

Contending for a Move of God in a Culture Overwhelmed by Darkness

Look around your neighborhood. On the surface, nothing seems to have changed much in the past several years. The streets look the same so do the houses. Sure, there's more congestion, but that's what you would expect with growth.

Yet appearances can be deceptive. Remember when you used to take a nice evening walk? In some locales, those days are gone. They ended when the crime you had been reading about for years began to invade your neighborhood. Now, the news of random break-ins in our nation has given way to new, growing threats-Ebola, global economic instability, corruption, injustice, and the next terrorist attack.

In such a climate, you might think that churches would be growing, and some are. Yet many longstanding denominations are losing members. Giving is down. Operational budgets and mission programs are hurting. The same people who smile and shake the pastor's hand at the door see society unraveling before their eyes with no turnaround in sight. All the things that could ignite hope for positive change-the Bible, prayer, Sunday worship-are labeled irrelevant and lifeless by outsiders. They not only question Christianity but hold the church and often pastors in contempt. On the other end of the national landscape, Christians look at a morally adrift, self-centered culture and ask, "How far can all this go?"

You might be surprised to learn that Americans were asking just such a question in 1794. If you think our current moral decay, increasing violence and crumbling ethics are signs of an inevitable, darker, downward spiral, think again. Consider the uneasy twilight of the late eighteenth century. Illegitimate births were rampant. Alcohol, the drug of the day, was destroying families and wrecking futures. Thomas Paine was proclaiming that Christianity was dead-and certainly, the body of faith appeared to be in a coma.

Yet even as church rolls were shrinking, and greed, sensuality

and family breakdown were becoming more widespread, America was about to experience a great spiritual revival.

It would start small, in a handful of broken-down corners of society, with a few people praying. In one year, it would spread like a wildfire through churches, seminaries and families, changing the spiritual landscape of entire cities and towns. People would spend days and nights in prayer and worship. Christians, who believed God had given up on their nation, saw thousands of people admit they were dead inside and find new life through forgiveness, wrapped in a power they had never seen. This phenomenon would unfold for the next 45 years. Although it was the first time America had experienced revival, it would not be the last.

How do we make sense of the growing evidence that our country and our continent could be ripe for a major spiritual awakening? The late evangelist Bob Cryder suggested, "If revival happens in the sanctuary (and we're beginning to see isolated cases), then we're standing in the foyer." Today, an increasing number of Christians, including me, believe we're that close.

Four times in history, God's Spirit of revival has touched our nation and transformed its people:

- The Great Awakening (1730-1743)
- The Second Great Awakening (1800-1830)
- The Third Great Awakening (1857-1859)
- The Fourth Great Awakening (1960-1970)

The elements that led to each movement bear a strange resemblance to events that have taken place in the dawn of a new millennium.

Now, as then, Christian leaders are being brought to their knees through humble, public confession. Around the United States, in a growing number of pockets, prayer is exploding. People of all economic, racial and denominational hues are turning back to God. Clearly, the spiritual hunger of our day offers conspicuous clues to historic parallels that cannot be denied. It is time we looked at:

- The unique, yet strangely similar, qualities of America's major revivals that parallel what's currently happening in individual lives, churches, prayer groups

and homes.

- The amazing consistency in the blessings that revival produced in Old Testament times—the same blessings our nation so desperately needs today.
- The seven indicators that reveal, not so much how close or far away we may be from experiencing revival, but how God is now calling people to Himself.

Let's look more closely at each of these points. Let's resist the temptation to forecast when or if revival will happen in our country. Instead, let's spend a moment with history. If our spiritual eyes are open, we may begin to see how Jesus-Now is impacting our land. And as we begin to look, let's pray a prayer, patterned after some wise men from the tribe of Issachar: "Oh, God, make us men and women who understand the times so that we may know what we ought to do" (see 1 Chron. 12:32).

Excerpt from the new book *Jesus Now Awakening—God is Up to Something Big* by **Tom Phillips**. Purchase the book today. Use Keycode: *RP-PRAY*

