Billy Graham has spoken and preached to more people than any man who has ever lived—a fact that you wouldn't think could coexist with humility. But it has in the life of Dr. Graham. During fifty years of personal ministry, he has maintained godliness, holiness, and Christian standards of integrity even in the face of attacks and defections by others. Though he has received many honors and had a number of opportunities for financial reward, he has consistently followed the calling of God to win men and women to Jesus Christ until the Lord returns.

One incident in Billy Graham's life illustrates the nature of humility and its results. In 1945 Billy was almost thirty years old, already an evangelist and president of Northwestern College in Minneapolis. He had, however, no national recognition, nor did he seem destined for any. He was obscure outside of what was considered the fundamentalist subculture.

At this same time an outstanding young Canadian evangelist named Charles Templeton was beginning to have serious doubts concerning the authenticity and reliability of the Scriptures. He went to graduate school in an attempt to resolve his doubts, but they only grew more intense. He and Graham often discussed these concerns, and soon he began to challenge Billy's commitment to the authority of Scripture and suggested that he should rethink his position on the Bible.

In 1949, at a conference center named Forest Home in southern California, Billy was deeply hurt to hear of a remark by Templeton implying that Graham's ministry would be curtailed, and he would never do anything significant for God, if he continued to believe, trust, and preach the authority of the Bible. In his biography of Billy Graham, John Pollack describes this time of struggling before the Lord:

After supper, instead of attending the evening service, he retired to his log cabin and read again the Bible passages concerning its authority. He recalled someone saying that the prophets used such phrases as “the Word of God came to us” or “Thus saith the Lord” more than 2,000 times. He meditated on the attitude of Christ, who fulfilled the Law and the prophets: He loved the Scriptures, quoted from them constantly and never once intimated that they might be wrong.

Billy went out in the forest and wandered up the mountain, praying as he walked, “Lord, what shall I do? What shall be the direction of my life?” He had reached what he believed to be a crisis.

He saw that intellect alone could not resolve the question of authority. He must go beyond intellect. He thought of the faith he used constantly in daily life: he did not know how a train, or a plane, or a car worked, but he rode them. He did not know why a brown cow could eat green grass and yield white milk, but he drank milk. Was it only in the things of the spirit that such faith was wrong?

Graham later described his own thoughts: “So I went back and I got my Bible and I went out in the moonlight. And I got to a stump and put the Bible on the stump, and I knelt down, and I said, ‘Oh God: I cannot prove certain things, I cannot answer some of the questions Chuck Templeton is raising, and some of the other people are raising, but I accept this book by faith as the Word of God.’”¹¹

What had Graham done? In humble faith he had placed his doubts and questions in the hands of his Creator. He humbly admitted that he did not have every answer, but he could trust God for them. What followed can only be attributed to the God who revives the heart of the contrite.

Two months later Billy Graham launched what was then an experimental evangelistic tent crusade in Los Angeles. It exceeded all expectations and hopes. So many thousands of people were converted, and so many multitudes of Christians were revived, that the crusade committee extended the campaign from three to eight weeks. Such attendance at a Christian meeting was unprecedented, as were the numbers of conversions. Many Hollywood personalities and even underworld figures were converted. Many gave public witness to the change in their lives.

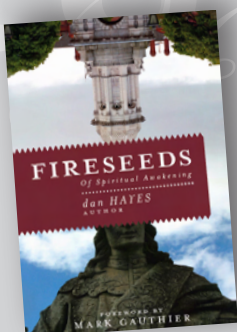
The final service drew nine thousand people. This was by far the largest evangelistic crusade in America in over three decades!

He had been largely unknown to the American public prior to this time. Now *Time* and *Newsweek* both wrote about the “new” evangelist, Billy Graham. The Associated Press carried dispatches about him across the nation. Graham’s ministry suddenly accelerated around the world. William Randolph Hearst, owner of a vast newspaper empire (which included the *Los Angeles Times*), issued his famous instruction to his reporters: “Puff Graham!” The work of God became something that the secular press would write about, a phenomenon that had not been true in America for years.

Why did this happen? It happened because one man, William Franklin Graham Jr., was willing to humble himself before God at great risk of failure, to look foolish and be pitied by his more learned contemporaries. He yielded everything (including his doubts) to the Lord of the universe. He decided to let God fulfill His promises to “dwell with the humble and contrite of heart” and to “revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the contrite” (Isaiah 57:15).

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