

The Fifth Great Awakening and the Future of America

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There is a Fifth Great Awakening occurring in our world today. According to David Barrett, author of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 82,000 people become Christians every day. More are coming to Christ than at any time in Christian history. Today, 32,000 will become followers of Jesus in Africa, 25,000 in Asia, and 17,000 in Latin America.¹

More Muslims are becoming Christians than at any time in the history of Islam. Thousands of Muslims are seeing visions and dreams of Jesus and coming to faith in him as their Lord.²

Saudi Arabian Muslim leader Sheikh Ahmad al-Qatanni recently reported on al-Jazeera television that every day, "16,000 Muslims convert to Christianity." He claimed that Islam was losing six million a year to Christian faith.³ While he could be inflating his numbers to incite Islamic reaction against Christianity, it is clear that a significant Christian movement is occurring in the Muslim world.⁴

However, of the 82,000 coming to Christ every day around the world, only 6,000 are in Europe and North America, combined. While much of the world is experiencing an explosion in Christian growth, we are living in a time of unprecedented skepticism in the Western world with regard to historic Christianity.

According to the latest American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), the number of Americans who describe themselves as "Christian" has dropped from 86% to 76% since 1990. At the same time, the number of those who say they have "no religion" has nearly doubled to more than 15%. The number of those who call themselves "atheist" or "agnostic" has quadrupled, and is now almost twice the number of Episcopalians in our country.⁵

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life recently released their "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey." Among its findings:

¹ <http://www.gcts.edu/ockenga/globalchristianity/resources.php>

² <http://www.truthnet.org/dreamsandvisions>;

<http://www.jesusvisions.org/index.shtml>

³ http://www.reformationsa.org/articles/Missions_In_Africa.htm

⁴ See "They Want Jesus Instead!: Why Muslims Convert," by Chuck Colson

(<http://townhall.com/Common/PrintPage.aspx?g=9521a55a-fa26-4e1f-bd1d-b9f95f912ad8&t=c>).

⁵ livinginliminality.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/aris_report_2008.pdf

- More than one-quarter of American adults (28%) have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion, or no religion at all.
- Among Americans ages 18-29, one in four say they are not affiliated with any religion.⁶

Spiritual trends in Europe are even more discouraging. A recent Harris Poll conducted a large survey of religious beliefs in France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, and the U.S. America was the most religious country, with 73% describing themselves as believing in "any form of God or any type of supreme being." Behind us, belief in the existence of God falls quickly: 62% in Italy; 48% in Spain; 41% in Germany; 35% in England; and 27% in France believe in any form of a supreme being.⁷

In Great Britain today, there are four times as many Muslims attending mosque on Friday as Christians attending worship on Sunday. Twenty-five percent of Brussels is Muslim. Fifty-four million Muslims live in Europe; their numbers will continue to increase due to immigration and high birth rates.

I recently participated in a debate with Christopher Hitchens, author of *god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. His book reached #1 on the New York Times Bestseller List in only its third week of publication. Mr. Hitchens and other well-known atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dawkins are selling millions of books to our culture.

Why are we not seeing a great spiritual movement in Western Europe and North America? Because we live in a culture which views God as a hobby. In our society, Christianity is for church, religion for Sunday. Our faith is to be kept separate from the "real world." But everywhere God's people are making God their King, the Lord and Master of every day and every dimension of their lives, the Fifth Great Awakening is coming. How can it come to our culture? God's word contains our answer:

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:13-14).

Do we need a spiritual awakening?

A "spiritual awakening" can be defined as a socially-transforming spiritual movement. A "revival" is a spiritual rebirth which transforms a person or a church or even a community into New Testament Christianity; a "great Awakening" transforms a nation. There have been four such Awakenings in American history: in 1734, 1792, 1858, and 1904-05. Each created a movement which changed its culture and altered its history for great spiritual good.

⁶ <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>.

⁷ <http://www.marketshare.com.hk/news/allnewsbydate.asp?NewsID=1131>.

I believe that such a movement is the greatest need of our country in these days, and that believers should be praying and working toward this purpose in every way we can. Why does America need a spiritual awakening?

As 2 Chronicles 7 unfolds, Solomon and the people of Israel have just finished their Temple. This is the high-water mark in the history of the Jewish people. Their borders extend from present-day Syria to the Sinai Peninsula. Their wealth and military might are unequaled in the region. Their king has accumulated 100,000 talents of gold (3,750 tons) and a million talents of silver (37,500 tons; 1 Chronicles 22:14)—a net worth of more than \$58 billion. Solomon is also the wisest man who has ever lived. And now he has just constructed a spectacular house of worship for his nation's God.

But Israel's future prosperity was in no sense guaranteed.

Their Lord warned them that future rebellion would lead to his punishment. In this event he would "shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people" (2 Chronicles 7:13). In a world dependent on rain for crops, defenseless against ravaging locusts or plague, such events would be totally catastrophic.

As it turned out, their future was in greater peril than they knew. Shortly after Solomon's death, their nation would be divided by civil war. The ten northern tribes would be annihilated and absorbed by Assyria; the two southern tribes would be enslaved by Babylon and then dominated by Persia, Greece, and Rome before their nation was disbanded and destroyed. Their nation would not be constituted again for 20 centuries, and today faces hostility from enemies on every side.

But all of this relates to Israel, the Hebrew people. Few reading this essay are Israelis. Why is this warning in the Bible? Is it still relevant to our day and our nation?

America is the world's only superpower. Our economy, even in these difficult times, is as large as Japan, China, Germany, India, and Great Britain combined. More Americans go to church each week than in any other nation in the Western world. Surely our future is assured. Or perhaps not.

We are struggling through the greatest financial crisis we've seen in 80 years. The Dow finished 2008 down 35%, the worst year for the markets since 1931. The crisis has wiped out nearly \$14 trillion in market value. The "Great Recession" has destroyed four million jobs, pushing unemployment near 10 percent.

Our military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan has continued longer than our engagement in World War II. Global climate change is accelerating faster than even pessimists were predicting a few years ago. Militant Islam continues its ascent, constituting what I consider to be the greatest threat the West has ever faced. At its root

it is a spiritual movement, and must be countered by a spiritual movement of even greater power and passion.

I am convinced that God redeems all he allows or causes. We can debate the degree to which God has caused all of this, but we must admit at least that he has allowed it. For what purpose?

Will you humble yourself before God?

Our text begins: "If my people, who are called by my name...." All who make Christ their Lord are included. We are "Christians," literally "little Christs," those who are the children of God and own his name. Awakening in the nation starts with us.

How? Our first step is to "humble ourselves," to admit our need of God. We will return to this momentarily. Once we admit that we need God's help, we "pray." The Hebrew word describes a national plea for repentance. Then we "seek his face." The Hebrew phrase describes a person who is returning to God in individual repentance. We see the need of the nation, then we admit the need of our own hearts and souls. In that light, we "turn from our wicked ways." We decide to turn, to change, to realign with God, to submit to him in all our ways.

When we do these things, God promises to hear from heaven and forgive our sin and heal our land. The spiritual transformation of the culture is the result, a rebirth of nothing less than New Testament Christianity.

So we begin with humility before the Lord. It is a spiritual fact that God cannot do for us what we try to do for ourselves. If you do not believe that our city and nation needs a mighty movement of God, you will miss that movement. A doctor cannot heal a patient who will not admit an illness. God cannot give what we will not admit we need. If we do not believe that we need more of God than we have, we will not have the God we need.

God will not share his glory. Humility is the indispensable factor in spiritual movement. Paul commanded us to "be completely humble and gentle" (Ephesians 4:2). James, the half-brother of Jesus, told us to "humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:10). A Roman centurion told Jesus, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof" (Matthew 8:8), and the Bible says that "his servant was healed at that very hour" (v. 13).

A Gentile woman told Jesus that "even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table" (Matthew 15:27), and "her daughter was healed from that very hour" (v. 28). Paul said of himself: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst" (1Timothy 1:15). And God used him to write half the New Testament and take Christ to the entire Western world.

John the Baptist said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30, KJV). And Jesus said of him, "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11). Now it's our turn. We can point people to Jesus, or to ourselves, but we cannot do both. I cannot convince you at the same time that I am a great writer and that Jesus is a great Savior. The time has come for us to choose—will we humble ourselves? Will we seek to glorify God with everything we think and say and do? Will we be a means to his end, or will he be a means to ours?

I once heard Rick Warren say, "Stop asking God to bless what you are doing, and ask him to help you do what he is blessing." What God Almighty is blessing is a global spiritual awakening, a movement of the Holy Spirit wherever God's people humble themselves, pray, seek his face, and turn from their wicked ways. That is what God is doing in these days.

Here's the question: Will you join him? Will you admit that your church and community and nation needs more of God than you have known? Do you need to experience the power of God, a transforming spiritual movement? Will you admit your need of God and humble yourself before him? Will you seek to glorify him with everything you think and say and do this week? Will you pray every day for spiritual awakening to come to America, starting with you?

Emerson insisted, "One of our illusions is that the present hour is not the crucial hour." He was right. We don't have another year or another day to wait. The hour is upon us. We must seek awakening, while there is still time. Tomorrow is promised to no nation, including ours.

Will you pray for your nation?

If you were asked to name the world's greatest military, strongest economy, and largest empire in the year 1900, the answer would be Great Britain. If you were asked to guess the army with the most troops, tanks, artillery, and nuclear weapons in 1980, the answer would be the Soviet Union.

Can the same happen to America and the West? Is it happening to America and the West? Consider the cultural crisis of our time, our battle with Radical Islam.

All Muslims believe that God's final revelation is the Qur'an, and that he wants all people on earth to convert to Islam. Radical Muslims take two steps further. First, they teach that the West has been attacking the Islamic world since the Crusades and especially with the establishment of Israel. Second, they believe that since the Western world is democratic, where we elect our leaders and our taxes support our military, none of us is innocent in this attack.

Since the Qur'an expressly forbids Muslims to initiate violence but requires them to defend Islam, these points are critical to understanding 9-11 and the mind of al Qaeda and

other terrorist organizations like Hamas. In their minds, lobbing rockets into Israel is a defense of Islam mandated by the Qur'an.

We have been at war with Muslim extremists far longer than most people realize. We could begin our reckoning with the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979. Consider the following:

- In April of 1983, Hezbollah attacked the American Embassy in Beirut, killing 63 and wounding 120.
- In October of that year, another Hezbollah suicide bomber attacked the American barracks at the Beirut airport, killing 241 U.S. Marines in their sleep.
- In 1984 and 1985, terrorists hijacked airliners and cruise ships, killing Americans each time.
- In December of 1988, Libyan agents bombed Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing all 270 passengers.
- In 1993, a truck bomb exploded in the garage of the World Trade Center, injuring over a thousand people.
- In 1996, a truck bomb attacked American soldiers in Saudi Arabia, wounding 240.
- In 1998, our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were attacked on the same day, killing more than 200.
- On October 12, 2000, a boat carrying suicide bombers attacked the USS *Cole*, killing 17 American sailors.
- On September 11, 2001, 2,740 Americans were killed by Islamic terrorists.

Radical Islam is a spiritual ideology. This war is more like the Cold War than World War I or II. Killing Osama bin Laden will not end this battle. This is a war for the souls of mankind, the battle of our generation.

Madrasahs are Islamic schools scattered around the world. Saudi Arabia has spent \$100 billion exporting radical Islam through these schools. There are approximately 24,000 educational institutions in America; there are more than 37,000 Muslim madrasahs in Indonesia alone.

So far, the West is not responding well to this threat. As we have seen, four times as many Muslims go to mosque as Christians go to church in Great Britain today. Anglo birthrates in Europe average around 1.2 children per household; Muslim birthrates average around six children per household. Many are speaking of Europe as "Eurabia." This is a spiritual movement, and must be countered spiritually.

Our oil-based economy is more vulnerable than ever before. There can be no doubt that oil is the gold of today's global economy. The United States has an estimated 29.9 billion barrels of reserves, ranking 11th in the world. The top five nations (in order) are Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, with a combined 716 billion barrels, 60% of the world's supply. If the Muslim Arab world wants to shut off our oil, it can.

What can we do to face these cultural, moral, and economic crises? Undoubtedly our response must include military and economic measures. But you and I have a critical role to play in the future of our nation and culture. Our text calls us to "humble ourselves and pray." The Hebrew word means to call for national repentance and turning to God. This is our mandate from our Maker for this day.

We must pray every day for the conversion of Muslims to Christ, for missions to the Muslim world, and for awakening to come to America. We must pray every day for a spiritual rebirth and moral awakening in America. We must pray every day for God to use this economic crisis to turn Americans from themselves to him. And we must ask for Awakening to begin with us.

A spiritual mystic once said, "There is one thing that must never be forgotten. It is as if a king had sent you to a foreign country with a task to perform. You go and perform many other tasks. But if you fail to perform the task for which you were sent, it will be as if you had done nothing at all." Will you do what God has sent you to do for your nation?

An elderly father could not decide which of his two children should inherit his mansion, so he devised a test. He gave each of them \$20, instructing them to buy something with which to fill every room in the estate. One bought straw and scattered it as far as it would go, but it did not nearly cover the mansion. The other brought candles, placed one in each room, and filled the entire mansion with light.

Which child are you?

Will you seek God personally?

Our text calls us to humble ourselves, admitting that we need a great movement of God's Spirit. Then we must pray for our nation to turn to God in the face of the great challenges of these days. Now God calls us to "seek my face." This is the most amazing, exciting, transforming invitation a human being can ever hear. And the most urgent.

God is seeking you

The Bible clearly depicts a God who is seeking us. God sought Adam and Eve in the cool of the Garden of Eden. He sought Noah, calling him to build the Ark which would save the human race. He sought Abram in the land we call Iraq today. He sought Jacob on that night they wrestled together, and Joseph in Egypt, and Moses at the burning bush. He sought David after the king had sinned horribly, and the prophets to speak his word to the world.

Then he sought us in the most miraculous, unexpected way of all—he became one of us. He folded the glory and power which created the universe down into a fetus who grew into a baby who breathed our air, walked our dirt, faced our temptations, felt our pain, died on our cross and rose from our grave. We could not climb up to him, so he climbed down to us.

He sought fishermen beside the Sea of Galilee, tax collectors in their booths and trees, lepers in their abandoned loneliness, and demoniacs in their cemetery hideouts. He was the housekeeper who sought the lost coin, the shepherd who sought the lost sheep, the father who sought the prodigal son. He sought Peter after his denials and Paul in the midst of his persecutions.

And then the day came when he made you. Your God has given you a heart which pumps enough blood through your body every 24 hours to fill a railway tanker. Every day it exerts as much effort as it would take to shovel 20 tons of gravel onto a platform as high as your waist. He has made you of protons, the core of atoms. Look at the dot on an "i" in this sentence. It holds something in the region of 500,000,000,000 protons, more than the number of seconds contained in half a million years. Your Father made all of that, for you.

You live in a visible universe that is now calculated as a million million million million miles across. Through a telescope you can see around 100,000 galaxies, each containing tens of billions of stars. And you're watching all this on a planet which spins at the speed of 1,000 miles an hour at its equator. Your Father made all of that, to make a place for you.

And then he made you. His Son died on the cross for you and rose from the grave for you. His Spirit led you to read these words. The God of the universe wants an intimate, passionate, personal relationship with you. He is seeking you.

Are you seeking God?

The question is, are you seeking him? A friend recently forwarded me this question: "Is there any logic in believing that God started his Church as a Spirit-filled, loving body with the intention that it would evolve into entertaining, hour-long services? Was he hoping that one day people would be attracted to the Church not because they care for one another, not because they are devoted to him, not because the supernatural occurs in their midst, but because of good music and entertainment?"

The world's religions have always seen worship as a kind of transaction. Make a sacrifice to Athena so she will bless your olive harvest. Practice the four noble truths on the eight-fold noble path so you can achieve enlightenment. Declare that there is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet; pray to Allah five times a day; go to Mecca; fast during Ramadan; give to the poor—all so you will perhaps be accepted by God into his paradise. Give to get. Transact business. Come to church, pray, read, give, so God will bless you or strengthen your marriage or help your family.

None of that is the biblical invitation. God says, "Seek my face," not "Seek my favor." Seek to know me, more intimately and passionately than ever before. Love me, for I love you. Want me, for I want you. Know me, for I know you. Seek my face.

"Seek" translates *baqash*, a Hebrew word which means to search out, strive after, ask, beg, beseech, desire, request, require. It describes a passionate search for something of great value. Such is to be our desire for God:

- "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always" (1 Chronicles 16:11).
- "Devote your heart and soul to seeking the Lord your God" (1 Chr. 22:19).
- Rehoboam "did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the LORD" (2 Chr. 12:14).
- Good king Asa "commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to obey his laws and commands" (2 Chr. 14:4).
- Scripture says of Hezekiah, "In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered" (2 Chr. 31:21).
- The Bible says of good king Josiah, "In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David" (2 Chr. 34:3).
- David assures us, "The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you" (Psalm 9:9-10). He later prayed, "may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, 'The LORD be exalted!'" (Ps. 40:16).
- Now the prophet exhorts us, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6).
- God told Jeremiah, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13), a passage Janet framed for me to put on my desk where I can see it every day of the week.

Seek "my face," the Lord calls to us. "Face" translates *pane*, the countenance or presence. To seek a person's "face" is to seek an intimate, face-to-face encounter with her or him. To seek God's "face" is to seek a closer relationship with him than you have right now.

How do we seek God's face? Desire to know God more than you know him now. Desire to be in his presence, to experience his Spirit's touch in your spirit, to draw close to him. Make some time to do this. As with any relationship, it takes an investment of time and energy to build a closer intimacy with God. It is best to do this at the start of every day.

Seek God's face as did the people who came to worship him in the Temple which Solomon had just constructed in our text. As they climbed the steps into the outer courts, they came singing psalms of praise to God. These were called "psalms of ascent," because they were used as the people ascended to Jerusalem and then up the steps to the Temple. In the same way, we enter the gates of the Lord with thanksgiving and his courts with praise (Ps. 100:4). Sing or say a psalm, a hymn, a chorus. Praise and thank your Father for all he has done for you. Remember his last blessing and give thanks for it. Come to him in worship.

Now continue in sacrifice. The Jews brought the sacrifices for their sins to the priests, where they were laid on the altar. Jesus' death is the final sacrifice, the "Lamb slain from

the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). Bring him your sins and mistakes, anything which would separate you from your Lord. Ask the Spirit to show you anything which displeases your holy God, and confess it to your Savior. Claim his promise to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Now you are ready to bring your offerings to the Lord. The people brought offerings from the harvest and from all the blessings of God. In the same way, we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God as our spiritual worship (Romans 12:1). Submit and surrender your plans, dreams, agendas, and problems. Yield them all to him, asking him to fill you with his Spirit and use you for his glory. Ask God to make his presence real to you, to fill you with his peace and joy. And they will be yours.

God wants you to know him more than you want to know him. You must now decide—do you want to know God intimately and personally? Do you want awakening to come to your heart and life? There is an Oriental saying: "No man can carry two melons in his hand." There is room for only one on the throne of your heart and life.

Thomas Kelly, the Quaker educator and author: "Over the margins of life comes a whisper, a faint call, a premonition of richer living which we know we are passing by. Strained by the very mad pace of our daily outer burdens, we are further strained by an inward uneasiness, because we have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence, a life of unhurried serenity and peace and power."

Is it yours? Will it be yours?

Will you turn from your wicked ways?

If we would experience true spiritual awakening, we must humble ourselves and admit that we need God's power and purpose. We must pray for the nation and seek God's face personally. Then we must align our lives with his call.

The last phrase of our key text makes the point clearly: God's people must "turn from their wicked ways." "Ways" translates a Hebrew word for road, path, journey, mode of action, course of life. It pictures the normal ways we live, places we travel, our lifestyles. "Wicked" translates a Hebrew word for superlative evil, that which is exceedingly wrong.

Does America need to repent of her "wicked ways"?

My parents remembered a time when moral standards were unambiguous and social expectations were clear. But that day is no more. Forty two percent of those who use the Internet view pornography on it. Ninety percent of our children, ages 8-16, have viewed pornography on the Internet, most while doing their homework. Sixty five percent of Americans see nothing wrong with premarital sex. Drunk drivers kill someone every 30 minutes in this country.

Why has the moral climate of America changed so much in recent decades? Here's the academic answer, in brief. The Reformation shook the foundations of medieval Catholic authority. In response, a mathematician named Rene Descartes (1596-1650), in a desire to argue for objective truth and his Catholic tradition, developed a theory that truth comes through the unaided use of the mind. Philosophers in England countered that truth is known through the senses. A German thinker named Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) combined the two views, arguing that knowledge is produced when our minds interpret our sense data. However, Kant asserted, we cannot know the "thing in itself," only our experience of it. Knowledge is personal and subjective.⁸

Two centuries later, this approach to truth has become the dominant academic view in our country. Ethics are personal and subjective. You have no right to force "your truth" on anyone else. So long as we are sincere in our beliefs and tolerant of others, we'll get along. The result is a culture which has lost its moral foundations.

Few Christians would claim that America's moral climate is pleasing to God. But note that his word focuses on "my people, called by my name." We are the first who must "turn from their wicked ways. Not Radical Muslim terrorists, or serial killers, or drug dealers. God is pointing to the things you and I do each and every day, the ways we live. God says that our ways are "wicked," evil in the extreme.

Do you think of your sins as "wicked"? You probably haven't committed adultery or murder this week. I doubt that you mean to harm other people. Neither do I. But the white lies, the sinful thoughts, the little things we know we shouldn't do—all of them are called "wicked" by God. If we humble ourselves, pray, and seek his face, we will see ourselves in the light of his holiness. Then we will see our sins the way he sees them.

That's what happened to Isaiah when he saw the Lord high and lifted up—he cried out, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5). That's what happened to Peter when he saw the miraculous power of Jesus—he said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). That's what happened to John on Patmos when he saw the glorified Jesus—he fell at his feet as though dead (Revelation 1:17).

When we see our sins as God sees them, the way to get off of the wrong road is to stop now. The further we go, the further we'll have to go back. Decide you want to go the right way, "turn from your wicked ways," and go there.

How? Begin with a "spiritual inventory." Make some time to be alone with God. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you anything in your life which displeases the Father. Write down what comes to your mind, specifically and honestly. Confess your sins individually, with repentance and contrition. Claim God's promise to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

⁸ See James C. Denison, "Shaking the Foundations: The Shift in Scriptural Authority in the Postmodern World," *Review and Expositor* 95 (fall 1998): 545-58.

Do this regularly. Know that God is ready to forgive every sin you'll confess, but that he can heal your land only if he first heals his own people. America's repentance begins with yours.

Gypsy Smith, a great evangelist of an earlier generation, was asked how revival begins. His response: "Take a piece of chalk, and draw a circle around yourself. Get on your knees and pray until everything in that circle is right with God, and revival will be upon us." Will you take his advice today?

Will you pray for Awakening?

God calls his people to humble ourselves, admitting that we need a great movement of the Holy Spirit; to pray for our nation to turn to God; to seek his face with personal intimacy; and to turn from our sins and failures. If we do, his promise is clear: "then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

God has honored his promise every time his people have fulfilled its conditions.

The *First Great Awakening* began in 1734. The crisis in the colonies was severe. Moral conditions were dire. Not one in 20 people claimed to be a Christian. Samuel Blair, a pastor of the day, said that religion lay as it were dying and ready to expire its last breath of life.

But Theodore Frelinghuysen, a Dutch Reformed minister who had come to the colonies from Holland in 1720, would not give up on his adopted homeland. He began praying fervently for revival to come to the colonies, first with himself and his church, and then with his larger community. Others began joining his fledgling prayer movement. The Spirit began to move.

Then Jonathan Edwards, an intellectual recluse who studied 12 hours a day and read his sermons, face buried in the manuscript, experienced the anointing and power of God. *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* shook his church and then the young nation. The preaching of George Whitefield gathered and galvanized thousands. The First Great Awakening was the result. As much as 80% of the colonial population became identified with a Christian church. It started with a group who prayed for the power of God to extend the Kingdom of God in their Jerusalem and around the world.

The *Second Great Awakening* began in 1792. After the War for Independence, social conditions grew even more deplorable than before. Drunkenness became epidemic; out of a population of five million, 300,000 were confirmed alcoholics; 15,000 died of the disease each year. Women were afraid to go out at night for fear of assault. Bank robberies were a daily occurrence.

John Marshall, Chief Justice of the United States, wrote to James Madison, Bishop of Virginia, that the Church "was too far gone ever to be redeemed." A poll taken at Harvard

University found not a single believer. Two were found at Princeton. Tom Paine claimed that "Christianity will be forgotten in 30 years."

But he was mistaken. In 1784, a Baptist pastor named Isaac Baccus gathered a number of ministers. They wrote a circular letter, asking believers to pray for awakening. Prayer groups spread all over New England. In 1792, revival broke out on college campuses, where hundreds were converted. "Camp meetings" spread across the frontier; eventually more than a thousand were meeting annually. Churches doubled and tripled in membership. One Baptist church in Kentucky with a membership of 170 baptized 421 during a single revival meeting.

In that year, William Carey began the modern missions movement. The American Bible Society, American Tract Society, and a variety of missions organizations began as a result of this Awakening. All because a group prayed for the power of God to extend the Kingdom of God in their Jerusalem and around the world.

The *Third Great Awakening* is dated to 1858. The Gold Rush of 1848 had led to a booming economy which crashed in 1857. If it were not for the Great Depression of the 1930s, the collapse of 1857 would have that title. Fear of civil war was increasing. Turmoil was everywhere.

In the midst of such fear and anxiety, a group of laymen began meeting for prayer on Wednesday, September 23, 1857 at the Old North Dutch Church in New York City. They were led by a Presbyterian businessman named Jeremiah Lamphier. The first day, six people came to his prayer meeting. The next week there were 14; then 23; then the group began to meet daily. They outgrew the church and began filling other churches and meeting halls throughout the city. Such meetings spread across the country.

The result was one of the most significant movements in Christian history. More than a million were saved in one year, out of a national population of only 30 million. 50,000 were coming to Christ every week. The revival continued into the Civil War, where more than 100,000 soldiers were converted. Sailors took the revival to other countries. Thousands of young people volunteered for mission service. It all happened because a group prayed for the power of God to extend the Kingdom of God in their Jerusalem and around the world.

The *Fourth Great Awakening* began in Wales in 1904 in the heart of a coal miner named Evan Roberts. He was convicted of his sins by the Spirit, and turned to God in prayer and repentance. He then began preaching to the young people in his church, calling them to prayer and repentance.

Prayer meetings broke out all over Wales. Social conditions were affected dramatically. Tavern owners went bankrupt; police formed gospel quartets because they had no one to arrest. Coal mines shut down for a time because the miners stopped using profanity and the mules no longer understood them.

The revival spread to America, where ministers in Atlantic City, NJ reported that out of 50,000 people, only 50 adults were left unconverted. In Portland, Oregon, more than 200 stores closed daily from 11 to 2 so people could attend prayer meetings. In 1896, only 2,000 students were engaged in missionary studies; by 1906, 11,000 were enrolled. All because a group prayed for the power of God to extend the Kingdom of God in their Jerusalem and around the world.

Now there is a ***Fifth Great Awakening*** on the move around the world. Will it come to America? No question is more urgent for our nation in these critical days.

Two centuries ago, Alex de Tocqueville traveled across America for his French government, searching for the secrets of our nation's successes. Here is his report:

I searched for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there. I searched for the greatness and genius of America in her fertile fields and boundless forest, and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her public system and her institutions of learning, and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

Will you join me in praying fervently for a Fifth Great Awakening in America today?