

The Ebb and Flow of Life

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Embry Hills currently seems to be in an “up cycle” of conversions. But at the risk of sounding pessimistic, we should not be surprised if we later enter a “down cycle” where it appears that few are interested in the gospel.

Mike Morrow, who has taught the gospel for a number of years in Prague (Czech Republic), recently wrote:

“We have been blessed with several new promising students during the past two months who continue to come for additional study. Even though the fields of our countryside are covered with the deep white version of our ‘global warming,’ in the warmth of our apartment the word of the Kingdom is being sown and planted in the hearts of men and women. Time will tell if they are good and honest ground that the Lord can accept. May God give the increase.

Most of our new students have come to us via newspaper ads. They are the same ads that we have been using for quite some time producing a smaller response, so we are perplexed as to why all of a sudden several people are showing a renewed interest in things other than the materialistic. We would certainly like to know the answer; maybe it is possible that with all the talk of a bird flu pandemic and the terrorist activity that is now spreading into Europe people are becoming more uneasy about their own future and the seriousness of what will happen after death?

I discussed this question with one young lady who has been coming, she told me she was coming to increase her faith. She had not been thinking very often in the past few years about spiritual things and has begun to feel empty inside, she wants to once again focus on the only thing that she has ever experienced that would give her real hope -- GOD.”

This seems to be a general characteristic of life. Seasons change. Illness is often cyclical. Peace and war swap places. And who can figure out the ups and downs of petroleum prices?! But strangely, even the spiritual climate of a culture changes, often rapidly.

At the peak of His ministry, Jesus was so thickly swarmed by Galileans and sojourners that He and His disciples couldn’t eat or were in danger of being crushed by the surging mob (Mk 3:9, 20). Yet a short time later, when perplexed by challenging teaching, the multitudes of interested listeners in Galilee evaporated. Even many disciples “*went back and walked with Him no more*” (Jn 6:66).

Perhaps most puzzling is the rapid turnabout by the Lystrans. Almost overnight, they went from praising Paul as a god to pelting him with rocks (Ac 14:11-19). And later, the three sweet, fruitful years that Paul had spent in Ephesus and Asia turned bitter: “*This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me*” (2 Tim 1:15).

There are unseen dynamics which are out of our control. Some of them are the result of human nature (i.e., the initial exuberance for the gospel in Eastern Europe swallowed by the glut of Western culture, perhaps now followed by a renewed spirituality). Some of them may be God’s will for or against a culture or nation. When we are bumfuzzled by either the ebb or flow of life, let us remember that the inner workings of this world are often veiled to us in the present. We should not overly praise ourselves during high cycles or be depressed by the low cycles. Rather, let us be steady and constant, doing the very things that God would have us do whether “in season or out of season” (2 Tim 4:2).