

Leaders in Crisis

The perils of this present age demand of us a decisive move to intercession and action.

It is rare that I even make reference to my personal journal, and even more so that I've ever had occasion to put a selection from it in print. But that's what I want to invite you to share with me.

Only days ago I experienced an inescapable moment—one of those when you know you are being awakened by the Lord—the only One who can “drag you out of bed at an unearthly hour” and receive no protest.

There is always the possibility that someone will misunderstand, possibly feeling I'm attempting to impress them with my “intense spirituality.” Of course, that's nonsense, but one's hesitation is real ... Nonetheless, here I go.

It was 3:37 a.m. Nothing naturally explainable prompted my waking. I opened my eyes, the impression was clear: “Get up, and come before Me.”

There have been times such an impression has been attended by a clear prayer directive, but not this time, and uncertain of further direction I simply went to my desk and waited in God's presence. Within minutes, an inner sense of urgency—something of feeling “upset”—began to stir my soul, and two phrases became engraved on my soul.

So, with that introduction, permit me to simply open my journal before you:

FRIDAY, MAY 14, 2004, 4:46 A.M.

Though feeling a restful confidence in the goodness and personally sustaining grace of God, this morning my soul is stirring me. As multiple pathways of thought come and go, each

momentarily signals the significance of an issue, and with it I am prompted by an inner heaviness over its unique challenge.

Foremost is the gripping sense: "What you do makes more difference in these outcomes than you think!" So, having risen to seek to distill what it is You are saying, O Lord, I register these things for my remembrance, active leadership and prayerful action.

I believe I am being agitated by the Spirit of God to hear a call—a call to an awareness that right now, on earth— because it is so in the heavenlies—there is a "confluence of conflicts" and a "convergence of crises." The conflicts are already engaged; the crises are the crossroads at which we stand right now.

None of the issues are outside the sphere of my stewardship to spiritually attend to; though being global in many cases, they resolve to being personal in terms of mine and any other believer's role to accept as a mission we are each charged to oversee.

1 Timothy 2:1-3 closes the door on any escape route from this responsibility: what I do—what spiritual leaders and their flocks do—will decide the destinies being resolved in this hour.

These are the issues most pronounced as I look at the present—this "confluence of conflicts" and this "convergence of crises."

GLOBAL TERRORISM AND MILITANT ISLAM

The gloves are off, and it seems to me that the last battle may be being engaged now—a battle that has infinitely more to do with spiritual evil than political power. The spirit of antichrist is unmasked—revealing itself either in the absolute and satanic brutality, hatred for life and self-exalting arrogance, or in militant Islam's announced agenda of

overthrowing everything Jewish or Christian. (Might this be the dual “witness” ultimately to be personified in the final murder of “the two witnesses” of the last days [see Rev. 11:1-14]?)

JERUSALEM’S PEACE

Distinct from the general realities of the above, a more specific and relentless assault has been and is being pressed against Israel’s reputation internationally. The way the world press reports day-to-day events of the strife over “His land”—never providing significant, objective historical perspective—is feeding an attitude slowly simmering toward a boiling point of global anti-Semitism.

The assignment to pray for “Jerusalem’s peace” has never been more upon us who believe. The call to stand by Israel (see Ps. 122). Passionate intercession by every believer is a biblical charge that calls us beyond political assessments. I’m called to tirelessly pray in faith for a supernaturally begotten “peace” for all that Jerusalem represents.

It’s a principal of spiritual wisdom—and it’s one that has never been harder to extend to many I lead because their ears are dulled and their hearts have been hardened by “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2, KJV).

IRAQ AND AMERICA’S 2004 ELECTION

Another deep point of “awakening” is related to the dividedness of God’s people over our own nation’s greatest issues: Iraq and the election, the readiness of so many in America to forget or deny what true legitimacy did exist for the war with Iraq, the pain of suffering continuing casualties, the difficulties in securing a stable democratic government, the absence of broad evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

All these weave a network of emotional resistance to even

bothering with prayer for that situation. What pastor even wants to bring it up? Unless a local family loses a son or daughter, prayer's pursuit is crippled by "dividedness" (lack of unity) and it all has put my country's future into a maelstrom of debate, discontent and dissension.

Apart from a national "clearing of the mind," the population's drift of likely action is leaning toward our being dominated in policy or at the polls by convenience-oriented citizenship, relativistic philosophy and a climate of national life governed by a lack of greatness.

We are being drained of vision for our servant-place as a nation in the world and co-opted by our self-centeredness and an absence of motivation by nobility of spirit rather than exigencies of the flesh. Whatever its sociopolitical impact, it is another thing I must move those I lead to confront and overcome, in order that we together be gripped by a kind of intercession that will wrestle in the heavenlies until dark powers are overthrown in Iraq and the United States.

LOS ANGELES AND CALIFORNIA

The simple facts alone, my city's being torn on the inside by gang violence and murder, polluted by homosexuality and pornography on the dark side, and suffocated with pride, self-centered snobbishness and sensuality on the "show" side, is enough to self-destruct us.

Across the whole of this state, the same is true in various degrees wherever the church exists. It is the only "salt" that can neutralize the spiritual toxicity of the climate of our culture.

Ironically, the church in my state(California)—so accustomed to creature comforts in our homes and church facilities, so enriched with an endless variety of "Christian resources" (so that every whim for books, music, entertainment or study is at our fingertips and within reach of our wallets)—is now

teetering on the edge of economic disaster.

Further, Los Angeles and California as a whole are known to be unusually vulnerable as the epicenter of either a terrorist or seismic disaster. In the face of this, I must lead God's people to prayer, together facing the reality: "Except the Lord keep the city (state, nation) the watchman waits in vain. In short, there is no security—social, economic or preemptively strategic—apart from a praying church.

BODY OF CHRIST IN AMERICA

In Your larger body, confusion of purpose and pursuits increase as the definition of the church is distorted by an absence of discernment among shepherds—distracted by:

The pursuit of methodologies becoming more event-and success-driven than discipleship-and prayer-oriented; seeking techniques rather than seeking Your face; and the neglect of applying an ethical and moral plumb line to our own souls, as we watch the slow unraveling of the spiritual fabric of the church—avoiding legalism we have succumbed to a fallacious definition of grace.

Lord, I am drawn to acknowledge my prayer role as Your people—both those in Christ and outside His saving life—stand at a confluence of conflicts and convergence of crises.

Now, dear Jesus, I recognize my own need of repentance. Help me, O Lord God to somehow help others away from the divisiveness that cripples the leaders of Your church. Lead me as I seek to follow You in humble confession and cleansing from my own apathy.

Let a breakthrough of holiness among many stem the erosion of spiritual power so cripplingly present among us by reason of casual Christianity and our preoccupation with comfort and entertainment, and our slowness to surrender to the Holy Spirit's call to renewed discipline and servanthood.

... AND BACK FROM MY JOURNAL

My point in risking being misunderstood as either pretentious or self-righteous is that I am persuaded we are at as critical a place as when Patrick Henry committed to “liberty or death.” But the issue now is “deliverance or demise.”

So, I write, believing that my words might come as a confirmation to other leaders who feel the present moment is indeed a convergence of crises. And sensing it, be emboldened to know again, “The power of ‘one’ is still the decisive factor at history’s crossroads.”

Esther was awakened to a fast that saved a nation. Mary was called to open to a redemptive possibility that changed the world. As pastors and leaders, join me: Let’s wake up and answer the call together. *

Jack W. Hayford, Litt.D., is the founding pastor of The Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California, and chancellor of The King’s College and Seminary.