

Greg Laurie: Will COVID-19 Lead to the Next Great Awakening in America?

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) sweeps across our country, confining us to another month at home, some have asked me, “Are we on the verge of a spiritual awakening?”

There are some hopeful signs.

In many ways, we now are doing the very things we should have been doing all along: Spending time with our families, sharing meals, talking to our neighbors, helping one another and taking long walks outside (while maintaining social distancing, of course).

And there are other hopeful trends. For example, some distilleries are stepping in and producing hand sanitizer instead of booze. It reminds me of the verse that says, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares” (Isa. 2:4). But instead it appears we are turning our scotch into sanitizer and our piña coladas into Purell!

I also have heard good news on several fronts: Less abortions are being performed, and crime rates in some parts of the country have plummeted since the stay-at-home orders were issued.

These are all good things, but then there is the unthinkable tragedy of people dying every day from COVID-19. It is this very thing, the fear of death, the acknowledgement of the fragility of life, that has been a wake-up call for many.

In some ways the COVID-19 pandemic has forced people to consider the afterlife and their relationship with God by knocking down all our false gods.

For people who worshipped sports, the stadiums are closed and no games are being played.

For others who idolized musicians, the civic centers are closed and the concerts are canceled.

For those who had such fawning admiration for actors, the theaters are shuttered and no new films are coming.

For even others who bowed at the altar of money, the stock market is generally down and the economy is stalled.

If you do go out, you can see the fear, stress and worry on people's faces. People need hope. They are searching for a light at the end of the tunnel, and are finding that their usual heroes cannot get them out of this mess.

Hollywood can't save us. There is no blockbuster film or actor that will get us out of this.

Technology can't save us either. Our smartphones and computer screens just feed us a barrage of information that heightens our stress and anxiety.

Our lawmakers in Washington can't save us from COVID-19. They will hopefully continue to work together and do what they can, but the outcome is outside of their control.

I think we finally are beginning to realize we need God.

I recently came across an article for an academic journal that studied the role of religion and faith in the COVID-19 pandemic. The article found that Google searches about prayer skyrocketed when the coronavirus went global, and in fact, the search intensity doubled for every 80,000 new confirmed COVID-19 cases.

A recent Pew Research survey of American adults confirmed this trend, with 55% of adults surveyed indicating that they had "prayed for an end to the spread of coronavirus." In another

poll, nearly half of respondents said the pandemic was a “wake-up call” from God.

We have noticed this trend of people searching for answers and hope at our church in Southern California. For the past 45 years I have pastored Harvest Christian Fellowship. We began as a small Bible study of young people and grew to around 12,000 people attending every week at our campuses in California and Hawaii.

One day we were meeting, and the next day we had to literally lock our doors and turn people away.

Some were angry with us, saying, “You can’t lock the doors of the church!” But we did so out of concern for people spreading COVID-19 through close contact. (Christians love to shake hands and exchange hugs!)

A word to some churches who are still holding public services: Please stop.

You are endangering your people and the rest of us. You may think that what you are doing is an act of great faith, but in fact it is an act of selfishness. You are not “trusting the Lord,” but rather testing Him, and He does not want us to do that (Matt. 4:7).

Although the doors of the church building are closed for the foreseeable future, the door of opportunity for the church has been flung wide open.

For example, we already had an online version of our church service that was beginning to grow. Before the COVID-19 crisis, around 8,000 people viewed it each week.

The first week we went exclusively online, that number skyrocketed to 250,000.

The following week 350,000 tuned in, and the one after 634,000.

Last Sunday we had 1.3 million people watching our livestream!

But here is the most significant indication we may be on the verge of a spiritual awakening: In those past four weeks, we have seen over 21,000 people indicate their desire to put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. This is unprecedented. We've only seen that kind of response through our crusades, which take months of planning and considerable expense.

I came to believe in Jesus Christ as a confused teenager at the age of 17 during the last great American revival known as the "Jesus Revolution" or simply the "Jesus Movement." That's what it was: Jesus moving in the hearts of a generation.

Is He doing it again?

Let's pray so, because that is the only real and lasting hope for America. We will get through this crisis. We just don't know how long it will take. But we know this: We are not alone. Hope has a name, and it's Jesus Christ, who loves each and every one of us and longs for a relationship with us.

So, hold on to hope. Hold on to Him. {eoa}

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