

5 Ways To Move From a Great Shaking in 2016 to a Great Awakening in 2017

According to the *Chicago Tribune*, 2016 was “A year unlike any other year.” Merriam-Webster, famous for its dictionaries, picked “surreal” as the word of the year, and Nigel Farage of Brexit fame opined that 2016 was the “Year of the ‘Political Revolution’ by the Little People.”

By all counts, 2016 was a year of great shaking, perhaps of divine proportions.

In America alone, a tremendous shaking has taken place through our presidential elections alone, as the mainstream has been shaken; the political system (in particular, the Democratic party) has been shaken; the evangelical church has been shaken; college campuses have been shaken; the status quo has been shaken—just to name a few. And in each case, we could add that the shaking has not abated.

Is this the hand of God at work?

Obviously, we cannot be dogmatic about this, since we do not have the inspired commentary of Scripture to take us behind the scenes, and some of the upheaval can be explained on natural grounds alone. But from my perspective, much of the shaking is the result of the Lord responding to the prayers of His people, who for many years have been asking Him to rock our world (not destroy our world) and wake us up. Are we getting the message?

But even if I’m right about this, there is a massive difference between a great shaking and a great awakening, and the burning question is: How can we move from the great shaking of 2016 to a great awakening in 2017 and beyond?

Before answering that question, let me give you a glimpse of what a spiritual awakening looks like.

Consider the First Great Awakening, which took place in the American colonies between 1730-1745. Before the awakening, young people caroused and partied all night, and women were afraid to walk the streets. But in the height of the revival even Benjamin Franklin could say that “it seemed as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk through the town in the evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.”

Could you imagine something like this today?

Before the 1857-1858 prayer revival, the churches were becoming worldly and internalized, and immorality, violent crime, spiritualism, corruption and atheism were on the rise (as recounted by the revival scholar James Edwin Orr). But a spirit of prayer swept across the nation to the point that stores and businesses would shut down in some of our cities for noon prayer (again, try to wrap your mind around something like that today).

As described by Mary Stuart Relfe:

The Revival of 1857 restored integrity to government and business in America once again. There was renewed obedience to the social commandments. An intense sympathy was created for the poor and needy. A compassionate society was rebirthed. The reins of America were returned to the godly. Yet another time, Revival became the solution to the problems, the remedy for the evils, the cure of all ills.

Could a spiritual movement like this happen again in our day? To use biblical language, with people it's impossible, but with God, all things are possible (see Matt. 19:26).

Here, then, are five keys to moving from shaking to awakening.

1. To the extent prayer played a role in the shaking of 2016, it must be maintained and even increased.

Many Christians prayed fervently in the months leading up to the elections, recognizing how terribly broken our nation was and how desperately we needed divine intervention. But human nature being what it is, once we get past the feeling of crisis, we take our foot off the gas.

Now is not the time to let up. To the contrary, we must redouble our prayer focus if we want to see real, lasting change.

2. We must put our hope in the Lord, not Donald Trump.

Let's say Mr. Trump turns out to be a phenomenal president, appointing terrific Supreme Court justices, effectively fighting terrorism, strengthening our economy (especially in the inner cities), securing our borders and creating compassionate solutions for worthy immigrants, replacing Obamacare with a much better plan, restoring respect for America abroad—and even more.

Even if he managed to do all this, which would be more than remarkable, he would not in any way usurp the role of the church, nor could he. He could not turn the hearts of rebels and mockers; he could not restore a spirit of prayer to the church; he could not break the hold of sexual bondages; he could not unite broken families—and the list goes on and on.

So, while we pray for our president to succeed in his mission, we put our trust in the Lord, not him, for spiritual awakening.

3. We must give ourselves to the Great Commission and to changing hearts and minds, especially among young people.

Change will not come to America from the top down. It must rise from the grassroots up, and the most effective weapon we

have, along with prayer, is the gospel.

With the Lord's help, we must make Jesus known to a generation that does not know Him, and we must demonstrate to the world that God's ways are best—ways of life and harmony and peace.

4. If, in fact, we have been given a divine respite, a reprieve of sorts, we must maximize this opportunity with holy desperation. If we don't, things could get worse than ever, and in a hurry at that.

Along with many other leaders, I do believe that we have been spared what could have been a disastrous Hillary Clinton presidency, in particular when it comes to issues of great concern to the church (especially abortion, religious liberty and the meaning of marriage). But if that is true, then what we do with this respite is of critical importance.

Will we redeem the time and maximize the moment, not only on the political and social fronts but on the spiritual and relational fronts as well? Will we seize hold of our liberties and make a real difference? I dread to think of what's ahead of us if we don't.

5. We must not underestimate the depth of division in our country. The task is massive, and only with the help of the Holy Spirit will we see positive, lasting change.

Even if we're right about God giving us a respite with the Trump election, we cannot forget how divisive he has been as a candidate (and even president-elect) and how these elections have revealed the deep rifts that stand between us, in particular along the lines of sex, race, skin color, age and religion.

And although we understand that there will always be deep divisions in a nation of 330 million people, we also understand that as followers of Jesus, we have been given the message of reconciliation, both vertically and horizontally,

and it is through a great spiritual awakening that these deep divides can be bridged.

The good news is that revival, visitation and renewal happen not only on a national level. Awakening also happens one life at a time, and so we do well to follow the practice of an old evangelist who was asked how he prayed for revival. He answered, "I draw a circle on the ground, then I get inside the circle, then I pray, 'Lord, revive everything in this circle!'"

Why not start praying that prayer for yourself today? {eoa}