

Will the Next BIG Revival Occur Outside the Church?

God is moving outside the walls of the church, but have we become so “religious” that we’ve failed to notice? 

One of the biggest dangers Christians face is thinking inside the proverbial religious box. When we talk about “a great move of God” or “revival” we often contextualize it inside a church building.

Even when we take it “to the streets” it still looks a lot like it does inside the church walls. We speak to people using the same language and pray for them just like we do in church, except that the setting has changed.

If people are not interested in experiencing it inside the church, then why would they want to experience it outside the church? Trying to invoke a move of God this way does not recognize how God is already moving in people’s lives apart from traditional church activities.

The New Testament church was different. They had an advantage. The fact that they had no buildings or traditions to protect provided them with a wide-open field of thinking. They were able to see the world in a whole new light, one that exposed the closed-mindedness of the Jewish ideas regarding the work of God among the gentile people.

Like those first-century Jewish leaders, Christians today can become extremely closed-minded about God’s activity outside our circles. After a span of 2,000 years, we seem to believe that God thinks like us, acts like us, votes like us, talks like us and enjoys hanging with us.

This was especially true with Paul until Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus. That one conversation with Jesus

obliterated every preconceived idea and paradigm Paul ever had. Nothing was the same for him after that. He had to reconstruct his entire religious, social, cultural and political worldviews.

Mental deconstruction is usually harder than construction. This is why it was about 14 years between Paul's conversion and the time he and Barnabas were sent out in Acts 13. He needed time to rethink everything.

After completing his first missionary journey—one that saw more gentiles coming to Christ than Jews—Paul chose Silas and went out again (see Acts 16). With some experience under his belt, Paul and his entourage traversed the length of Asia Minor, crossed over to Macedonia and started the Grecian campaign.

At Mars Hill, Paul presented a remarkable and brilliant perspective on the move of God outside the walls of the church. What he said would stun anyone who believes that God moves only in certain ways, with certain people (like us) and in certain places.

Paul said that God had been revealing Himself in various ways with various cultures from the beginning; that God loves all human beings and is active in bringing them into a relationship with Him through various means (see Acts 17:22-31).

While walking the streets of Athens, Paul saw many idols that the Greeks worshipped. Among them was a statue dedicated to "The Unknown God." The Athenians knew there was a God out there who couldn't be named yet deserved to be worshipped. Regarding this God and their worship, Paul said, "Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23).

Paul affirms that the Athenians had been ignorantly worshipping the God of the Jews—Yahweh. They simply had not

known His name and did not have the full revelation of His ways and desires for mankind.

It didn't mean they were in covenant with God. It didn't mean they were born again. But it did testify to the fact that God was working in their hearts, having placed in them a desire to know Him.

Paul discerned God's work in that culture and aligned his message with the move of God. He spoke to the Athenians in relevant ways.

Like Paul, we must have an open mind and look outside our religious box to see where God is going.

What I see God doing in the culture is exciting. More and more people are looking for what's real. Slick productions are being replaced by reality TV. People value participation. They would rather watch a YouTube video than TV.

People want to connect with each other. The global community is getting smaller as technology drives everything from the economy to the uprisings of the so-called Arab Spring.

Do you see God in all this?

Christians today can become closed-minded about God's activity outside our circles.

Nicki Pfeifer is co-founder with her husband, Mark, of Open Door Ministries in Chillicothe, Ohio (), where they serve as senior pastors. They are also the founders of Mark and Nicki Pfeifer Ministries ().