

3 Reasons I Have Hope for a Great Awakening Among America's Youth

Two words: The Ramp.

Just recently, I had the privilege to spend a few days at this youth/young adult conference center in Hamilton, Alabama. The leadership is intently focused on equipping the next generation to unlock their purpose and destiny in God's Presence. That's it.

A Backwards Way of Youth Ministry

No fancy gimmicks. No aspirations to be cool, hip or hyper relevant. No showmanship; just a genuine desire to experience the powerful Presence of Jesus and bring others into that rich place of purpose.

Some might think that the Ramp does youth ministry backwards. It goes against all the books, the strategies and the popular methods. This is what makes it such a unique place.

Senior leader and founder, Karen Wheaton, pioneered this youth center back the late 1990's. Sensing an urgency from God, she returned to her hometown of Hamilton, Alabama, and started an outreach ministry for the youth of the city. Her heart was burdened by the apathy she witnessed in the young people.

The Priority of God's Presence

In the process of launching the Ramp, Karen wrestled with thoughts of inadequacy for the task. After all, she was a Christian singer and recording artist. That was her world. She was not in the youth ministry circuit and felt out of touch with the needs of a generation. With all of these factors in mind, she considered herself the most unlikely candidate to

pioneer such a mission. After all, she did not see herself as “cool, hip” youth leader material.

What she knew was the way into God’s Presence. That is what sets the Ramp apart and what makes it such a special place. Everything at the Ramp revolves around encountering Presence of God. By building a culture around this vision, their community is witnessing incredible miracles and spiritual transformation in the lives of young people on a continuous basis. This is because their team has intentionally created a place where the Holy Spirit is able to move without restraint, and the young people are free to encounter God.

An Epicenter of Revival

The Ramp is simply a community of people—leaders, ministry students, local church members, and visiting youth alike—who are “all in it together.” In short, they want to experience the fullness of God and release it into the Earth. Since 1998, I would consider the Ramp as an epicenter for revival in our country. They have been experienced a sustained outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Kids don’t just come for a good weekend retreat; they come in one way and leave changed. They come in lukewarm and leave set ablaze. They come in un-churched or nominal Christians, and they leave as revivalists.

I have travelled across the United States visiting some of the great centers of revival. What is one thing they all have in common? Hunger.

The more I visit places where the Holy Spirit is being poured out, the more I become convinced that revival is not some sovereign, mystical thing that God reserves for one city, but denies another city. This does not fit in God’s personality and nature as One who is no respecter of persons (see Acts 10:34, KJV). In other words, our God is not one who shows favoritism toward one person, or one city, over the next.

Some of us—myself included—have looked with longing at a

specific city, church or place where God is moving powerfully and deeply wish that God would sovereignly choose our city to be a center for outpouring. The truth is revival is simply a high concentration of collective hunger, all in one place, creating a draw upon heaven. Remember the words of Jesus: "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied" (Luke 6:21, ESV). God has long delighted in filling the hungry with good things! (see Ps. 107:9).

Here is why I have such a stirring hope that great spiritual awakening is coming to the youth of America:

1. **Revival is not a mystery.** I heard it said (by either Charles Finney or John Wesley) that revival is no more a miracle than a seed that produces a crop of wheat. This begs the question, what causes revival? Again, the Bible tells us that God does not show partiality or favoritism. Revival is not some mysterious sovereign act of God where His presence and power fall upon one city because He likes it more than another one. Hamilton, Alabama is no greater than your city. I'm sure you're still asking something like "Why is God moving in Hamilton? Redding, California? Kansas City, Missouri? Africa? China? Australia? Why is He moving there and not in my city?" You want to know the key to revival and spiritual awakening? Hunger. Revival comes where there is a high concentration of spiritual hunger in one area. Hamilton, Alabama is filled with people who are hungry for Jesus, and this is why you can count on having a God encounter upon visiting the Ramp. It's not that God favors the Ramp above any other place; it's because the Ramp community favors God's presence above any other desire or pursuit. I have hope for awakening in the youth of America as they begin to discover that revival is not all up to God; in many ways, it's up to us. How hungry are we? And how convinced are we that our God satisfies the hungry with good things?

2. **I've seen awakening in seed form.** I have hope for a Great Awakening in our nation spearheaded by the youth, because I have seen awakening in seed form in Hamilton, Alabama. What I experienced at the Ramp among 150 or so ministry students profoundly impacted me. Whether I was praying alongside them in the 8:00 a.m. prayer meetings or whether I was teaching them about spiritual hunger, revival and the advancing Kingdom of God, I saw in their eyes a consuming fire for the Lover of their Souls. You have to understand that Hamilton, Alabama is not Los Angeles. It's not New York, Miami, Chicago or any other place like that. It's really small-town America. It's set in the backwoods of the country. There are no shopping malls. There are no amusement parks. There's not a bunch of leisure activities or popular hot spots. These students all made a sacrifice to come to the Ramp. In essence, they were saying, "We choose God over other available options." The generation that says "Yes" to God in the midst of options is a force to be reckoned with. If the future of the church is currently being trained in places like the Ramp, we are well on our way to nation-shaking revival.
3. **Generations are connecting, and this alignment is releasing breakthrough.** Senior leader Karen Wheaton is intentional about connecting the next generation with true mothers and fathers of the faith. Their community walks out Psalm 145:3, in which David expresses: "One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts." Generational alignment happens when one generation (the older) makes a focused investment into the next generation (the younger). It's not tolerance ("we'll tolerate those young people"). It's not catering to the latest popular trends ("let's give the youth what we think they want.") The Ramp has created a culture in which the older generation imparts wisdom, truth, courage, strength and testimony into the

younger generation. This is vital for revival. Often, great spiritual awakenings were sparked as someone heard about what God had done in the past, and they became discontented with God's movement being reduced to a historical memory rather than a present reality. As a result, they begin to press in to experience what the former generation walked in. I love the fact that the Ramp brings in leaders like German evangelist, Reinhard Bonnke. Just reading his name, you might conclude with me that Bonnke is not the "latest, greatest" craze in youth ministry right now. But you know what? This man's eyes have seen tens of millions come to Jesus Christ in the plains of Africa. Now in his 70's, he has become ignited by a driving passion to see America transformed by the Good News of Jesus. Signs, wonders and miracles follow his preaching of the gospel. Even the dead have been raised in Bonnke's meetings. And this is the kind of leader that the next generation is being mentored by at the Ramp. Generations are aligning. Fathers and mothers are sharing what they have seen God do, and those testimonies release fresh faith in a new generation.

These are just three reasons I have hope for a Great Awakening in the youth of our nation. No, the Ramp is not the only place in our nation that is experiencing a powerful move of God's Spirit. But if you need a fresh dose of hope that the Lord is awakening the youth of our nation, I encourage you to check out this wonderful ministry.

So goes the next generation, so goes our future. What I'm seeing in the next generation is giving me hope for a future of Spirit-filled gospel preachers who will see masses come to Christ, the burned out set on fire again, and the miracle-working power of Jesus return to the church en masse.

For more information about the Ramp, visit .

Larry Sparks is author of the upcoming *Breakthrough Faith: Living a Life Where Anything is Possible*. He is a conference speaker, popular blogger, columnist, and host of the weekly radio program, *Voice of Destiny*. Featured in *Charisma* magazine and on CBN's *Spiritual Gifts Webcast*, he is also founder of *Equip Culture*—a ministry that equips believers with the tools and resources to live victoriously through the power of God.