



## Everything Is Changing... So What?

By Dr. Gregory Wiens

As I write this, the news is broadcasting (and my iPhone keeps chirping) the celebration in Egypt over the resignation of Hosni Mubarak as president. I am amazed at how this regime was toppled in 17 days of unrest. It appears that this movement succeeded because they were not willing to compromise their freedoms. It did cost at least 300 people their lives during the past three weeks. Though the blood of martyrs fueled it, it was expedited through the social media. It began last month with a fruit vendor in Tunisia, so upset with the repression, lit himself on fire and started a move toward freedom for the common people in Tunisia.

Egypt was the largest and the most stable regimes in the Arab world. My intent is not to use this to elucidate my latest economic or eschatological theory, but to illustrate how rapidly our world is changing. The actual underground movement of revolt in these countries began on Facebook and Twitter in June of last year. It began with middle class educated young adults. Then it spread through all social classes and toppled the government in 17 days.

Think with me about the Kingdom implications for our generation. National governments are not only falling and changing, but the way people communicate, what they value and what they are willing to give their lives for is also changing. Many of our churches have little idea how rapidly the culture around us is changing; nor how these changes are radically impacting the way ministry will need to happen in our communities.

I am writing this article on a laptop connected to free Wi-Fi at Starbucks. Arguably, Starbucks' free Wi-Fi developed in much the same way that the revolt took place in Egypt. People began to complain and write about it on a variety of social media such that eventually Starbucks capitulated and stopped charging for its Wi-Fi. Now, no matter where I am in the nation, I can almost always find someplace to communicate to others through email and other forms of electronic media.

How much of what you do in your church has changed from ten years ago? How do you communicate any differently? Do you value similar things as you did ten years ago? How has your language changed? How has the way you relate to people in the body changed? How have you changed the way you lead?

I really don't like change for change sake. However, our world continues to change rapidly and we must continue to change our methods to keep pace. If your methods become wedded to a specific era, you will become a widower much faster than you would have fifty years ago.

If you would have fallen asleep in 1860 and woke up in 1910, you would still have found an industrial world. There would have been a few differences, like a few phones, automobiles and some electricity. But, the functioning of the family and values were not radically different. You would not have been lost after about two hours of being updated on the few changes that had taken place. Therefore the methods of reaching lost people and discipling found people really didn't change much.

If you fell asleep in 1960 and woke up today, it would be serious culture shock. Go watch an episode of "Leave it to Beaver". Our whole societal structure and values have changed dramatically and we live in a totally different manner. You can still live without a cell phone, email, or texting and you can listen only to music produced before 1960, but you would be ostracized from most of the population. Unlike a hundred years ago, it would take you years to comprehend the changes in the way people think. Because of this radical shift in the way life is lived and experienced, the methods we use in the church must CONTINUALLY be upgraded. These kind of things need to be continually rethought:

- The way people come to understand who Jesus Christ is
- The way people grow to be like Christ
- The way worship is experienced
- The kind of music we embrace
- The way we communicated with each other
- The content we communicate with each other
- The way we make decisions in the church
- What the people in the church value
- What we wear when we are together
- The language we use
- Our expectations of the time we are together

I also fully embrace that the gospel never changes, but the methods that we use will change as rapidly as our culture around us changes. The mission of the church hasn't changed for 2000 years, but every generation has to continually figure out how to fulfill that mission in their own generation.

Acts 13.36 tells us, *"For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed."*

It used to be much more stable and the methods that worked for our parents would work pretty well for us. NO MORE! What worked ten years ago, now is suspect. I have just completed a consultation with a church and they wonder why some new churches don't:

- Have Sunday night services
- Have Wednesday night services
- Have adult Sunday school classes
- Use the altars like we used to
- Sing all the old hymns
- Keep the lights up during the service
- Use the 52 dollar bill sized tithing envelopes
- Use "Church of God" in their names

All of these cherished and valued methods have developed within the last 150 years. Ironically, they all served a great purpose in the Kingdom and some still do. But they are still just methods.

I don't know how Egypt's change in government will impact our local churches, but it will. The challenge is for us as leaders to be continually aware of how our surrounding culture is changing and be willing to do whatever it takes to the never changing Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to it. As pastors and leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, this is what God has called us to do. It is not easy, but eternity for millions of people depends on it.