

Culture Shift Brings Huge Opportunities For Christ Followers

Recently I had the strangest experience while driving my parents to their 56th anniversary dinner. In full-time ministry since 1962, my mom's question from the backseat created a flashback to when the roles were reversed and I asked, "What's happening in our world? What's going on?"

For the most part, those who called themselves Christians believed in the entire Bethlehem narrative, a virgin birth, the sinless life of Jesus and His literal resurrection, ascension and return. But having attended three different seminaries, I can tell you that even the body of Christ now struggles to agree with one another on these foundational truths.

In the same way, a major shift has occurred in our culture. There is a shift of confidence, courage and humility taking place in the people of God. It's a sense of not being shaken and a growing boldness to love like Jesus and trust in God's sovereign plan.

We are being reminded that God has always had a contrasting spiritual community.

The contrasting power of God's Spirit at work in the world cannot be tempered by a desire to look less extreme.

This might help you like it helped my mom. Think about what it is that makes followers of Jesus stand out. What is it about your worldview that is so different?

Here are just a few that stand out:

Your perception of God and His personal love and broken heart

for arrogant humanity is vastly different (in other words, the words of Jesus who forgave the adulterous woman and called the audience to examine their own lives in light of His forgiveness and command to sin no more).

Your belief that God is continually sending messages to His people through the events around them for renewal, identity and direction in times like these.

Your deep belief that Jesus is just as relevant today as ever.

Remember when Moses heard the people's questions in Numbers 20:5, when they said: "Why have you brought us up from Egypt, to bring us into this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates. Nor is there any water to drink."

What Moses and Aaron did is leave the presence of the people and head into the tent of meeting to get into the presence of God. It says plainly that they fell on their faces and the glory of the Lord appeared.

No matter where you are on the spectrum of faith, you are being led into times of trouble and difficulty and discomfort. I believe the mindsets of American Christians are changing in that they no longer see their leaders as responsible to lead them into comfortable places.

Comfort, as we could see in the story of Moses, always led to arrogance and entitlement. But just like Moses learned in the wilderness, God uses the environment around His people to expose false beliefs and wrong assumptions.

The Israelites in the story were expecting things to feel differently than they did. But difficulty always reveals what or whom you are depending upon. Like with Moses, sometimes the longest and most lonely walk is the one where you leave the presence of people and head toward the presence of God. Collectively, the U.S. church is now being forced out of the

presence of mainstream America and I believe headed back to fall on their faces in the presence of a loving and intentional God. This is the time to get your heart renewed. Reconnect with the God of the Bible in a personal way.

There's no greater mistake that you can make than to think you're fully awake in this world and be dead to God.

The balconies of heaven are now filling up with the last few generations of God's servants as one after another age out of this life and take their seats around the throne. It seems that, like God did in Exodus 20, He is using the circumstances as a way to posture the community of faith toward an absolute dependence upon Him.

What's happening right now is that the people of God are being pulled into a deepening intimacy with the love of God that will not only transform our families but also model the unconditional love and mercy God has extended toward us all.

God doesn't belong in the back seat.

Mike Rakes serves as lead pastor of Winston-Salem First in North Carolina with his wife, Darla. His most recent book, *Slings and Stones*, teaches how to deal with negative thoughts and to instead be filled with God's courage.