

[In September 2009 there was a revival at Taylor University. Here are my thoughts from an email I sent to my friends from Taylor.]

To my TU buddies,

We are all glad to hear of a revival of spiritual awakening at Taylor.
We interpret it as a move of God in the lives of people.

I would like to reflect on this, expand our thinking, and perhaps cast it in a different view and invite us all to join in.

From the letter by the president, it was started when a student made some public confession that moved someone else towards the courage to do the same and it kept going from there like a giant snowball.

The year after I graduated from Asbury Theological Seminary, 1970, a similar revival broke out at Asbury College by the same mechanism - a confessing student. As in the TU case, even without the Internet, word spread quickly around the globe. Students were leaving campus to go home to reconcile with parents and faculty joined students in confessing and reconciling. It was powerful. It was in the secular news. When Jim Terry and I went back to Wilmore to witness it for ourselves and hopefully catch some of the spirit, it had been over a week from the initial spark and everything was back to normal. We didn't see any spark or catch any spirit.

But I have pondered what happened there for many years now. We tend to think of this as a mysterious, supernatural event, but I have come to think of it as what I call an "outbreak of honesty."

This is not to diminish the power of God at work in people, but to point out that most of the time most of us live in gross dishonesty with ourselves. (see a book by Larry Crabb "Inside Out") We don't see ourselves very objectively at all, but rather we see a person of our imagining, a person we wish we were, a person that others have convinced us we are, or many other views of ourselves that we think are real.

We pray, we try to do the right things as best we can tell what they are and with some amount of feeble power, we believe, we hope. Yet in so many ways we deceive ourselves as to our own real self.

When a sudden flash of ourselves comes into mind that is not in harmony with our preconceived notions about ourselves, it is a jolt to us. Most of the time these jolts get dismissed without a second thought, denied, repressed, or ignored with our favorite rationalizations. (as in the parable of the sower.) As an example from psychology, when a young person who was badly treated by his parents yet has never acknowledged this and tried to tell himself that he loved his parents suddenly comes to see his own underlying hostility towards his parents instead of the love he is "supposed" to have, a very painful realization, then he will be able to move towards

healing and a real love that transcends the pain and grief.

I'm only guessing as to what might have been initially confessed, but if a well-respected student got up and said, "You know what. I'm a liar and a cheat. I don't deserve your respect. I appeal to God and you for forgiveness." That would get everyone's attention. And who would withhold forgiveness after a humble, contrite confession. God can only get through to us when we are honest. I have come to see Biblical confession as simple honesty, being honest with ourselves as to who we really are, coming to God without a religious mask. Any other way is just pretending and will get us nowhere either as a person or with God.

This is in harmony with Biblical religious experience, as with Isaiah. He had delivered some serious "woes" in his preaching and when he got a vision of God in the temple he all of a sudden included himself in the company of "woes". He saw himself not unlike the rest of "undone" humanity. Then God was able to get through to him.

I long and pray for insight to see myself as a real person - my doubts and faith and fears, my gifts, strengths, and failings, my loving and my hating, my bravery and cowardice. In this broken world, as I hope to join with God to heal some of the brokenness, when I acknowledge that I also add to the brokenness as well, then I am humbled and cry out to God "Woe is me!". And in that painful cry God offers grace and calls me to follow Jesus some more.

I realize that I am writing to people of long-standing faith. And yet I say that our own renewal and awakening is waiting for us, too. It doesn't take some mysterious, supernatural intervention from God to sweep us up in a flame of emotion. When we simply acknowledge ourselves to God, garbage and all, as a real person and not some imaginary one, then we can experience God's grace in a new way. Then we can become the real person that God made us to be.

May we all join with those in a great revival of spiritual awakening and renewal.

-Joe Vandegriff, class of '65