

The Leonard Ravenhill Quote That Smacked Me Between The Eyes

We sold everything (our cars, furniture and home) in 2016 and moved our family of five into a motor home to travel the entire United States in 2017 on a tour we called the Trail Of Fire. This week, we arrived back where we started. We covered 50,000 miles, visited 47 states and connected with 80 amazing ministries.

This past month, the question I have been asked the most is "What is your biggest takeaway?"

Curious?

One thing this year has done for us is it has given us a national perspective. We didn't just pass through a city or state, we lived there. We didn't just minister in the church. We walked their streets, bought groceries in their supermarkets, sat in their homes and around their tables. We spent time getting to know them and listening to their stories. Our lives have been greatly enriched because so many were willing to share their own lives with us.

It's been a blessing! We set out in January of 2017 dreaming about the impact we could make on the nation; however, we never considered the impact the nation would make on us. We have truly been changed by this year for the better!

Ultimately, we found a great remnant across the land that also carries the same burden for national awakening. These churches, ministries, revival hubs and houses of prayer are strategically positioned across America. They are a faithful battalion of believers that have made seeking a greater awakening for their city a priority.

This year has greatly encouraged me about the possibilities for national awakening. I believe that true nationwide revival is not just a distant dream, but an imminent reality if we will pay the price. I assure you that though the full breakthrough we've prayed for may tarry, we ourselves are not tarrying in vain!

So, what was my biggest takeaway from 2017?

Just as I am encouraged at all we saw and experienced, I also see a tremendous need. I believe the church, as a whole, has lost its eternal perspective. So much of what occupies our present time is making little eternal impact. This must change if we have any hope of true revival.

This week I came across the following in a book called *In Light of Eternity*. It is the biography of the late great revivalist, Leonard Ravenhill. At the end of the book the biographer writes the following account. He asked Ravenhill in the last year of his life if he had any regrets. This was his response:

"If I had spent more time alone with God rather than preaching and planning how I was going to change the world, I would be a very different man."

Stop and read that again! "If I had spent more time alone with God rather than preaching and planning how I was going to change the world, I would be a very different man." I pray it hits you like it did me!

Ravenhill was a man with a colossal prayer life. He would often spend entire days locked away in his study in prayer. I've heard unbelievable stories about the prayer meetings he hosted. The man was a giant in prayer, yet here he was, at the end of his mortal life, with eternity in view and his response was, if only I had prayed more and preached and planned less.

If such a man could say this, how much more should we!

That quote only reinforced what I had been feeling over the past few months—that so much of what the church world is doing right now is missing eternal intentionality. Let's be honest, we could all say, "If we spent more time alone with God this year, rather than—(preparing that sermon series, watching television, golfing, on Facebook), I would be a different person right now."

Interestingly, here we are back where we started, and I find myself confronted with a truth I wrote about one year ago in my book, *Trail of Fire*. Fifty thousand miles traveled, only to arrive right where we began. I am convinced the Lord gave us this assignment to give us His perspective on a serious need within the American church. This is the key to unlocking national awakening—we must bring eternity into view.

I said above that much of what the church occupies its time with carries very little eternal significance. Most of what we call "ministry" is really day-to-day maintenance. Granted, this daily maintenance is necessary, and when done properly, it allows us to actually do ministry. However, let's not confuse the two as being the same thing.

This is true for individuals and churches. Whether it is working a 9-5 just to make one more paycheck so you can make one more payment or if it's one more Sunday so we have one more offering just to keep the wheels spinning one more week, the effects are temporal, not eternal.

I think back to all the meetings, the plans, the series, the programs, the budgets, the tasks that I let dominate my time and realize much of it could have been eliminated or done more efficiently, allowing more time to pray and truly love others. At one time, I called all of it ministry and was proud of my busy ministry life. Looking back through the lens of eternity, I see so much of that was arrogance. It is only the things that impact eternity that can truly be called ministry.

This year, I stood by a man and watched as he was born again. What a moment to witness and share with him. I've seen this so many times this year. There is nothing like seeing eternal life come into what was once a broken soul. That moment changed eternity, not just for him, but for his family as well. I think about the orphans in Uganda we were able to help through our giving. Yes, it was a simple thing that simply met a temporary need. However, it also enabled a local church to show the love of Christ to them as well. That moment impacted eternity. This was ministry! We should have, could have done more!

The key to true eternal impact is found in learning to minimize the maintenance so we can maximize the ministry. This shift is made simple by adopting an eternal perspective.

Jonathan Edwards often prayed, "Oh God, stamp eternity upon my eyeballs." He endeavored to live each day with eternity firmly fixed in view. The result was America's First Great Awakening. Ravenhill wrote that were we to be so bold to pray such a prayer, we would likely change everything we do.

Now, there's a thought. Ravenhill went on further to say, "Five minutes inside eternity and we will wish that we had sacrificed more, wept more, grieved more, loved and prayed more, and given more." Oh, my friend, if that statement is true, then a great deal must change. If we truly desire to see more in the coming year then we need to start living with eternal intentionality today.

So what do we do? Let's start here. Take a moment to evaluate 2017 in light of eternity. What things have you done that will make a difference 10 years, 100 years or even 1,000 years from now? Take a look at your checking account. How much money went into temporary things and how much went into things that will last? How much more could have been moved toward eternal purposes? Look at your calendar. How much time was wasted in frivolous activities and how much was sown into eternity?

I admit, this is a sobering exercise, but it is necessary. Too often, we treat time as if it is something that can be wasted. However, eternity leaves no time waste. Each second is precious and must be invested wisely.

Here are three eternal priority shifts we must make this year:

1). Prioritize the Secret Place. Rather than letting that place of prayer and devotion be the last place you run to, let it be the first place. We must tackle each day and every problem from the same starting point. There is no getting around this. Prayer must be paramount.

2.). Prioritize the Word. God's Word is eternal, powerful and life-changing, but it does you no good as long as the words sit unread on the shelf. The American church is becoming increasingly biblically illiterate. If you're a pastor, I encourage you to minimize the trivial sermon series that offer a few verses and take your congregation into actual study of biblical texts. Let's preach the Word and let the Word transform them. Don't just give your people verses, give them the Word. For the rest of us, let me encourage you to adopt a daily reading plan. Get the Word in you!

3.). Prioritize Eternity in your Present. Every day is pregnant with eternal possibilities. Most go unnoticed and unrealized. Make it a daily goal to look for one eternal moment in each day. You'll be surprised how many there are.

Eternal intentionality is the key to making 2018 more significant. Eternal intentionally is the key to getting the church on track toward awakening. Eternal intentionality is the key we've been missing. It's time we find it.