



Why be Thankful for Upheaval?

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We seem to be living in a time where upheaval is the norm. If you're like me, upheaval is probably not generally looked upon as a good thing. Truth be known, I like smooth sailing more than turbulence, order more than disorder, and calm more than turmoil. When you look around our world, it seems like there's an awful lot of upheaval and confusion.

Author

The weekly eNews is provided by CGGC Executive Director Lance Finley



In our western world, the Christian church is no longer respected or privileged. Institutions of all types are facing major shifts and changes. Things seem unsteady and threatening and new challenges seem to arise with each passing week.

We usually associate peace and tranquility as things to be thankful for and upheaval and confusion as things to be avoided or prayed against. But today I'm actually thankful for the upheaval that I'm seeing in our world – I think God's at work in ways to stir us and move us into greater fruitfulness. I'm so convinced of this that I've been praying for God's Spirit to stir and agitate His people so that we don't miss out on God's agenda.

Here's some of what I'm seeing and hearing. My brother Don Dennison just returned from leading a team of leaders from the Great Lakes Conference in a learning experience in Sweden. I don't know how much you know about Sweden, but it is decidedly post-Christian. Only 2% of the population identifies as Jesus followers. Several years ago, the CGGC partnered in planting the New Life Church in Sweden's second largest city, Gothenburg. CGGC pastor Douglas Molgaard was instrumental in this work and continues to do Gospel work in the area of Gothenburg today.

One of the upheavals going on in Sweden (and a lot of Europe today) is the rise of the Muslim faith as a result of immigration. The area around the New Life Gothenburg Church was once soccer fields; today it's filled with multi-family unit housing filled with Muslim people and there is a mosque located nearby. I'm guessing most of us wouldn't see this as a good thing in our neighborhoods or communities. Here's why I'm giving thanks for this kind of upheaval. The rise of the Muslim faith in Sweden has led to a greater openness to discuss matters of faith and given our Christian brothers and sisters new opportunities to share about their faith in Christ in a society that's been mostly closed off to such conversations. God is using this upheaval to advance His kingdom. He's even giving them opportunities to take the Gospel to their Muslim neighbors.

I've just come out of two days of Board of Trustee meetings at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. The last couple of years at WTS have been filled with upheaval and turmoil (Dr. Brent Sleasman has guest blogged here several times in recent months to help explain some of the recent decisions and changes at WTS). Education of every kind is facing new challenges and shifts in culture and theological education is no different. WTS has experienced a fair amount of upheaval over the past twelve months but I truly believe that God is at work in the upheaval and turmoil to position WTS to have a greater kingdom impact in the years ahead. God is at work in the upheaval and leading us to new ways to prepare leaders for service in His kingdom.

Almost every time I have the opportunity to be with church leaders from across the body, I hear similar stories of the upheaval and confusion facing local churches today. There's a strong sense that things are different today when compared to twenty years ago (or even more recently). We're not seeing the same results from our efforts. Things that worked in the past don't seem to produce the same fruit. Sometimes it's expressed in fearful tones, other times it's more of a sense of frustration, but there's certainly a sense that something is not working. Again, I don't think this upheaval is necessarily all bad. I fully believe that God is shaking us and forcing us to think deeply about what it means to be followers of Jesus. Everywhere I go, I hear conversations and see evidence that brothers and sisters are wrestling through difficult conversations such as how do we be the church rather than just go to church?

Upheaval certainly isn't enjoyable. It doesn't typically result in feeling safe. Times of upheaval and uncertainty can leave us longing for smoother times. I don't necessarily enjoy living in times like this, but I'm convinced that God is at work to move His people onto His kingdom agenda. As a result, I'm grateful for the upheaval we're experiencing. I'm trusting that God is at work to shake us and wake us and to bring us to a greater obedience to Him.

I'm thanking God for the upheaval we're experiencing in our world today and praying that He does whatever it takes to bring us in line with His kingdom agenda.

Are you grateful for the upheaval and disruption you're experiencing lately? Are you asking God to stir and agitate us? Are you asking the Spirit of God to shake us and wake us? Let's not be so afraid of upheaval and disruption - I think God's at work to bring us to greater Kingdom impact.

Christ's Peace,

Lance