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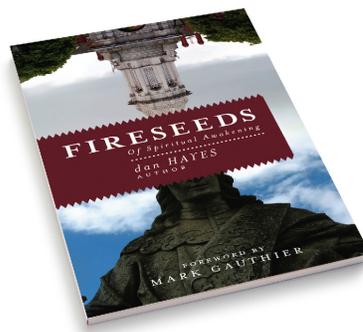
YOUNG LEADERS-INSTRUMENTS OF REVIVAL

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FIRESEEDS OF SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

AWAKENED AT SIXTEEN; AWAKENER AT TWENTY-SIX

“Though Josiah had these obstacles as a hindrance, there was one great obstacle which he did not have to overcome. He was not confirmed in sin. There is nothing so hardening to the heart, and so blinding to the eyes, and so searing to the conscience as sin. “Those who seek me early shall find me.” Men who seek late in life, if they truly seek, will find, but it will not be such easy work for them as it is for the young.”

– Ernest Baker¹

I have often heard this sentiment expressed, in one form or another, from Christian college students: “How can we really make a difference? We’re young. We don’t have any resources. We don’t have time; we’re just studying and working to get through school.” Even if it’s never articulated, college students live with a pervasive sense or mindset that college is “life interrupted”—a time to have fun, a period of preparation for life, a time to acquire the tools to make a mark, just not the time to leave one.

Yet, from the perspective of God's redemptive plans, college could be the time of our greatest impact, the time to leave our greatest mark. When God has moved powerfully in human history, He has typically called on young men and women to accomplish His mission, to further His purposes, and to interject into history those awakenings that have changed its course. Mentally page through the Bible: think of Samuel, David, Daniel, Esther, Mary, Ruth, Joseph, and others. These were mostly teenagers when God intervened in their lives and began to use them. Without young men and women availing themselves to God, many of the great movements of Scripture and history would not have occurred.

Let's look at one of those movements and one of those young men in Scripture—Josiah—and see what principles we can draw about who God uses and the way He works in and through them. If we can lay hold of these principles and faithfully follow them, we can profoundly impact our campuses for Christ, and much of the skepticism and Christian apathy that now exist will be changed into heartfelt searching—and finding—of God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Worst of Times

Second Chronicles 33 and 34 describe the worst and the best of times in Judah, Israel's southern kingdom. It had been ruled by a succession of both good and evil kings. In chapter 33 we see two of the worst of the worst: Manasseh and Amon.

Manasseh ruled for fifty-five years, and he had the distinction of being one of the most despicable kings who ever ruled any nation in the world. God said about him, "He did evil in the sight of the LORD according to the abominations of the nations" (2 Chronicles 33:2, NASB). In other words, he was wicked like the kings of the godless nations around him.

Not content with his own wickedness, Manasseh spent most of his free time involving others in the creative process, encouraging their capacity for evil: “Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the sons of Israel” (2 Chronicles 33:9, NASB).

Among the baser things that he did in Israel was to perpetuate the practice of witchcraft, spiritism (2 Chronicles 33:6), and the worship of the gods Molech and Baal. He actually encouraged the people to sacrifice their own children on altars of fire—a national pastime that might have made even Mao or Stalin queasy.

When Manasseh died, his son Amon took over. Amon was much like his father, just less creative. Second Chronicles 33:22 says, “He did evil in the sight of the LORD as Manasseh his father had done, and Amon sacrificed to all the carved images which his father Manasseh had made, and he served them” (NASB). The only good thing you can say about Amon is that his rule was brief. After two years, his servants put him to death.

Josiah the Boy King

Judah was now in a bad way. After fifty-seven years filled with witchcraft, murder, immorality, and all manner of pagan idolatry, the people had forgotten God and had grown intensely materialistic, jaded, and perverse. They were consumed by their own wants, desires, and passions and apathetic to any semblance of real spiritual life. Yet sometimes the darker the night, the brighter the morning. Into this scene enters the protagonist, Josiah the boy king.

There’s a new sheriff in town, but he’s only eight years old. Second Chronicles 34:1-3 tells us:

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. He did right in the sight of the LORD, and walked

in the ways of his father David and did not turn aside to the right or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, the carved images and the molten images. (NASB)

Josiah the Praying Teenager

What a contrast to his grandfather and to his father! Only eight years old when he started to reign, Josiah clearly had within him a heart for God from the very beginning. At age sixteen he began to seek God fervently and earnestly. The result of this was a deep intimacy with the Lord and a righteous heart that grieved over the practices of the palace around him and those of the nation that was named with God's own name. How many hours in the next four years must he have prayed and wept and thought and planned and studied until, gradually, ideas and directions came into focus? Though still young, he knew what was necessary and courageously stepped out in faith.

Josiah set out to eliminate idolatry from Judah and Jerusalem. He was like the sons of Issachar, who Scripture describes as men who “understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chronicles 12:32). Understanding “the times” and, as a result, knowing what God's people should do in response is the definition of spiritual leadership, and Josiah was a spiritual leader. He never said, “I know things are bad and I'm disgusted by the culture, but what can I do about it?” Now, granted, Josiah was king. But he was also a kid—a kid surrounded by older advisers who usually ran the administration and would have warned him that he should not get involved and that moral reform was equivalent to political (or more likely, actual) suicide. And as Josiah's father had been assassinated, there was nothing abstract about any of this. If nothing else, it would have

been easy for Josiah to delay the effort—to put it off until he was a little older, a little more experienced, and had gained a little more respect.

But for Josiah, youth was neither an excuse nor a handicap. And, if I can engage in some speculation, I'm guessing he realized that God had placed him in a unique position to help accomplish the renewal of his nation and society. He knew he had the passion and vision, not having been scarred by years of habitual sin. As a young man, he had uninhibited freedom and energy, not burdened by responsibilities or worn down by years of shouldering them. And I think he suspected that there were others who felt as he did, other young men and women who shared his convictions and who, if rallied, would follow, forming an army that would accomplish Judah's cleansing.

The battle to liberate Israel from spiritual bondage took Josiah far from his home in Jerusalem. He traveled to the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and Naphtali, tearing down altars, crushing carved images into powder, and chopping down the incense altars—basically, amputating the diseased appendages of spiritual apostasy. When the campaign was completed, he returned to Jerusalem.

It's an inspiring story, a spiritual version of *Braveheart*. This young man sought to take back his country for God and to destroy the things that brought Him dishonor ("They tore down the altars," 2 Chronicles 34:4, NASB). He led the people in an exodus out of sin, rallied them to return to God, and drove out the idolatry, apathy, and wickedness that had pervaded the nation. In the face of opposition, he burned white-hot with passion for God and for righteousness. This zeal not only drove him but also compelled others to follow.

In the space of about six years, all of Israel was outwardly cleansed of the idolatrous practices that had characterized the reigns of the two previous kings. Can you imagine? He turned the whole nation around in six short years—about as long as it takes some people to finish college!

Despite the thorough cleansing and whitewashing of Israel's exterior, the deeper problem of inward cleansing and renewal remained. You can legislate moral actions and outlaw immoral ones, but spirituality and righteousness can come only from inside a population and from within an individual. Josiah had made the right start and had accomplished more in a few short years than most people do in an entire lifetime, but how could the inward transformation of Israel be accomplished?

Josiah the Righteous Young Man

As part of Josiah's spiritual reforms, he organized and raised money for the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem. This structure had been the heart and soul of Israel's worship and the nation itself, but (rather metaphorically) it had been allowed to fall into disrepair. While the restoration was underway, a discovery was made. Somewhere in the clutter and debris they found the lost Book of the Law given to Moses by the Lord. "While they were bringing out the money that had been taken into the temple of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD that had been given through Moses" (2 Chronicles 34:14).

This was not like recovering a box of old love letters in the attic. Believed by most scholars to be the Book of Deuteronomy, this restatement of the Mosaic Law was intended to remind Israel not to forsake their God and to warn them of the consequences if they did—and they had lost it! Shoved down a crevice in the temple, out of sight and mind; this would appear to be the very definition of irony.

When Josiah was told of the discovery and "heard the words of the Law," he tore his clothes (2 Chronicles 34:19). In Scripture this is a mark of great sorrow, grief, and repentance. (I'd have to think that shredding your clothing would carry similar meaning today.) The act also stands as a symbol of renewed consciousness of the holiness, majesty, and presence of God. It dawned upon Josiah, with utter

shock and outrage, that no one had even read this book for eighty years. No one had believed it, no one had followed it—it had simply been forgotten.

Josiah must have thought, *No wonder we've experienced such immorality, violence, and ungodliness in our country. No wonder the people are spiritually and morally bankrupt. We have not obeyed God. In fact, we have not even known what obeying God means.*

Josiah immediately took action. Second Chronicles 34:29-33 describes what he did and the long-term response of the people to this new exposure to the Word of God.

Then the king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up to the house of the Lord and all the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the Levites and all the people, from the greatest to the least; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the LORD to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant written in this book. Moreover, he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand with him. So the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel to serve the Lord their God. Throughout his lifetime they did not turn from following the Lord God of their fathers. (NASB)

Obviously, finding the Book of the Law was not just good fortune. God had undertaken to solve the second part of Josiah's dilemma: how to produce the inward transformation that would fuel and sustain the outward cleansing he had accomplished in Judah. The solution was to provide the power of His Word, which cut like a scalpel to the heart of Josiah, his friends, and the entire nation.

Revival of a Lifetime

The people turned to the Lord, and Scripture reports that they "did not turn from following the LORD God of their fathers" during Josiah's lifetime. No longer was their obedience merely external, motivated by fear and obligation to the king, and no longer did they follow Josiah alone. The people now came under the conviction of God's Word and desired to serve Him from the heart: the Word and Spirit fueling obedience to the Law and King.

The next chapter of 2 Chronicles tells us that the Passover was celebrated as it had not been celebrated in centuries. In fact, this was probably the greatest Passover in Israel's history, reflecting a genuine renewal that the nation had experienced on both individual and corporate levels. Awakening by God's Spirit had come!

What God did through this young leader was nothing short of incredible, yet it was certainly not unprecedented. What was different about Josiah? A closer examination reveals five roles that Josiah played, allowing him to influence a revival and provide spiritual leadership to the nation.

Josiah the Prayer Warrior

Josiah was successful because he did not depend on either his personality (diplomacy) or position as king (legislature) to bring about spiritual transformation. He knew that only God could produce an awakening in his apostate nation, and so he prayed. When the Scripture says that Josiah "began to seek God at age sixteen," it means that he largely

devoted himself to prayer.

But the question that lurks in the back of our minds is this: *Can the prayers of a few really change the course of an entire nation?* It is not so much a doubt as wondering if God still works in this same way outside the Scriptures. Revival in general, and this story of Samuel Mills in particular, illustrate that He most certainly does:

As an entering freshman at Williams College [in 1806] Samuel Mills cut anything but an impressive figure. Mills was described by one of his roommates as having “an awkward figure and ungainly manner and an inelastic and croaking voice.” ...

Soon after his arrival he came into contact with a group of fellow Christians who were meeting weekly to pray for revival among the students of Williams College. Fearful of contempt and possible disruption from their peers, the group met in the countryside some distance from the college. Although he was but a freshman he was also twenty-three and because of his maturity and the depth and sincerity of his own religious life, Mills quickly became the leader of these students.

The group continued to meet on a twice-weekly basis throughout the summer. One hot, sultry August afternoon, the skies began to darken and the accompanying thundershowers and lightning persuaded them to return to the shelter of the college buildings. Before they could reach the campus, however, the clouds began to disperse and they were able to continue their meeting under the shelter of a

nearby haystack. After some discussion, Mills invited the students to join with him in offering their lives in the cause of foreign missions, so as to reach the under-privileged peoples of the world. “We can do this if we will,” he said, revealing a determination differing from the expected “we will do this if we can.”²

The impact of the resulting revival was so great that “not only Williams College, but also Yale, Amherst, Dartmouth, Princeton, to name a few, reported the conversion to God of a third to one half of their total student bodies.”³

As with Josiah, it was the prayers of Samuel Mills and his friends that sparked an awakening at Williams College, spreading to all of New England. In addition, it launched one of the greatest foreign mission thrusts in the history of the church. The following story demonstrates that missionary impulse that flows from revival as well as the manner by which revival spreads from campus to campus and nation to nation.

A Hawaiian student named Henry Obookiah, happened to be at Yale when the revival spread from Williams College to New Haven. It was at Yale that Obookiah came in contact with Mills who happened to be visiting the campus. As a result of their meeting, in 1820, a small party of student missionaries set off for Hawaii, then part of the Polynesian kingdom. Within fifteen years (1836) these young missionaries had planted seventeen churches among the islands, which, as it turned out, was only the preliminary work, for in 1837 the Hawaiian Great Awakening occurred, which saw the conversion of a fifth of the island’s population (27,000 converts).⁴

Think about that: a revival in Hawaii tracing back to a handful of students at Williams College—and all because they were willing to pray.

Josiah the Activist

Young Josiah was also effective in the awakening of his day because he took action concerning his convictions. Second Chronicles 34:3 reports that he began to seek the God of his father David, and he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the carved and molten images on the high places. Josiah was an activist, a radical, and a revolutionary. He knew that he could not do *everything*, but he knew that he could do *something*...and he did it. He also knew that by his example and leadership others would be motivated to take action. No doubt it was lonely being on the leading edge of moral and spiritual change, but others joined him as his example and passion drew many to the cause.

Taking a radical stand is never an easy thing to do, especially when the cause is unpopular and when you may be subject to ridicule from students, professors, friends, and family. But it is always worth the sacrifice. God is always worth the sacrifice.

I had a friend in college named Bruce. He and I had been Christians for about a year. We both had an English professor who was renowned on the campus as a skeptic toward things Christian. His classes numbered from three hundred to four hundred every semester, and he delighted in taking every opportunity he could to discredit the Bible and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Semester after semester, unknowing students would write down what he said as “truth” and find their Christian faith (if they had any) completely undermined. This professor was extremely intimidating and would make a point of ridiculing anyone who would dare to stand up for his or her faith. Consequently my approach was to decide, *I’m just going to keep quiet and try and suffer through this class and hope I don’t get ridiculed.*

Bruce took a different tack. He decided he was going to take action and not allow his beliefs to be trampled upon without a struggle. One afternoon he approached this professor and questioned him concerning his statement about two allegedly contradictory sets of Ten Commandments in the Old Testament. Grudgingly, the professor pulled out a Bible from his shelf and opened it to show my friend “the error of his ways.” After pausing for a few minutes to search for the two passages, he looked up with a surprised expression and said, “Well, what do you know? There are two sets of Ten Commandments in Scripture, and they don’t contradict each other after all.”

As far as I know, the professor never taught that falsehood again. Bruce was willing to stand up for his faith and be an activist, even when his grade might have been in jeopardy. This experience emboldened him, and finally me, to become more aggressive witnesses for Christ.

The people who have changed the world have not necessarily been the smartest or the richest or the most powerful. Instead, they have been those willing to take a stand, activists willing to sacrifice for their faith. In fact, when I think of the small steps Bruce and I took as students (steps that seemed so difficult to us at the time), it seems trivial compared to the courage, radical faith, and sacrifice of students in nations hostile to Christianity. One such story comes to us in a letter from the Henan Province, dated from 1982.

When one girl of only fourteen, after being beaten, revived and continued witnessing, all kinds of people broke down, repented and believed in Jesus. Four young men were arrested and forced to kneel for three days without food or water, but even as they were being beaten, they continued praying, singing, and praising the Lord, until even their tormentors were convicted and believed the gospel.

The writer went on to say that in that province “the flame of the gospel spread everywhere.”⁵ Such stories clear up the mystery of how the illegal, underground church in China could go from one million members in 1951 (when all missionaries were deported) to ninety million five decades later. It serves as an example of how sacrifice, courage, and radical faith are being lived out in different parts of the world this very minute.

Josiah the Preacher

We notice in the life of Josiah that he was willing to proclaim the truth of God’s Word. Holding up the Scripture, he preached, proclaimed, and pleaded with the nation to return to the Lord. About a century ago, there was another young man (twenty-six years of age, to be exact) who was not afraid to call his contemporaries to seek after God. He was Evan Roberts of Wales. Roberts, a student at Newcastle Emlyn College, had a profound encounter with God in which he experienced the Spirit’s cleansing and awakening as well as a profound burden for revival.

For a long time I was much troubled in my soul and my heart by thinking over the failure of Christianity. ... But one night after I had been in great distress about this, I went to sleep, and at one o’clock suddenly I was awakened up out of my sleep, and I found myself with unspeakable joy and awe in the very presence of the Almighty God. And for the space of four hours I was privileged to speak face to face with him as a man speaks face to face with a friend. At five o’clock it seemed to me as if I again returned to earth. ... And it was not only that morning but every morning for three to four months ... and I knew that God was going to work in the land and not this land only, but the world.⁶

These nighttime prayer vigils were also accompanied by recurring visions in which Roberts felt God communicating to him that a hundred thousand souls would be saved in a revival about to sweep Wales. (The fact that it happened certainly seems to accredit the visions.)

Impassioned by his prayer and vision, and with the permission of his college principal, Roberts left his studies and went home to the village of Loughor to preach his first sermon. Apparently God had not given an accompanying vision to his pastor, who only reluctantly allowed Roberts to preach after the Wednesday night service to any who might choose to stay and listen. And so his first message was preached to a crowd of only seventeen and consisted of four simple points: confess any known sin to God and put right any wrong done to man; put away any doubtful habit; obey the Holy Spirit promptly; and confess faith in Christ openly. Roberts described the event: "At first they did not seem inclined to listen: but I went on and at last the power of the Spirit came down."⁷

The Spirit did indeed come down. Two women were overpowered by God's Spirit and began shouting. Roberts himself was overcome with awe, as people started yelling, "No more, Lord Jesus, or I die." Others cried for mercy, wept, sang, and praised God. This, together with "the sight of many who had fainted or lay prostrate on the ground in an agony of conviction," was (according to historian Eifion Evans) "as unbelievable as it was unprecedented."⁸

From that meeting and that college student, word spread throughout Wales and so did the awakening. Church historian J. Edwin Orr reported that within three months a hundred thousand converts had been added to the churches of Wales.

Welsh newspapers printed the names of those being born into the kingdom. Roads to the Chapels were lined with people. Colleges closed

down and students marched singing and praising God on their way to prayer meetings. Prayer brigades formed: one town boasted a get-out-of-bed prayer brigade where they would pray all night for God to rouse others out of their sleep, convict them of sin and save their souls. And indeed there were reports of people climbing out of their beds in the middle of the night, searching out a prayer meeting and crying out for the Lord Jesus to save them.⁹

Alcoholism dropped by 50 percent. Crime plummeted so much that some judges were presented with white gloves, meaning there were no crimes to try. There was even a work slowdown in the coal mines because so many workers became converted and ceased using profanity. How exactly would that cause a slowdown in mines? “The horses are terribly puzzled. A manager said to me, “The haulers are some of the very lowest. They have driven the horses by obscenity and kicks. Now they can hardly persuade the horses to start working because there is no obscenity and no kicks.”¹⁰

And all of this was simply the beginning. From Wales the 1904–07 Global Awakening jumped to England, Europe, the U.S., and then to countries all over the world.

Roberts was not afraid to stand up and proclaim the truth. The Spirit of God took the simple words of this godly college student, turned a whole nation right side up for righteousness, and began a spiritual awakening that circled the globe within the next five years, bringing millions to Christ.

Josiah the Confessor

Josiah was a man of prayer as well as an activist, a humble servant who honestly confessed his sins and the sins of his people. Upon hearing of the lost Book of the Law—

outrageously shelved for eighty years—not only did Josiah personally repent, but also he stood in the gap for an entire nation that was in grave danger of falling under divine judgment (2 Chronicles 34:19, 21). He confessed his sin and the sins of the people and then exposed them to the Word of God so that they might personally repent, confess, receive cleansing, and avert God’s judgment.

Confession means agreeing with God that our sins are wrong, that they are forgiven through Christ’s death, and that they are to be turned from (repentance). When we think of confession, we typically think of 1 John 1:9, the prominent New Testament passage on subject: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (NASB). But there is a biblical corollary to confession that is critical to revival. James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” While the focus of confession to God is on cleansing (1 John 1:9), the emphasis of confession to each other is on getting well, being “healed” (James 5:16). And that is what we see happening in revival.

Josiah did not try to hide his sin or disguise it behind a spiritual veneer. He did not try to blame others, rationalize it, or excuse it in any way. Rather, he sought out and embraced the very Word and Spirit that would convict and expose his sin. Of all the eclectic means and places that revival manifests, confession is one of only a few common denominators. We see confession at the outset of the 1904–07 Global Awakening in Wales, sparked by Evan Roberts: “It soon broke out when one of the proudest members of that assembly fell on her knees in agonizing prayer and unrestrainedly confessed her sin ... others followed rapidly with such spontaneity as to cause bewilderment.”¹¹

We witness confession as that awakening jumped the Atlantic to the campuses in America:

For three weeks ... teachers and students were lying upon their faces. ... Awful confessions were made. ... It began at twelve o'clock noon and went on until the next morning. Some tried to get away and not confess but they had to come back and go through with it ... when the confessions were over the mighty presence of God filled the place. We walked on tiptoe the atmosphere was so holy.¹²

And we see confession as the Global Awakening reached Korea on the other side of the world: "Conviction of sin swept the audience. The service commenced at seven o'clock Sunday evening and didn't end until two o'clock Monday morning, yet during all that time dozens were standing weeping, awaiting their turn to confess."¹³

And confession is the required action for all who would experience God's power in their lives and become the vessels of spiritual awakening and revival.

Josiah the Summoner of People

Josiah not only led the spiritual charge toward renewal, but he also persuaded others to join him in the cause. He was a mobilizer as well as a leader. "The king went up to the house of the LORD and all the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the Levites, and all the people, from the greatest to the least; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 34:30, NASB).

Josiah did not merely impart information or hand out marching orders. He read to the people from the Scriptures so that they might yield their lives to God. He called them to service in the kingdom, pleading with them to surrender their hearts to the Lord and to be His vessels of righteousness, holiness, and love. Josiah alone could not possibly do the work that God had given him to accomplish;

tens, hundreds, and thousands of others would need to embrace the Lord as well as the mission. And so Josiah summoned an army.

Summoning an army sounds daunting, but through the working of God's Spirit prompting the heart and prodding the will, we can do that. In fact, we have to do that. None of us is strong enough, spiritual enough, talented enough, or smart enough to be the sole channel of blessing for our campus or our community. We must call others to join with us.

And as others join with us, they too must become mobilizers, calling still others to be a part. By a few calling a few, who in turn call a few more, a great movement quickly builds. In fact, exponential growth defines a spiritual movement—I tell two people, and each of them tells two people, and so on, and so on. Such a movement can permeate every segment of campus, as a multitude of leaders reach the communities to which they have the greatest relational ties.

At Berry College (a private secular college in Rome, Georgia) an awakening occurred in the mid 1980s because two students summoned others. With little organized Christian activity on campus, these two men became concerned about the welfare of their fellow students. After reading this book, they decided to call others to prayer and to join with them in their efforts to see revival. By their own testimonies, nearly 10 percent of the student body was in small-group Bible studies within two years, and Christian meetings had quadrupled in size.

Think of it! This happened because two students decided to pray and summon others to be involved.

Spiritual Leadership

Here's the point. Spiritual awakening frequently starts with a few men and women who are willing to go out on a limb for Jesus Christ, praying fervently for spiritual awakening, courageously living out their convictions,

honestly confessing their sins and the sins of their campus and community, and fearlessly exposing others to the Word of God. And then they call others to the same challenge and task with which they themselves have been burdened. We become spiritual leaders when we step into these roles, as Josiah did, for these are the activities that define spiritual leadership.

Think back on Evan Roberts. He was only twenty-six years old; a mere seventeen people heard his first sermon; he had not finished his college degree; and he was not an accomplished preacher. Yet he was willing to pray, to preach, to be an activist, to confess, and to call others to join with him. God used him and the others he reached to bring a hundred thousand people to the kingdom of Christ and change the moral climate of his country.

It's important to note that spiritual leadership can and does look different depending on the time, personality, and person. There is an important backstory to the Wales revival led by Evan Roberts. The earliest spark to that revival occurred six months before Roberts gave his first sermon.

The Reverend Joseph Jenkins was holding a prayer meeting for the youth of Cardiganshire, futilely prompting the teenagers to share something—anything—concerning their spiritual lives. Into the awkwardness and silence a young girl named Florrie Evans spoke. Evans, a recent convert, stood and with a trembling voice gave this testimony: “If no one else will, then I must say that I love the Lord Jesus with all my heart.” Journalist W. T. Stead recorded the following: “The pathos and the passion of the avowal acted like an electric shock upon the congregation. One after another rose and made full surrender, and the news spread like wildfire from place to place that the Revival had broken out, and that souls were being ingathered to the Lord.”¹⁴

Roberts and Evans provide us an example, and encouragement, that any of us, and all of us, can be

spiritual leaders initiating revival and awakening. The apostle Paul said to Timothy, “Let no one look down on your youthfulness” (1 Timothy 4:12, NASB). And historically it may be more accurate, not to say that “God can even use young people,” but to say that “God usually uses young people” to spark revival. Let us never hide behind our own youth or inexperience. The time for spiritual awakening is now, and we can be the ones who will ignite it.