

How Can We Be So Numb?

While in prayer earlier this week, I was reminded of a quote by Edward Payson (1787-1823), known as “Praying Payson of Portland.” He said, “I do not believe that my desires for revival were ever half so strong as they ought to be; nor do I see how a minister can help being in a ‘constant fever’ ... where His Master is dishonored and souls are destroyed in so many ways.”

Immediately, I was cut to the heart by his words. What would Payson say to us today?

If he expressed these sentiments in the early 1800s, grieved and burdened over the spiritual complacency of his generation, how would he feel in 2019?

How much more is our Master being dishonored today? How much more are souls being destroyed “in so many ways”? How much more should ministers be in a “constant fever” over the moral and spiritual state of our nation, beginning with the state of the church?

In his classic song “Asleep in the Light,” Keith Green raised this plaintive cry:

Do you see? Do you see?/ All the people sinking down? /Don't you care? Don't you care?/ Are you gonna let them drown?/ How can you be so numb?!/ Not to care if they come/You close your eyes/ And pretend the job's done.

Yes, how can we be so numb?

I recently met with pastors and leaders in New York, discussing how we could come together and mobilize the church of the region for pro-life action.

At the end of the meeting, I was introduced to the host

pastor's son, now a junior in high school. This young man told me that the teacher in one of his classes surveyed the students, asking how many were pro-choice and how many were pro-life. (He said the survey was conducted in a non-hostile way.)

Almost unbelievably, *the pastor's son was the only one who raised his hand as pro-life.*

This is a real crisis.

How can we not be burning on the inside? How can we not be driven to our knees in prayer? How can our hearts not be broken? To repeat Keith Green's question: How can we be so numb?

According to a 2015 article on the Exodus Cry website, "In 1991 there were fewer than 90 different pornographic magazines published in America. By 1997 there were about 900 pornographic sites on the internet. In 2011, the internet filtering software Cyber Sitter blocked 2.5 million pornographic websites. By now [meaning, 2015] that number has increased exponentially."

And that was 2015! What are the numbers today?

More disturbingly, the average age at which children now get exposed to pornography may be as low as 8.

How can this not shake us to the core?

I could also speak of the plague of human trafficking.

Or the deadly rise in opiate addiction.

Or the percentage of young people leaving the church.

Or the mockery of our faith in the schools and in Hollywood.

Or the passing of increasingly radical, pro-abortion laws.

But that is all the backdrop.

The greater concern is the state of the church.

In the midst of an urgent moral and spiritual crisis, many of us (including all too many leaders) are complacent and unconcerned.

We would rather be entertained than exhorted, coddled than confronted.

Sports is more important to us than souls, and possessions more important purity.

How many of us really carry the heart of God? How many really feel His pain? How many really want to make a difference for Him in this world, regardless of cost or consequence? How many of us can say that the Great Commission is our greatest priority or that the burden for revival consumes us?

Could it be that our constant exposure to graphic violence has dulled our senses? That the endless parade of online sensual images has desensitized us? That the bombardment of 24/7 news has deadened us? And could it be that our contemporary, feel-good, what's-in-it-for-me gospel has only deepened our slumber?

If the Lord does not return for some years, I believe future generations of Christians will not be so shocked when they look at the moral collapse of the society in our time. Instead, as they survey the books we were reading and the sermons we were hearing and the movies we were watching, they will ask, "What were they thinking? How could these multiplied tens of millions of Christians be so complacent while America unraveled?"

We live in a day in which, in a figure of speech, America is burning.

We should be burning too.

May God awaken His people! May He set our hearts ablaze. May He share His pain with us.