

America Desperately Needs Another Awakening and 2 Other Truths

This summer I had the distinct privilege of serving Mat Staver, president of Liberty Counsel, in hosting pastors and wives luncheons in 30 cities preparing the way for “Who Will Stand?” citywide events. These rallies will challenge attendees to make a choice to use our voice for righteousness amidst America’s downward spiral.

Mat—along with Mike Huckabee, David Barton, Sam Rodriguez, Ralph Reed and others— is challenging us to make a difference. How? Simply by replacing the muzzle with a megaphone to charitably declare and demonstrate truth.

My travels and interaction with these shepherds of God’s flock have been an enriching experience. In these tumultuous times, I commend these men and their helpmates for their dedication and hard work. I learned much from engaging in honest conversations during the luncheons, with these being the primary takeaways from this investment of my life.

Surveying the Scene

1. America desperately needs a spiritual awakening.

In Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, Louisiana, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky and Florida, pastors were sobered when I told them that George Otis Jr. traveled the globe for 20 years documenting revivals and stated emphatically three essentials for genuine transformation: 1) Realize the gravity of the situation; 2) Understand that time is running out; and 3) Respond to God’s lifeline of opportunity through repentance and passionately seeking God.

I reminded them that from 1720 to 1760 amid horrendous societal decline, God answered His people's prayer for revival in the First Great Awakening that shook American society.

I recounted that from 1800 to 1840, when skepticism and moral decay had spun out of control, God did it again through the Second Great Awakening.

I pondered the supernatural visitation of God in the 1906 Pentecostal outpouring at Azusa Street, launching unprecedented global growth for Christendom and soon after birthing the Assemblies of God (now 100 years young and planting a new church every 39 minutes!).

Later came the Christian Broadcasting Network, Youth With a Mission, *Charisma* magazine, Trinity Broadcasting Network, Teen Challenge, the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, and the Foursquare global network of churches.

I told them of the Jesus People movement in America from 1968 to 1973 when God broke into a time of incredible cultural upheaval, beginning at ground zero in Southern California, and spread the wildfire of revival across our nation. Calvary Chapels, Vineyard churches, Willow Creek Network, contemporary Christian music, plus mass conversions including people like Greg Laurie, Mike Bickle, Dr. Michael Brown, myself and too many to number, attribute our roots to this divine visitation.

With fresh stirrings in our hearts, we longed for more and agreed in prayer. "Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy" (Hab. 3:2).

2. Silence on social issues is dereliction of duty.

Leaders with whom I talked were in total agreement that the scriptural mandate for those called to vocational ministry is to "*prepare* God's people for works of service" (Eph. 4:12); follow the example of Paul who did not hesitate "to proclaim

to you the *whole* will of God" (Acts 20:27); and, obey the Great Commission by "teaching them to obey *everything* I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20) [emphases mine].

Yet even knowing these biblical responsibilities and the fact that remaining silent in the pulpit on key moral issues will bring judgment on both the leader and the people (see Ezek. 33), many pastors admit they are reluctant or afraid to address the critical "hot-button" issues of our day.

Reasons given are numerous:

- Avoid controversy and/or "political" issues
- Avert losing tithing members or adversely affecting fund raising for a building program
- Not upset or alienate younger church attenders who have different perspectives
- Steer clear of offending gay people, couples living together, and those who had an abortion.

The last luncheon that I hosted had 16 pastors present. I inquired how many of them were familiar with the troubling revelations from the two-year research project recently completed by The Barna Group dealing with American pastors and social issues. Not a one lifted their hand, so I highlighted the findings:

- 90 percent of American pastors agree that the Bible speaks to today's social and political issues.
- 10 percent of America's pastors say they will address these moral and political issues.
- 80 percent of these pastors believe what the Bible says on these issues, but they admit they are not going to preach on them.
- In response to what these pastors consider "success" in their churches, the five factors that the vast majority stated: attendance, giving, number of programs, number of staff, and square footage of buildings.

I've been in pastoral ministry for more than 42 years, so I know the pressures faced in local church ministry. My challenge to these leaders was simple: Pastors must refocus and regain courage in the midst of our current civilizational crisis. Criteria for successful ministry must not be the amount of money coming in, the number of people in services, or how large are our facilities! Rather it must be obedience to God and faithfulness to our commission to proclaim biblical truth so our people have a biblical worldview on all of life.

As part of the "Pastors and Patriots Initiative," I am reminding pastors and the people of God that "Today's complacency is tomorrow's captivity." We've lost enough ground already. It's time to arise and heed the words of our elder statesman in the Lord, Billy Graham, who says, "Courage is contagious!" His *Decision* magazine last month emblazoned these words on the cover, "COWARDS—DESTINED FOR THE LAKE OF FIRE."

3. The younger generation desires and deserves a place at the table.

Before I went to Dallas, I connected with a young man named Joe Oden. He's starting a fantastic training school for young evangelists called "Launch School of Ministry."

He's recruited 18 full-time students to be equipped for radical evangelism. He's convinced the hour is urgent, and the "fields are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35).

This Millennial is a son in the Lord and a former student at the Brownsville Revival School of Ministry. His zeal, passion for the lost, and innovative ideas inspire me greatly. I can't stay young, but I can stay youthful in spirit through relational connection with his generation.

All summer I was driven about in a van by a 26-year-old graduate of Liberty Law School, Michael Johnson. This young man, like Joe, kept me current with the heartbeat of young

people today and enabled me to be more effective in my communication. My daughter, who's an outreach director at Nashville's Rocketown youth outreach, helps me likewise on a regular basis—even down to my attire, mannerisms and outmoded forms of speech. “Dad, ‘You bet your bippy’ is dated!” Thanks!

Those of us from the Baby Boom generation must be intentional in reaching out to the upcoming generation if we are to remain relevant. God's design has always been intergenerational ministry. Our sons and daughters in the home and in the church must feel valued and included for there to be lasting impact.

Eight years ago I entrusted our Atlanta church to my young adult son and his wife, and they've done a phenomenal job. Currently I'm serving a senior leader in our home church in his transition to his younger son's assuming the helm. This plan of succession is occurring throughout this nation, because God is bringing young people to the forefront for these momentous times.

Do not believe the lie that young people don't really have a heart for God or that all of them believe in same-sex marriage, abortion, living together and liberal politics. They may approach these issues slightly differently or not be as informed, but when we engage them respectfully in conversation and gently help them understand a biblical worldview on the hot-button issues of our day, they'll usually be more effective in reaching their peers.

“He that has ears to hear, let him hear” just some of the terms and concerns coming from this generation: “Stand up and be counted. Stop human trafficking. Adoption. Rescue the unborn. Social and environmental justice. Racial reconciliation. Be bold. Courageous Christians. Disruptive. Lifestyle evangelism. Cultural engagement. Community. Authenticity. Being missional. World-changers. Out of the comfort zone. Adventure. Simple faith. Reckless abandon. Amazing. Encounter. Transformation. Make a difference.

Celebrate life.” And of course, “Enjoy Jesus!”

There’s a movie in the theaters currently called *Calvary*. It’s about an older Catholic priest in Ireland who is told one day in the confessional that a man is going to kill him in one week because of sexual abuse he suffered at the hands of another priest who is now deceased.

This religious figure, while big, burly and a sensitive listener, is actually a pathetic religious wimp who uses profanity, gets drunk and explodes in rage when crossed. He offers sympathy but doesn’t skillfully or scripturally address the sins of people who need to repent.

Even though he knows the exact day he is going to be killed, he’s spineless in not going to authorities or even defending himself and so is shot to death and left like a beached whale in the sand.

From my summer and previous interaction with young people, I’m convinced they reject the kind of character this priest portrayed. They don’t want an aloof, phony, stained-glass “bunny rabbit” religious figure to whom no one can relate. Their passion is to obliterate the caricature that society has seen of Jesus and present the reality of a dynamic relationship with the living, joyful and authentic Son of God!

Our assignment as adults is to draw them into our circle and together make a difference for the Kingdom of God in our day.

Summer has wound down, but I’m freshly gearing up for a more fruitful season ahead as a result of my travels in the summer of 2014. I certainly learned these three themes: Awakening, courage, generations. I pray you’ve benefited as well.

Larry Tomczak is a best-selling author and cultural commentator with 42 years of trusted ministry experience. His passion is to bring perspective, analysis and insight from a biblical worldview. He loves awakening people to today’s

cultural realities and responses needed for a restored, influential church. Please visit and follow him on Facebook or at @larrytomczak on Twitter.