

By Craig B. Cooper



May

31

*Days
On The Church*

31 Days
on the
Church

By Craig B. Cooper

All Rights Reserved © Copyright 2012 Craig B. Cooper

ISBN 978-1-105-42011-5

www.craigbcooper.com

Published by Craig B. Cooper

Why is the Church Here?

Culture or Christianity?
Why Do the 1st Century Get all the Good Stories?
What an Awesome Day
Our Standard – Making Disciples
What is a Disciple?
Are You a Disciple?
Is Completeness Possible?
I'm on a Highway to Hell
Is the American Church on Steroids?

Who Is in Control?

What a Difference 2000 Years Makes in a Word
What is a Balanced Christian? – Part 1
What is a Balanced Christian? – Part 2
Where's The Passion?
Has God Become a Commodity?
Jesus, Inc.
McDonald's Franchise or Specialty Restaurant?
Familiarity Can Be Dangerous
2 Things I Hunger For in a Church
4 Group Worship Principles

So You Want to Work in the Church?

Apostolic Pastors
Prophets - The Gift of a Voice
So Which Prophet Do I Invite for Dinner?
Maturing of the Prophetic Ministry
Who are You? Really.
Whose Work are you Doing? Really.
If You Are a Young Minister
How to Appoint Yourself Into Ministry Without God
5 Steps to Become a True Recognized Minister

Final Thoughts

RISK – Where the Church is Heading
HEAT – Where Leadership is Heading
Why are we in a Hurry?

Why is the Church Here?

I am a believer in the Church, matter of fact, I am 100% for the Church. I have given my life to see Jesus' Church grow, become more mature, change culture, and to do what He has in mind to do with it. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Church is growing in it's influence, intimacy with God, and in power.

I believe the Church is one of the greatest things Jesus set up to further His family and principles on earth after His resurrection. Without the Church the earth would be an entirely different place. A place without as much hope, progress, freedom, and truth. Let's don't forget that Jesus is the head of the Church and as a result it is an awesome thing.

I believe that the Church is not a end unto itself. It is the primary tool to bring the Kingdom of God into the earth. Jesus' primary purpose was not to build a Church but the Kingdom of God. The Church is part of that Kingdom and it is the primary tool He uses to introduce the Kingdom to the World. So it is a necessary thing. For this reason, the Church needs to continually change as God's Kingdom grows on the earth. The Church – which is of course in it's simplest form Christians - needs to continually walk in more revelation and live out more of His principles in order to stay current with what Jesus is doing on the earth through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This booklet is a collection of 31 blogs out of 150 that I wrote over a 3 year period discussing where I think the Church is going, the types of leaders that are being raised up, on giving control back to Jesus, and other thoughts. This is not a book to be read in one sitting. I don't think it will be very effective if you do that. I think it would be a much better exercise if you took no more than 1 article or blog a day and meditated on that thought out the day. The goal of this book is not information but transformation of our life into making us the best expression of Jesus on the earth as His body that is possible. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you as read as what your part in the Church is. Enjoy the month and may your perspective on the Church never be the same again,

Day 1 *Culture or Christianity?*

In America there is a very large influence over our country. It is consumerism. Consumerism is where we define ourselves by buying things. We are bombarded by approximately 3500 ads a day. These ads are enticing us all day long to buy. They are telling us that we will be better off by buying their 'thing'.

Buying things is not bad. But at the core of consumerism is the message that it is about me. Trying to sell to me is everything. Trying to make me happy is the focus of advertiser's efforts.

What does this blog have to do with God? Only this, I have seen over the last 10 years a definite shift in the church's emphasis away from it's about God to it's about us. I have seen it become heavily influenced in how it 'sells' Christianity. In many ways the church has become just another one of the 3500 ads we see every day. We sell how Jesus will meet our desires. The Church often looks like another consumer product we are telling people they need and emphasizing how it will make them happy.

If this is true, it has huge ramifications. We have moved the focus of the gospel from following Jesus to Jesus following us.

Think about how we present the gospel these days or advertise a church? It often goes something like this: Come to our church and we will show you how God will meet all of your needs, give you a stable marriage, provide a steady income, and give you lifelong friendships. In many ways this is true. As you commit your life to God and apply His principles there are many of these consequences.

But what I am concerned about is who is at the center of our churches? Christianity is about Christ first. It is about following Him and doing His will. It is not about Him doing our will. Christianity is about the cross and taking it up to advance the gospel. We live for Him. He does not live for us. Have we, as consumers become the center of Christianity?

How do we pick a church? Many times it is the same way we pick a pair of jeans.

We ask questions like: What does the jeans/church do for my image? How will I look wearing/going to this church? Will these jeans/church meet my needs in life? Does the jeans/church have the correct number of pockets/programs?

Are we living out our culture or Christianity? May God grant us the wisdom to know. May we choose substance over style, reality over image, His presence over false perception.

*“Jesus’ call to discipleship clashes with every culture and every human heart. In the West, it confronts our modern/postmodern individualism. We are uncomfortable with a God who makes demands of us. We are uncomfortable with the idea that the Creator of the universe might have an opinion on how we should conduct ourselves. We recognize no other authority than ourselves. We do not easily come under the authority of the Scriptures or accountability to the body of Christ.” – Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity**

Day 2 Why Does the 1st Century Have all the Good Stories?

Why do the 1st Century Christians get all the good stories? I love the stories in the book of Acts. But I am ready for some stories of my own. I am ready to hear your stories!

I am amazed that Christianity spread to all of the know world in one generation. They had no forms of modern communication like MySpace, Fox News Channel, Facebook, Text Messaging, or IM. They also had no New Testament, Charisma Magazine, Christianity Today, TBN or CBN.

I am provoked.

It only makes sense that God wants us to walk in the same power and character that the 1st Century did. They, along with the life of Jesus, showed us the model of how Christianity is to be lived. I believe that it was God's will for each succeeding generation to take what the previous generation did to a higher level. I believe this was to continue until the Kingdom of Heaven was brought fully into the earth like Jesus prayed in the Lord 's Prayer (*Matthew 6:10*).

We have acted like all of the good stories are over. We have become satisfied with telling stories from the past.

I want to create stories that my grandchildren will tell. I want them to read them at bedtime and be provoked to create their own stories in their life.

I want those who follow me in life to read of my courage, my faith, my commitment, my miracles, my love, the things that I took from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the light. I want them to read of stories that could only happen because the Holy Spirit partnered with a person to transform the area around them.

God wants to raise up another generation like the first century where every Christian is full of the Holy Spirit. Where they have made the Holy Spirit Lord and walk in His fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. I want to see it everywhere and upon everyone. 200 decades between the first century and us is long enough.

There are four things that keep us from believing that we can write our own stories.

1. *People* - We tell ourselves, others tell us, religious well meaning people tells us that God doesn't move that way anymore. Jesus said to go and I give you all authority.

2. *Rough Times* – When we encounter resistance we often believe that it is God's will telling us to stop. No, it simply means that there is resistance and we have to fight to bring the Kingdom of Heaven into the earth. We continue fighting till our circumstances line up with our theology instead of lining up our theology with our circumstances. In *Star Trek - The Next Generation*, the Borg enemy had a phrase, "*Resistance is futile, you will be assimilated.*" Let's adopt this phrase towards our enemy, "*Resistance is futile, you will be assimilated.*"

3. *Offense* – When rough times come, if we don't realize that "*God is good all the time and the devil is bad all of the time*", we will blame God for rough times. When we blame God we will then get offended and distance ourselves from Him. When we distance ourselves from Him, we will distance ourselves from the power and insight to change our rough times. Offense is a vicious circle.

4. *Guilt & Shame* – The devil will torment you with your past mistakes. This is a tactic of the devil to stop you. After you confess your sins, others may remember, you will remember, but God does not. You are forgiven. So partner with Him to change your future and tick off the enemy!

It's time to create some stories. Resistance is futile.

Day 3 *What an Awesome Day!*

"Oh, darling, this place is wonderful!"

"Isn't it? It's the best restaurant in the city," the newly married bridegroom responded as he reached over and took his new bride's hand in his, "it's a great way to end an awesome day."

He continued, "You sure did look wonderful in your dress! I didn't think you could look any more beautiful but today you were stunning."

"Thank you," the bride said as she blushed. "Wasn't the wedding just lovely? And the amount of people that attended even surprised me. Every seat was taken."

"I can't imagine it going any better," answered the bridegroom.

There was an intimate moment as the two lovers looked into each other's eyes. The bridegroom finally broke the silence and gently asked, "Are you ready to go to the hotel room for the night?"

"Yes, let's go. Do you have the keys Jesus," the bride asked?

"Yes, my dear bride - my dear Church - here is yours - room 2041. I will be staying in 2043. Can I expect to see you again at breakfast in the morning?"

Why does it seem so natural for the Church not to be intimate with Jesus?

"We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face...." 2 Corinthians 3:13a

Day 4 Our Standard – Making Disciples

Look at what Jesus said in *Matthew 28:18-19* : *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*”

Definition of Disciple: “follower of person or idea: somebody who believes in and **follows** the teachings of a leader, a philosophy, or a religion”

Wow! Do I as a Pastor make disciples following the teachings of Jesus or just create loyal attendees on Sunday that believe in Jesus?

This command bothers me. I know how to create events to attract people. Make disciples? Not so sure.

I have been thinking about the difference between disciples and attendees for a long time now. I have a lot to learn. Unfortunately the more I learn the more I have to stop doing what I have already learned.

Here is some of what I have learned so far:

1. Jesus doesn't have a perfect Church attendance program. I don't think He cares.
2. Jesus was always running off crowds. If you don't believe me check out John 6:66 & 67.
3. Attendance and discipleship are not the same. Crowds don't mean depth. People listening to me teach don't automatically translate to transformation.
4. Making disciples can only be done in a very small group, preferably one on one. Teaching - impartation of skills - can be done in mass, but transformation can only be done one on one where the teaching is applied to the specific strongholds, thought patterns, etc. of a person.
5. The commandment was to make disciples. Teaching was a part of it, but only as a support to what we were supposed to do in following Him.

6. True disciples are made when we get to know one another without facades. You cannot help people find out who they are without first going through the slow process of getting to know them. A church can entertain or teach a lot of people. They cannot help people find their destiny as a disciple except through one on one encounters.

How does this work out in our modern day church institutions? I don't really know. But we are commanded to find out.

One place to start is to stop asking how many people come to your church every week. This is in reality a worthless number. I bet you that if I advertised that I was going to have a giraffe and an elephant on stage this week at my church do the tango together that attendance would go up. So what?

Let's start asking the question, how many disciples do you have at your church?

That's a question that will get us focused in the right direction.

Day 5 *What is a Disciple?*

What is a disciple of Jesus? This is an important question because a disciple is different than a believer.

Jesus said in *Matthew 28:19* go and make *disciples* of all nations. He did not say go and make *believers* of all nations.

If we are to make disciples and not believers then we need to know what is a disciple?

The definition of a disciple is usually one who ***believes like Jesus***. The common way Christian leaders make a disciple is then to teach someone all about the Bible and ensure that they believe those teachings. I submit to you that this ***is wrong***.

The Western culture believes that information is the key to everything - including making a disciple. This is a byproduct of the Enlightenment period of the 1700's that has so heavily influenced the West. While this period did bring many remarkable changes, it also brought the primacy of knowledge above all else.

A disciple is ***not one who believes correctly***.

James 2:19 says that demons believe correctly about God but they are obviously not disciples. Belief alone does not make a disciple. You can believe correctly about everything in the Bible and still not be a disciple. This may make you a great theologian or teacher, but not a disciple.

A disciple is one who ***loves and obeys their Master***.

John 14:15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

Luke 22:42 "...yet not my will, but yours be done."

Love and obedience are the mark of a disciple.

A disciple is one who follows His Master ***trusting*** that His Master knows best.

A disciple is one who knows that as He follows His Master he will **gain the knowledge** he needs when he needs it.

A disciple is one who **walks with** His Master and as a result comes to **know** His Master.

Correct thinking is important. But when you love and obey the Master He has His own teacher to guide you into all of the truth – the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:27). As you walk with the Master you will learn how He thinks. But just as important you will learn **to be and do** as He is.

This simple distinction of what a disciple is needs to be filtered through out all of Western Christianity. Our current programs of making disciples are **information based** methods of making disciples. We enroll new Christians into programs that are primarily composed of getting as much information about the Bible, God, ministry, etc. into their skulls as quickly as possible. We then have them recite this knowledge back correctly in some form. We then “graduate” them based on correct recitation of this knowledge.

This style of making disciples also limits who can disciple others to those who are extremely knowledgeable about Christianity and are also good **communicators** or teachers of that knowledge.

Biblical Experts are not needed to disciple others. Teachers are very important but they play a *supportive* role in the discipleship process. Disciple making does not end with teaching. Disciple making does not begin with teaching. We must teach people to get to know and love the Master first. We then teach them how to walk with Him on a regular basis obeying all that He tells us. This is the mark of discipleship. Anyone who knows the Master and walks with Him can disciple others. When a person is taught to walk with, love and obey the Master they will have the basics they need to grow as a Christian for the rest of their lives.

Love and obedience are the mark of a disciple. These two characteristics will turn Christianity in the West from an **intellectual pursuit** to one of **transformation**.

Day 6 Are You a Disciple?

According to many different surveys in America, around 90% of Americans believe in God and 86% say they are Christians. I have to ask the question does anyone believe this? I'm not sure I do. I can't say who is a Christian or not - that is obviously God's role. But let's give the benefit of the doubt and say that almost everyone in America is a Christian. Why do we have such crime and immorality then? If there are that many Christians in our country then the problem in America is *not evangelism* it's *discipleship*. What is the difference? Everything. I like the definition of discipleship from Mike Breen.

"A disciple is someone who, with increased intentionality and passing time, has a life and ministry that looks more and more like the life and ministry of Jesus. They increasingly have his heart and character and are able to do the types of things we see Jesus doing." - Mike Breen

Evangelism gets people into the Kingdom but discipleship trains them how to live in it. It is quite obvious that if 86% of Americans were over time taking on the life and ministry of Jesus it would be a radically different place. Jesus said in Matthew 28:19 to make disciples not converts. How radical of a thought is this?

*"Therefore go and make **disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"*

According to Matthew 18:19 the Great Commission is *discipleship not conversion*. Interesting. If we changed our focus from making converts to making disciples what are the ramifications, for our nation, for our church? I'm not sure. But this I know, America as a nation needs to be disciplined.

Day 7 *Is Completeness Possible?*

I remember a time when my vision for Christianity was for everyone to become saved. It was a good vision.

Then my vision increased. I started dreaming of people becoming saved *and* becoming dedicated disciples. It was a very good vision.

My vision is increasing again. I am dreaming of people being **complete**. Absolutely, 100% complete in every way. It is now an outrageous vision. So outrageous it is probably lunacy.

Completeness definition: *“the state of being complete and entire; having everything that is needed”*

This dream started with two verses.

The Apostle Paul said in *1 Thess 5:23 (NASB)*, *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved **complete**, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

The Apostle James said in *James 1:2-4 (NASB)* *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and **complete**, lacking in nothing.”*

Could it be possible for people's bodies to be disease free with no sickness, no mutilations, and no frailty?

Could it be possible for people's souls to be emotionally pain free, no torments, no addictions, restful, and healed from bad memories, with a bright outlook on the future?

Could it be possible for our human spirit to be at peace and have true communion with the Holy Spirit?

Paul and James asked for it. It's obvious their vision was bigger than mine.

Have I dumbed down my vision of Christianity and its power for the world? I am thinking I have.

So I am going to start asking for it for my family, my fellow church friends, and myself. I am going to start seeking the Lord on what are His ideas for fulfilling His vision of completeness for the world.

Think what the church could offer the world if we could offer completeness in addition to salvation?

Do you want to be admitted to the lunatic asylum with me?

Day 8 *I'm on a Highway to Hell*

Have you ever heard the secular song *Highway to Hell*? It was considered one of the most demonic songs ever when it came out in 1979 sung by the rock band AC/DC. I was 19 then and the song went on to become a mega hit in the West.

Here is part of the song:

*I'm on my way to the promised land
I'm on the highway to hell...
No stop signs, speed limit
Nobody's gonna slow me down*

In all truth it was a very demonic song. But I am proposing that it become the theme song of Christians.

OK, I probably just lost half the subscribers to this blog with that statement. With the half that is left think about this.

We teach Christians that we are on a straight and narrow road to heaven. That is true. But before we die let's do what Jesus said Peter was going to do in Matthew 16:18 – Storm the Gates of Hell!

Wouldn't it be awesome to be a part of a group of radical, supernatural, bold, wise, passionate believers bringing the true Promised Land at full speed to people's hell?

Just the thought makes me shudder.

Wait a minute, maybe that was hell shuddering.

Day 9 *Is the American Church on Steroids?*

Yes, this is an article about the American church and not baseball. But with all of the news about athletes taking steroids in the news, I seriously think the church might be taking steroids. Think about it.

Why would the church take steroids? Why do athletes take steroids? Self-promotion, ambition, to become big at all costs. Hmmm.....

As we know, the negative effects of steroids eventually catch up with the athlete.

Athletes that take steroids see their reproductive organs shrink. Hmmm... I'm thinking.

Athletes that take steroids do it to make their body – their outside - look good but their *heart* is developing major problems. Hmmm...What was the first commandment? I think I heard a sermon on that once.

Athletes that take steroids end up with damaged *joints*. Hmmm....who is that sitting in the pew beside me? What was their name?

Athletes that take steroids develop a mentality of unreasonable *expectations*. How many church leaders have heard this one, "I know there are 23 programs in the church but I need one more for my need"!

Athletes that take steroids damage their physical eyes. Have you heard this one in the church? We don't want the prophetic gifts they run people off. Hmmm...no prophetic...no see into the future.

Athletes that take steroids focus mostly on the *short term* gain. Tomorrow? We will worry about that...well...tomorrow.

Strange blog, I know. Why did I write this? If you or your church feels the pressure to be big and good looking because the fans love big and good looking, get off the steroids.

That's all for now, the pain is too much for me to continue writing. Going through withdrawal will do that to you.

Who Is in Control?

Jesus in Ephesians 5:23 says that He is the head of the Church. I know this intellectually but in practice I often take over and want my Church to be run how I want to see it run. In addition, I want to decide what is best as a leader and then get Jesus' blessings on my plans. Am I the only one? Hopefully.

Jesus the last few years has been letting me know that if I want Him to show up at my Church then I have to let Him call the shots otherwise He won't show up. He is wanting His church back. I can't blame Him since He died for the Church and I didn't.

When God started showing me all the ways I wanted to run the show – I mean Church – it was really brutal. I know about pruning but this was not clippers time but ax time. I am still very much in this process and hopefully you can learn some from my journey so that you can be spared the ax.

I am starting to realize that much of what I do is because of my ambition and not His. I am also starting to realize that Jesus' vision of His Church is so much bigger and more powerful than I ever could do on my own. Slowly, I am becoming the junior partner and letting Him as the Senior Partner and Owner lead the Church.

Enjoy the blogs in this section and let Jesus show you how He wants His Church you are involved in to let Him lead.

Day 10 *What a Difference 2000 Years Makes in a Word*

What do you think of when I say the word *order*?

What do you think of when I say the word *order* in respect to your relationship with God?

There are two opposite ways to view the word *order*. It can have two directions in respect to a person. An *order* can come *to* you or an *order* can come *from* you.

In 2000 years the word *order* in respect to our relationship with God has taken a 180 degree turn. It has moved from a word that comes *to* us from God to a word that comes *from* us to God.

As Americans we are used to ordering things. We order food at a restaurant, we order prescriptions at the drive through line, we order our employees to do something, we order our children to behave, and we order clothes through the Internet. We are indeed a blessed society. We get to order a lot of things. We like ordering. We are good at ordering.

In many parts of American Christianity, Church and God is just another place we order things. Instead, of the Coca-Cola logo on the vending machine at the store the Church version of the vending machine has a picture of a dove coming out of a cloud on it.

The church has encouraged this vending machine mentality. Our auditoriums are full of the 'vending machines'. Matters of fact, the churches with the most vending machines have the biggest crowds. Most of our sermons and programs are describing our use of getting things out of the vending machines. We like ordering at church. We are also good at ordering at church.

I want to submit to you that 2000 years ago the Church did not know what it meant to order God. Instead, God ordered them.

Mark 16:15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

Do you realize that the most common name of God in the Bible is the 'Captain of the Hosts (Army)'? Captains give orders, they don't take orders.

Now, I have done more than my fair share of giving orders to God. I have gotten some of the best ways to give orders to God from the Church. And you know, not once, did He ever obey. I even did it with faith, in accordance with His Word, with power, and might! He still didn't move. He usually waited for me to get through ranting, spitting, yelling, declaring, and then would say something like this, "You move with me, not the other way around, Private. The only orders I obey are the ones I give to you."

I have enjoyed life so much more since I have stopped giving orders to God. There is more peace since I started asking God what His orders are for me. He loves fulfilling my orders when they first come from Him. It's an amazing thing.

"God, one last request for the day, can I have a Big Mac, Fries, and a large Coke, with that better job"?

Day 11 *What is a Balanced Christian – Part 1*

I have said to myself numerous times as a Christian, “I need to ‘stay balanced, be careful, are you sure you should be expressing your Christianity that way’”. As a Pastor, I have had many people say that to me about our church.

Can I make a confession? I have grown to hate this statement. The Holy Spirit is showing me how it is just my excuse to not follow Him.

What does it mean to be a balanced Christian? Good question. If I am honest this is what it means to me: not doing something different from what I am doing now. I assume that I am either already a balanced Christian or pretty close to it so I don't venture out into new territory.

I hate to admit it but it's true. How pitiful when I think this way. It's sad to think that I have reached the pinnacle of Christianity and understand it all.

As I look at the gospels and think about how Jesus modeled how a Christian walks I realize I am using the ‘balanced’ argument to justify my pathetic power and bashful boldness.

As I look at how God is moving in Christianity around the world I realize I am using the ‘balanced’ argument to justify the lack of God's presence in my life.

As I look at the looks of horror on people's face when I get passionate about God I realize my argument of ‘balanced’ justifies my cultural Christianity.

As I look at the circumstances that I must change if I ‘pick up my cross daily’ I say, “Craig, you had better watch out, keep things in balance.”

I have come to realize that “keeping things in balance” is simply a code word for status quo.

The devil is scared to death of change in our life. He has convinced me of the same by saying, “if you are not careful you may end up in error.”

The fact is I am already in error.

Jesus told me in His last statement before He ascended to Heaven in Matthew 28 & Mark 16 to heal the sick, cast out demons, speak in tongues, have no fear of poison or snakes, disciple nations, and exercise authority.

Jesus' Great Commission is ridiculed as not balanced in most of Western Christianity. I would love to see Jesus' face and remarks if a Western Christian told Him He just needed to be balanced or He may get off in error.

I have another confession to make. I am not balanced. In the scales of Christianity I am so weighed down by my thinking and way of life that I wonder if there is any of God's way of thinking on the other side of the scale. I don't have to worry about getting into error, I am already there.

I am no longer scared of becoming unbalanced; I am scared of never getting there.

Day 12 *What is a Balanced Christian? – Part 2*

Yesterday I confessed that I was unbalanced and in error as a Christian.

What would it look like if I was balanced?

I propose to you 2 'weights' that are equal in importance, cost and value. When these two weights are put on each side of the scale they will cause the scale to be balanced. I will be balanced when I have the full portions of each weight.

Those weights are the two things the Holy Spirit brings when He comes inside of me when I am born again. These two 'weights' are the things He wants to teach me. These two weights are the things that gave the proper balance to Jesus as He walked with the Holy Spirit on earth.

These two things are the Holy Spirit's fruits and gifts. The fruits are one side of the scale, the gifts are the other.

The fruits are (*Galatians 5:22-23*): *Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control.*

The gifts are (*1 Corinthians 12:8-10*): *Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Healing, Miracles, Prophecy, Discernment, Speaking in Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues*

9 Fruits. 9 Gifts. Perfect Balance.

If I flow in *all* of the gifts without the fruits I am unbalanced (*1 Corinthians 13:1*).

If I flow in *all* of the fruits without the gifts I am unbalanced (*John 3:2*).

If I flow in *some* of the gifts and *some* of the fruits I am becoming more balanced.

The Holy Spirit is working to get *all* of the fruits and *all* of the gifts active in my life.

Only then will I be balanced.

Until then, I am simply an unbalanced Christian seeking balance.

Until next time, seeking the scales of balance.

Day 13 *Where's The Passion?*

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' Matthew 22:37

I remember the first time I was challenged by this verse. I was 25 and the Lord asked me to raise my hand during the worship service at church.

Worship God with all my heart, soul, mind, and body? You have got to be kidding? That is not dignified. What will others think? What about my flesh getting out of control?

Truth be told, I was scared to death. My flesh didn't have to worry about getting out of control, it was firmly in control! Finally, I raised my hand.

After the initial wave of extreme self-consciousness passed I felt awesome! I felt free! I had never experienced worship like that before!

I have been thinking that one of the most damaging enemies to the Kingdom of God is not Satan, its *Controlled Christianity*. As a Church leader I ask myself, why I spend so much time organizing well run programs when what we really need is *Matthew 22:37* encounters.

Why do we as Ministers focus on perfect services instead of creating encounters? I know one excuse I use is that God wants us to be *excellent*. The problem is that I don't think He means the same thing as we do by this phrase. I believe excellence of spirit is what He wants and not a perfectly timed production.

Another excuse is *let's not be too weird or we will offend the visitors*. So instead of mirroring the amazing passion Jesus has for His bride the service mirrors the *controlled* love for God I have. Visitors get enough productions from Hollywood. I think what they really want is something real and worth being passionate about.

A *Matthew 22:37* encounter takes all I have. Passion is raw. Passion is exhilarating. Passion is not perfect. I will sacrifice anything for what I am passionate about. I think that is why Satan talks me out of it.

I am learning that Christian performance drains me and perfection kills me.

When I see someone spiritually *naked* before the Lord in worship it makes my flesh uncomfortable, so I keep my *clothes* on. Meanwhile, I don't realize I have become spiritually barren like Michal who was embarrassed by her husband David's nakedness as a result of passion (2 Samuel 6:16). It offended her.

I can offend others or I can offend God with my lack of passion towards Him. I can look good or I can become intimate with God.

I want to see a whole church full of passion! Not an individual but a whole church! When that happens something is going to be birthed! The world is looking for something to believe in that's real.

In the natural you can't reproduce without intimacy and it's not fun without passion.

So who cares who is watching anymore?

It's time to take the spiritual condom off our spiritual lives.

Day 14 *Has God Become a Commodity?*

Definition of Commodity: “useful thing: something that people value or find useful”.

We have figured out Christianity in America. The book stores, blogs, and sermons are filled with titles like ‘3 Ways to Hear God’s Voice’, ‘5 Keys to a Successful Marriage’, ‘Understanding the Holy Spirit in 5 Steps’, ‘Being a Better Parent within the Week’, and ‘10 Steps to a Successful Ministry’. I myself just recently spoke on ‘3 Things That Compete Against God’s Voice’.

We in Christianity read just like the ‘Self Help’ aisles in the book store or sound like the Motivational CD’s they sell in the early morning hours on TV.

What I want is a God I can’t figure out.

What I want is a God where I don’t always get the answers I want.

What I want is a God that is so big that I experience the infinite.

What I want is a God that is so large that it causes my imagination to run wild.

Yes, I want principles and 7 steps to success. But more than that, I want a God that causes me to experience wonder and awe.

I don’t want a God whose only value to me is His usefulness to me. He is not a commodity I use like salt, copper, gas, or food. He is to be revered not used like a vending machine.

We need imagination. We need transcendence. We need the unknown in Christianity. Why do we feel we have to explain everything? He is not a calculation that we perform when we need something. He is more than a grocery store and pithy proverbs.

We are so good at distilling everything down to a formula. But sometimes I don’t need a formula. I need power that blows my formula apart. We have removed the unknown from God and replaced it with security in statements. Unfortunately, I think we have taken

away the power and presence of God in the process. We have many of His principles but little of His presence.

Where is the mystery? Why pursue mystery when it is easier to have a genie in the bottle.

Just a thought...

Day 15 *Jesus, Inc.*

If Jesus had been an American He would have trademarked, copyrighted, patented, branded, and incorporated Himself.

If Jesus had been an American He would own the domain www.jesus.com, I AM TV Channel, Fly to the Skies Airlines, Miracle Vitamins, and Whole Healing Food Stores.

If Jesus had been an American He would have written *How to Ascend in Power in 3 Days*, *How to Grow Rich through Fishing*, and *How to Start A Catering Business with 5 Loaves and Two Fishes*.

If Jesus had been an American think how much more He could have changed the world!

“In the beginning the church was a fellowship of men and women centered on the living Christ. Then the church moved to Greece, where it became a philosophy, Then it moved to Rome, where it became an institution. Next, it moved to Europe, where it became a culture. And, finally, it moved to America, where it became an enterprise.” - Richard Halverson, former chaplain of the United States Senate

Day 10 *McDonald's Franchise or Speciality Restaurant?*

I am finding that Churches are rapidly becoming 1 of 2 types - either a McDonald's type of franchise or a specialty restaurant.

McDonald's is the largest restaurant chain in the world. It is very desirable to be this big to a lot of people. Nobody would say their food is at the top of the review charts but big is always good isn't it? McDonald's got big because of the franchise concept. The franchise concept is where other people own the restaurant besides McDonald's but they have to follow strict systems and procedures to insure consistency of experience. Go to any McDonald's restaurants in the world and they are basically all the same.

I am seeing this same philosophy in the Church world. There are many conferences, denominations, and individual Churches telling us the franchise formula for how the biggest Churches in America does things. So since they are big we assume that it is the way to go. Our success depends almost solely on being big. Right?

We are told there is a formula of 'rightness' in America that if you follow it you will be big like the biggest churches. We don't ever stop to evaluate whether our criteria for success is even right. We just go to more conferences and read more books hoping to find the next thing to 'tweak' in the system that will ensure lots of people come in the door to get another Big Sermon or Quarter Pounder Youth program.

I have studied this model quite extensively. It's not bad. The biggest Churches in America implements this franchise formula. I can within about 5 minutes of visiting a Church tell you if they are following the franchise formula. Again this isn't necessarily wrong, but surely God has something better in mind than all of us trying to copy the few successful Churches in America. The fact is that most Churches that implement the franchise formula never see the success they desire.

The Church franchise system imitates the same 4 core principles that McDonald's uses. They are: Predictable (No Surprises), Fast, Convenient, and My Way. My Way means that while you can't order Spaghetti you can order a standard product like a Big Mac without

pickles.

We can build a Church with these 4 core principles but the problem is that God does live by these principles. If we insist on a Christianity with these 4 core principles we will get some American hybridized version of Christianity that the original Apostles would never recognize.

Jesus the head of the Church is not predictable. He never did a prayer or miracle or healing the same way twice, creation is incredibly varied; even people are quite different all over the earth with different personalities. Here are the McDonald's values being adopted by Churches vs. God's model for Churches (in my opinion).

McDONALD'S VALUES
Franchise Church

GOD'S VALUES
Creative Church

Predictable
Fast
Convenient
My Way

Orderly - But Not Predictable
Slow Cooker vs. Microwave
God's Time Table Not Ours
His Way vs. My Way

What would Christianity in America look like if we did away with the Franchise mentality and asked Jesus how He wanted to build each individual Church? What would they look like if they were orderly but not predictable, events happen on His time schedule, we adjust our lives according to His timetable?

It is much harder to do it this way but you will get a better meal. Don't you like visiting those out of the way restaurants that the locals rave about? I know I do. But it will take creativity, risk, and breaking out of what is the definition of success.

Day 17 *Familiarity Can Be Dangerous*

I go to a great church and I am involved with a great group of people. I am sure you do too. Many times we experience God and His presence in a wonderful way. It's fantastic and I don't want to be doing anything else.

But the other day I found myself being bored in one of our church services. This bothered me because I knew God was manifesting Himself but I was still bored.

Later on in the week the Lord spoke this simple word to me through another brother, "Familiarity can lead to apathy."

I immediately knew that was true in my life. Fortunately, I have come to experience God's presence quite often, so often, I was taking Him for granted.

I often do this with the Bible. Have you ever read a passage so many times you don't pay attention to it anymore?

When you know a part of God or His Word so well that He doesn't fascinate you anymore it should scare us. It means our familiarity with Him is leading us into apathy.

Has your wonderment left? Has boredom set in? It happens to me. Step back at those times, repent and ask God to give you a fascination with Him again like it's the first time. Pretend like you are a little child seeing some new part of the world for the first time. I guarantee you that the fascination will return.

Familiarity can be dangerous, but it doesn't have to. It should lead us to greater intimacy.

Day 18 *2 Things I Hunger For in a Church*

I live in a part of the world where Churches are expected to be a cross somewhere between an Activities Center, Theater, and School. While all of these things have their benefits in the end what do I want in a Church?

I do want a church with good teaching, wonderful music, and programs for my kids. But if I had to distill down what I would die without these would not be it.

There are 2 things I hunger for: the Presence of God and a sense of Family among my brothers.

These 2 things are the only things I cannot do without.

These 2 things are the only things that last forever.

These 2 things are about relationship.

These 2 things cannot be created by a great organizer.

These 2 things are not an event.

These 2 things require humility and the supernatural.

These 2 things give meaning to life.

What do I remember as the high points in my 51 years of life? Almost entirely they are memories with people and God – not a movie or an event I saw. I want to create more memories with God and with people.

As a Church leader how can I do this? I am not totally sure, but I know that humility and the priority of relationships over time and events is a place to start. I long for upper room experiences like were found in Acts 2. I long for encounters with God and *with* others like the 120 who were in the upper room *together*.

I am convinced that few Christians in America have ever truly been in the presence of God. I have not met Him enough myself but I desire to change that for me and for others. This is a value we often say in

phrases like “I am going to go to Church to meet God.” But most of the time I find myself *hearing about* God and not meeting Him. I know it can only happen if we are not in a hurry to go somewhere else and give true opportunities to encounter Him.

How do you describe God’s presence? It’s hard. It’s not a meeting as we typically define it but a meeting with an awesome, loving, holy Person. When you leave God’s presence you can’t really describe it. But once you have been in His presence you want nothing else from then on. You are spoiled as to what ‘meeting with God’ means.

The other thing I hunger for is family, true family as described in the Bible. Have you noticed that the concept of family with brothers and sisters is all through the Bible? Even in the New Testament where we get a glimpse of what the early Church was like it was often best understood in family terms. God is a family God! What does Biblical family mean? Here are some ideas.

Family is where we don’t have to pretend we are anything other than what we are.

Family is where we don’t have to worry about whether we will ever see each other again. We know we will, for better or for worse!

Family is where each member’s joys and pain are shared.

Family is where we are free enough to admit we need help and we receive it.

Family is where we are a member no matter how we act.

Family is people that we enjoy hanging out with and expect to at all major events!

The presence of God and a sense of family – these are the things I hunger for in a Church. How do we make that happen? I am on a journey to find out but I have experienced it enough to know that I will never be satisfied with anything else. This is why I am still involved in the Church as a leader. I want to see these two things I hunger for be satisfied in me and my family.

Day 19 4 Group Worship Principles

Worship is such a big subject. Think about it, if someone asked you to define worship what would you say? If you started asking people what their definition of worship was you would probably get a different definition from every person you asked! The interesting thing is that every one of those people would have a part of what worship is. Worship is something we are to do in every area of our life.

At Relationship Church one of the unique things about our Sunday morning gatherings is our worship. Why do I say this? Every newcomer mentions this as the most unique thing about our Church. Hopefully that is a good thing and not just a 'different' thing.

Last Sunday I shared with the Dalton congregation 4 guiding principles of our worship on Sunday. I wanted to share them with you too in case you weren't there.

1. Prophetic Not Predictable

Prophetic is a word I use to mean listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying. We want our music – as well as the message – to be prophetic. That means if the Holy Spirit decides to change up a song, add a new song, move into freestyle worship we are open to that. That means that the song list could change which would mean that our worship would not always be predictable. We don't want to change for the purpose of change. But we also don't want to follow a song list no matter what!

What does that mean for the worshipper in the audience? If a new song or a spontaneous song is being played the words will not be on the projector. There may be times when there are no words as the musicians just play allowing our thoughts to dwell on God in whatever matter works best for us.

What does that mean for the musicians/worship leaders? They have to stay flexible and listen to the Holy Spirit for modifications while they are playing.

For all involved it means a higher level of grace, flexibility, and maturity.

2. Excellent Not Professional

We want to be excellent in all that we do. That means for musicians/singers they are the best musicians/singers they can be. Their instruments/voices are in tune; their timing is correct, etc. When I say professional I am not talking about people getting paid for what they are doing. Professional to me is someone who considers the actual act of performance as the main thing. The main thing is to bring the people into the presence of God. That means the worship team has to truly worship God themselves as they play they can't just have a great performance. If that is the case we end up watching them and not meeting God.

3. Messy is OK

When people actually worship and not just watch it is often messy. Messy means people may cry, dance, shout, etc. When you truly meet God different things can happen to different people. We are not advocating a behavior that draws attention to ourselves but at the same time meeting God doesn't always fit into a nice 'right behavior' package. When Mary poured out her expensive bottle of perfume on Jesus' feet it was different, expensive, and definitely messy.

4. Purpose of Worship is His Presence

Our pursuit is not worship. Our pursuit is His presence. All worship's goal is to end up face to face with Him! Admittedly we don't always get there but our criterion for a good worship time is not how well everyone played or sang or whether we liked the songs. Those things are important but the judge of how well a worship time was did the Presence of God come into the building and our lives.

Worship On!

So You Want to Work in the Church?

For change to be lasting it needs to flow down from the leaders and not upwards from the members. This is true for any organization including the Church. So guess what? Jesus is shaking and shaping the leaders that report to Him. These leaders go by many titles in the modern Church but include Pastor, Senior Leader, Bishop, Deacons, Elders, Evangelist, Teacher, etc. There is nothing wrong with these titles but Ephesians 4:11-13 shares with us the names of the leaders who are directly accountable to Jesus. These names and their functions are new to many people but here is a list of them.

Ephesians 4:11-13 "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Part of what Jesus is doing is redefining these positions according to His insight and subsequently giving us increased insight. It is a privilege to follow Jesus but keep in mind that the Leaders have to change the most since they are the ones that have to lead the Church in that change. With the added insight given by Jesus much responsibility is required.

The next few blogs gives some thoughts on some of these positions and how to become a leader in God's timing.

Day 20 *Apostolic Pastors*

What do you think of when I say the word *Pastor*?

It's often warm thoughts about comfort. I hope so any way. Pastors are to be comforting.

But I am afraid some American pastors have put all of their emphasis on comforting and not much else.

Many Americans think their pastor's main job is to make them comfortable and well fed. If they don't do it...well...as the saying goes, "*it was nice knowing you.*"

As a result, American sheep don't ever stop getting fed and rarely get any exercise. So we end up with extremely fat sheep. So fat they often can't move when God tells them too.

God is raising up a new type of Pastor with an apostolic anointing. In layman's terms that means they work with an Apostle who rubs off on them.

The word apostolic means building for a purpose. Apostolic pastors are going to be different than a traditional pastor because they have a purpose in mind - for you.

Apostolic Pastors are more than paid adult baby sitters.

Whoaaa. There I said it. I feel better. Good thing you can't fire me. Don't put this book down either. You are pumping soul iron right now.

Sheep that are used to the traditional American pastor are going through some good changes as God releases the new breed of apostolic Pastors. Here are some:

- They will not change your diapers forever. They will help you learn how to do it yourself by passing you the diaper to put on when you need them.
- Help you develop muscle by finding and exercising your gift. When you hit the playing field, they will be your biggest cheerleader.

- Help you tackle root causes of problems in your life and not just your *felt* needs. They are looking for lifetime solutions.
- Teach you to prophecy and not just phone 1-800-PROPHECY.
- Bring you into true maturity and not just give you enough to maintain.
- Be conquerors and not couch potatoes!
- Do all of the above with great love!

Oops, my pastor is calling and asking something of me, got to go.

Day 21 Prophets – The Gift of a Voice

I like prophets. There, I said it.

It feels good to come out of the closet. I have been a closet prophet lover all of my life.

I know most people want to be friends with a prophet like they want to see the dentist but not me. Prophets are some of my best friends.

I don't know if something traumatic happened in my childhood that made me this way or not. Until recently I didn't even know what a prophet was. But as I look back I always hung around people who had the calling of a prophet. Strange, I know. It gets worse.

I pray for more prophets ... All the time.

We do have a dress code at our church. Sorta. Prophets have to be modest. No camel hair loin cloths (Matthew 3:4).

Also, when they go to lunch with my family and me they can't order locusts to eat. Have you ever smelled fried locusts? I live in the South - everything is fried. I don't like prophets that much to smell fried locusts.

Why do I like hanging around prophets? I finally figured it out. It's their voice. Think about it? What do prophets actually do? I'm a little fuzzy on all that they do because I am not a card carrying prophet. They won't let me in to their monthly association meetings to find out.

I actually paid the Whitfield County Prophet's Association dues one year and tried to fake my way into their meeting. Guess what happened? They knew. Lesson learned - you can fake out pastors and evangelists. You can't fake out prophets. God likes to tell them things. Take it from me don't try to go to one of their monthly association meetings if you aren't invited. It's not a pretty picture.

But what do they do? They don't preach. They say a few sentences and then this hush comes upon everyone. It really messes up what the bulletin says is supposed to happen next.

They rarely write books. When they do, they usually don't sell well.

They don't make good counselors because most people want their locusts with lots of chocolate on them. If you haven't noticed, there are no Biblical references to Prophets eating locusts with chocolate.

Prophet's do voices. To be more accurate - one voice. John the Baptist, who announced Jesus' arrival, is described in *Isaiah 40:3* as, "*A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God."* John was being the voice of God.

I love hanging around prophets. Their voice - their gift to the Church and me - is stating what is on God's heart. They are the mouthpiece. The true prophet's voice speaks God's thoughts and is one of the best gifts in my life.

The voice frees me from my past and points me to my destiny.

What better gift is there? Why do people run from prophets like they have leprosy? Why do church leaders push them down and try to make them behave? I'm not really sure. Honestly. I want to be free from any part of my past that is holding me back. The voice is like a knife that cuts junk off of me. I want to know all the insight I can get to walk in my destiny. I crave God's voice in whatever way I can hear it.

I want to modify what Dr. Spock would say on the old TV Series Star Trek. "May prophets live long and prosper."

Invite a prophet over to dinner this week. You can eat the locusts with honey.

Day 22 So Which Prophet Do I Invite for Dinner?

OK, I will invite a prophet over for dinner but how do I know which one to invite? My first response is, "it doesn't matter who, just any prophet. You'll have fun."

But don't take my first response as your guideline. There is a standard for the invitation list. Let me give you a few guidelines. Consider it as a new entry in Emily Post's *Etiquette* book.

First, there are three types of prophets. Actually, these types apply to all of the 5-fold gifts (*Ephesians 4:11*). But pastors always get asked out to dinner so we are just going to talk about prophets.

There is the *true* prophet. There is the *foolish* prophet. There is the *false* prophet.

You definitely want to have over the *true* prophet. This equals maximum blessing. But don't ask them to say the blessing over the food because it will turn into a 2 hour intercession meeting for your neighbors.

You want to invite over the *foolish* prophet too. But just remember, it's more for them than you. They need somebody to practice on. You definitely don't want to invite a *false* prophet. They always give you heart burn later. Matter of fact, you will probably have stomach problems for the next few days. *False* prophets are definitely not on the invitation list.

So how do you know who is what? Well, in all honesty, I have to admit it is more art than science. But here is a few things to look for.

True prophets. These are mature people who truly exhibit the nature of God. They are definitely not perfect but their character and fruit have been *proven over time*. The Bible is full of them with names like Ezekiel, Isaiah, and John. Their voice does not come from their own thoughts or the body language you are giving off.

Foolish prophets. These are young, immature prophets that have *not* been *proven over time* (*Ezekial 13:3*). They are young in their gift. You can consider them in training.

They are not bad dinner guests they just haven't finished prophet school yet. You can always tell a young prophet because they act like they are a full-fledged member of the County Prophet Association. But don't believe it. They only have a student ID card from the local School of Prophets. When they start talking about their credentials you can rest assured that they are young prophets. When you notice this, just smile over your plate of chicken at them and say, "That is nice; would you like some more tea?" Then proceed to weigh carefully everything else they say. Most of it is going to be their voice and not The Voice.

But definitely have them over for dinner especially, if you are a good counselor. For a young prophet to become mature he needs someone to help him deal with their wounds, personal issues, or probably pride because they know how good the gift is in them.

False prophets. These are former *foolish* prophets that would not let God develop His voice in them. Simply, they refused to give up their voice for The Voice.

How can you tell? When you are around a false prophet you are more enamored with them than what God is doing. False prophets like to bring attention to themselves especially by 'doing' spiritual things. It's not that you don't respect 5-fold gifts, but a false prophet will end up bringing more attention to them than to Jesus. At their core it's about their position in the kingdom. That is why they never graduate from the School of the Prophets.

They have a hard time working with a team unless they are the lead. Will they listen to the others on the team? Especially the ones who are senior to them? If not, save your dinner invitation for your pastor. You can always watch the Comedy DVD you got for Christmas with him.

Well, enough of that. Get back to your dinner menu. Remember, that New Testament prophets can eat pork. But one word of caution, the prophet Ezekiel (*Ezekiel 3:1*) ate a scroll. So don't leave any of your nice Bibles around when they come over. I lost my favorite pocket edition at a Christmas dinner one year.

Day 23 *Maturing of the Prophetic Ministry*

I was first introduced to the gifts of the spirit – including the gift of prophecy – in 1984. I spent the next 15 years in the Charismatic movement. It was more than a great time, it changed my life, it changed my theology, it changed the way I walked with God. It even changed how I expressed that relationship.

One of the most prominent parts of the Charismatic movement was the introduction and proliferation of the gift of prophecy. It is one of 9 gifts given by the Holy Spirit (*1 Cor. 12:7-10*). I have received many prophetic words (the fruit of the gift of prophecy) and given many prophetic words in my life. This gift has been a constant source of blessing to me as *1 Corinthians 14:3* says it should, "*But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation."*

I have noticed that the prophetic words that God is giving to me from others and those that I am giving myself are undergoing a change. The best way that I can describe it is they are encouraging people towards maturity. I have listed below four ways I see that the words are encouraging maturity in people.

1. Moving from just blessings to an emphasis on building. It is showing our responsibility in advancing kingdom principles in our lives and others (*Matt. 16:18, 24-25*).

2. Moving from just an emphasis on an individual's call to an individual's place within the local church. It is showing our part in the greater whole.

3. Moving from Survival to Strength. This is moving from an emphasis of settling to an emphasis of expansion. The goal is for people to become a pillar in God's work.

4. Emphasize on Obedience that leads to Maturity. The Holy Spirit is expecting us to obey and ask for direction on how to carry out the prophetic words that we get. We are not to accumulate them like good luck charms, but to use them as sources of strength and confirmation to continue to run the race with excellence (*Psalms 119:14-16*).

I am encouraged by the changes in direction I am seeing. It means that our God is maturing His church and growing us up!

Prophesy On Holy Spirit!

Day 24 *Who Are You? Really.*

Do you struggle to be like someone else? Do you wish you could have the influence of someone else? Do you wish you had the affirmations others get? Are we imitating someone else?

I imagine we all do at one time or another. I know I do. As a pastor I find myself comparing who I am to the greats – Mike Bickle, Rick Joyner, Joel Osteen, Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, etc. It's hard when all we often hear is how awesome these other guys (or gals) are. The facts are that these people are having an influence in the earth. We all want to have an influence. None of us want to live a life that has not made a difference.

The answer to making a difference is not imitating others. We don't need another Rick Joyner, Mike Bickle, Jack Welch, Bill Gates, Jack Nicklaus, Harrison Ford, John McCain, Joyce Meyer, or Rush Limbaugh. One is enough of all of these people.

The world needs you. Be yourself. It's all right. You may not be famous, but the world still needs you. You need to be you.

Too much stress goes into comparison with others. We will never win that game. Don't put on the uniform and don't let others force you into a game you can't win.

Get your affirmation from being who you were created to be. Get off of the treadmill of comparison. It's one that will kill you because you never stop running.

We can admire others and the qualities in them, but apply those qualities in the way most comfortable to you.

Admire the handiwork of how the Holy Spirit moves in others but don't imitate it. Ask the Holy Spirit to move in you the way that is you.

Who Are You? Really.

Do you like who you are? Why not? God does.

The Holy Spirit likes who you are. Ask Him to help you to be happy, content, and enjoy who you are. God has made something really amazing – you – let it out.

Don't settle for imitations.

You don't look good in other people's skin.

Day 25 *Whose Work Are You Doing? Really.*

Jesus said one of the most powerful statements ever for ministers. It should be engraved on every Bible College building, our brains, Church buildings, and training program missions statements.

"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do." John 17:4-5

Did you notice the last part - *you gave me to do*?

Can we honestly say as ministers we are doing the work *you gave me to do*?

I can honestly say that I don't often want to do the work *you gave me to do*? Do you ever struggle with this? I know I do. It's hard to come to peace with who is the boss.

I often struggle with the assignment that comes from the Father.

I often struggle to get the assignment changed.

I often struggle when the assignment is not in the mainstream.

I often struggle because I know I have to pick between the Father's approval and man's.

I often struggle when the assignment from the Father is not popular.

Can I say I am fulfilling the work the Father gave me to do?

Jesus said He did it all that was assigned Him by the end of His earthly life. Paul said the same thing in 2 Timothy 4:7. I want to be able to say the same thing.

In order to do so I have to stop asking several questions. These include: What do *I* want to see done? What do *I* want to see done for God? What do people I minister to want? Instead, all of my questions must be reduced to just one: What does God want?

Are you willing for the Father to do whatever it takes to fulfill His purposes in your life?

Easier said than done.

It means only asking my Father what does He want and not caring about the rest.

It means that the end result will not look like what we think it will look like.

We have only finite eyes that are trying to discern the infinite.

Ministers, give him permission.

The voices in the earth are loud and try to drown out the Voice in my spirit.

We all want to see the glory of God. But some of the glory will be withheld until we complete the work He gave us to do. Some of the glory has been delayed because we often do what we want to do.

May His Glory Come!

"Many of us do not go on in our spiritual life because we prefer to choose what is our right instead of relying upon God to choose for us." - Os Hillman

Day 20 *If You Are a Young Minister*

20 years ago I left my position as an associate pastor. Actually, it was the 3rd associate/assistant pastor position that I had worked in during my 20's. I was 31 and I would spend the next 3 years in transition moving to Dalton to start a Church where I would be the Lead Pastor.

This article is to give younger ministers some pointers on how to still be ministering in 20 years with the fire of God. Before I give you these pointers I want to point out that during my entire ministry career I have had to be a bi-vocational (working a full time job elsewhere). This is important to remember because many ministers my age are only still in the ministry because it is a job and they don't have the skills to get an equivalent paying job anywhere else. They are in the 'ministry' but the fire has gone and it is now just a job. I can quit ministering anytime so I still do it because I want to (at least most of the time ☺).

Warning, this post is not a feel good, 'go gettum boy' talk. It is straight talking. If you are easily offended then don't read on!

5 Things for a Young Minister to be Successful for the Long Term

1. Learn to Truly Submit To the Leadership Above You Even When you Disagree

It's hard to see when you are young but the times when you disagree with your leadership about methodology, direction, etc. that the issue in disagreement is not the important thing. It's not about who is the best gifted (or the most anointed if you are a Charismatic) it's about character and humility. God leads you into these situations on purpose because He is testing you to see if you will be a servant or do you have to be the 'man' or be 'right'. If you don't pass this test arrogance and intolerance will follow you the rest of your life. If you fail this test you will have to 'promote' yourself after that because God won't until you pass this test. King David was anointed as a teenager but he was not made King until he was out of his 20's because he had to learn that God promotes because in God's kingdom your gift, calling, or latest marketing page is not enough for Him.

2. Honor and Respect Those Who Have Been There Before You

Believe it or not in a decade or two you will be one of the so-called old ones. No one has accomplished anything without the help of those who have gone on before them. Do we have something new from the Lord? Maybe, probably, but the ministers that came before you were also given something 'new' from the Lord and if they hadn't been brave enough to do their 'new' thing you would have never been able to do your 'new' thing. The kingdom of God is built brick upon brick. When you think that the whole world revolves around you then all you are doing is showing your immaturity.

3. *Learn Endurance*

Paul told Timothy to learn endurance like a good soldier. I can guarantee that all the rest of us have to learn it too. Until you have been in the ministry (just being a Christian doesn't count) for at least 3 years and have had multiple opportunities for failure, offense at others, and offense at God you haven't even started to learn endurance. Anybody can last 3 years just based on adrenalin and newness of what you are doing. Harsh? Maybe, but do you want to be around 3 decades later? Then you have to learn to do things even when you are sick, it's not fun anymore, you don't feel the anointing, and everybody has left your ministry. It has been my experience that 3 years is a minimum before you get to enroll in this program.

4. *Learn Ministry Skills*

Everybody likes to watch young ministers when they first start out. They are not usually near as good as they and their mothers think they are. But we like to be around them because their zeal makes up for any of their mistakes. This is God's grace.

But zeal *alone* on a 40-year minister is no longer attractive. We need to keep our zeal for all of our life but zeal alone has its limits. While you are young and full of zeal and you are in the grace period look for mentors who are good at your calling and learn from them. Buy every book and go to every conference you can afford to get better at your calling. Then when you are 40 you can be both full of zeal *and* good!

5. *Learn Relationship Skills*

If you want to last in the ministry you will have to develop good relationship skills. Your skills in teaching, music, etc. will not guarantee success in the long run. You will have to learn how to love, speaking with, listening to, negotiating, and loving people. Why? Because

ministry is about people and people is about relationships. Most young ministers that start out in their 20's as Lead Pastors usually fail during their first one or two pastorates because of relationship skills. Preaching makes up at most 3 hours a week – Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. So what are you going to be doing the rest of the time? Ministering to people one on one or in small groups. My experience has been relationship skills are harder to learn than how to teach.

Well, that is enough for now, probably more than enough.

Day 27 *How to Appoint Yourself to Ministry Without God*

Matthew 22:14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."

1. Many are called By God
2. Many answer the call of God
3. Many are then enlisted by the Holy Spirit in His training school
4. Many withdraw from the Holy Spirit's training school before graduation
5. Few are then chosen by God
6. Many promote themselves into ministry any way calling it God

Day 28 *5 Steps to Becoming a True Recognized Minister*

1. Do what God has given you a desire to do.
2. Stay teachable.
3. Do it with a team.
4. Fruit will follow that confirms your calling.
5. Over time others will recognize your calling publicly.

Please make out all checks to Craig Cooper.

What?

I just saved you the cost of going to seminary in order to get recognized.

Final Thoughts

This is the most exciting time to be in the Church ever! I truly believe that. I imagine that the 1st Century Church was exciting too but I believe more is happening right now than was happening in the 1st Century Church. In Acts 2:41 when Peter preached 3000 people were saved! This was an amazing start to the Church but some Missions experts believe that as many as 3,000 people are being saved per hour now! That's even more amazing.

All around the world Jesus' Church is advancing. Miracles, Healings, Deliverance, Resurrections, etc. are happening all over the earth. It is estimated that as many as 1 in 3 people – over 2 billion people – confess to be Christians! Compared to the 1st Century Church it is evident that the Kingdom of God is moving. In the final 3 blogs I have listed what I believe are some characteristics of Christians and Leaders that God is forming in us as His Bride.

The Bride is another word for the Church. The Bible uses a lot of different metaphors for describing us. These include soldiers, athletes, farmers, living stones, temple, and Jesus' Bride. Bride is a great metaphor because it implies that we are to walk close to Him and we have a special place in His heart. God the Father is raising up a Bride – a Church - for His Son that is going to be in love with Him, know His voice, walk with Him, help Him do exploits, and partner with Him to expand His kingdom. It is truly a great time to be in the Church and the most exciting days were not 2000 years ago in the 1st Century but today.

Day 29 R.I.S.K. – Where the Church is Heading

I like to describe broad ideas, movements, and direction in one word.

For instance, I like the word *Restore* to sum up the whole Bible. See blog... for thoughts on this word.

Simplistic? Oh yea. But the simplicity of 1 word can often plant an idea that will motivate people to see things from a different perspective inspiring further study.

I believe where Jesus is taking His Church in this time can be summed up in one word – **RISK**.

RISK. Now that is a word that I have never heard used with Christianity in a long time.

Risk is usually used with adventure, new business ideas, bold plans, and game saving athletic moves.

It's time to use this word with Christianity. What better adventure, idea, or plan is there than true Christianity?

The one word I would describe Western Christianity is definitely not *RISK*. It would probably be *COMFORT*.

But it is going to take *RISK* to bring back a culture shaking, life changing Jesus to the West.

Let me give to you some thoughts on what I believe are 4 values Jesus is wanting us to take a *RISK* on.

R – *Relationships*. Intimacy with Him and others.

I – *Intercession*. True *hungering* after Him and His heart.

S – *Supernatural*. God wants to give His *super* to our natural.

K – *Kingdom*. The King wants His values in us *everywhere*.

What do you think? Are you ready to take a *RISK*?

Day 30 H.E.A.T – Where Leadership is Heading

Here I go again, I have another one word acronym to describe something. In my last blog I described in one word where I believe Jesus is taking His Church - *RISK*.

This blog describes in one word where I believe Jesus is taking the leadership of His Church.

The word is **HEAT**.

If you are a leader in the Church you know that God has been turning up the heat on us for quite a long time. He is the God of fire and I have definitely been feeling the burn. I only wish I could lose the same amount of physical weight that I have been losing in my soul!

Leadership *HAS* to change in order to take Christians into *RISK*. We are where we are at in Christianity because this is where our leadership has taken us.

But don't be distraught, new and changed leadership is coming forth now.

While the assignment of each leader is different the values they work by are similar. I propose to you 4 values Jesus is instilling in those who lead His church.

H – *Honor*. Respect, Appreciate, and Celebrate what others are Doing.

E – *Empower*. Extend Opportunities, Resources, and Oversight to Others.

A – *Atmosphere*. Create an Atmosphere for His Presence First. *Spirit Sensitive Church*.

T – *Team*. Relationship, Accountability, and Gifts are the basis of Ministry not Position.

Each Initial is worthy of at least a paper if not a book. But for now we will stick with just the one word.

It's time to turn up the *HEAT* and eliminate *COLD* Professionalism.

Are you feeling it getting hotter?

Day 31 *Why Are We in a Hurry?*

We had the music part of our service one time go 1 hour and 15 minutes. When it was over no one could believe it went that long and I was one of them. It was a wonderful time of being in God's presence.

The Contemporary Church model in our country says to keep the entire service to 1 hour and 15 minutes! It is commonly believed that no one will stay longer than that let alone spend that whole time in worship. Unfortunately, I have to agree that the majority of Christians won't worship God that long but I have to wonder why?

Is it because we approach Church like a fast food meal at McDonald's? I know very few adults that get excited about going to McDonald's. They go because it is quick and fills the hunger pains.

I wonder if we do the same thing with Church? We go to Church because we have a few spiritual hunger pains but let's make it quick in order to satisfy our hunger. So we are in and out in as fast as possible. The quicker the better. Can we get a drive through service?

What is the place of Church in our society? That too me is the bigger question. Is it a place to satisfy spiritual hunger at a basic level or should it be more? Is Church that bland that we want to hurry it up and get it over with like a meal at McDonald's?

We don't do this at nice and expensive restaurants. We will wait 30 minutes in line on a Friday night to get a table at a nice restaurant. We don't get in a hurry even ordering our meals. We take our time perusing the menu anticipating what the different entrees may taste like. We don't rush in and say I will have the Combo Meal #1 with Diet Coke.

Are we not doing this sometimes with quick Church?

With our order we will often get an appetizer and then spend one hour just eating and talking enjoying the event with our friends. It is then often followed up by a second ordering time of getting a dessert followed up by more talking and coffee. Obviously we like doing this and we will spend a lot of money on top of that.

Can Church be like a fine meal instead of a happy meal? I think so but

it is going to take a change of expectation on the part of the worshippers and the chefs – leaders – in deciding to change what they serve.

On a conceptual level shouldn't Jesus deserve more worship and if we really met Him in worship I don't think we would mind staying there! Are our Churches that bland and boring? If they are, no amount of technology or cool environments is going to cover up for long that we are still eating a Happy Meal followed by a Hot Apple Pie. A McDonald's restaurant is still a restaurant even if they have a playground.

As a leader I think we have 2 problems in the American Church. First, a discipleship problem where people don't want to worship God probably because they don't really know what that means and have never seen true worship. Second, we often lead people into the presence of the church's cool environment/awesome speaker/whiz bang technology/latest band instead of into His presence.

I know we are all trying hard to get people to come to our services but maybe that is the wrong approach. Maybe we need to work hard at getting the presence of God to come to Church then teach our people how to act when He comes. When people truly start worshiping God and loving being in His presence it is one of the best evangelism tools available. I pray that the Church becomes passionately in love with their Bride Jesus. This would be truly revolutionary and the enthusiasm from that will propel the Church even faster around the world!

What's Next?

Continue partnering with Jesus to make the Church – His Bride – all that He has envisioned it to be. He is the Senior Partner, the Head, but we are His body. He has chosen to work with us to accomplish His purposes on earth. Helping make the Church into the pure white powerful Bride of Jesus is one of the most noble calls on earth. As we are doing this we are giving Jesus a Bride that is able to walk with Him and we are helping ourselves in the process since we are also a part of the Bride. It's a win-win situation for everyone.

How do I do this? Ask Jesus regularly what He has in mind for His Bride and how we can help. It's an exciting journey that is full of challenge and adventure.

Enjoy the journey and let me know your thoughts!

Craig Cooper

About the Author



Craig is married to Susan Lührman Cooper; a proud Father to Abigail, Grace, and Israel; a Software Developer; and Founder/Pastor of Relationship Church.

You can get more information about the author, his family, blogs, church, books, articles, etc. at www.craigbcooper.com.

Other Books by Craig

How to Walk with the Holy Spirit

How to Be a Religious Demon

Can Women Minister to Men?

Breaking the Darkness Over Control, Rejection, and Poverty

11th Dimension

31 Days to Maturity

Foundation Training Manuals

Encounter! - Book 1

What happened to you when you got saved? This manual has 7 lessons helping you to discover the awesomeness of that event.

Disciple! - Book 2

There are truths every disciple of Jesus needs to know. This manual gives you the top 10.

Minister! - Book 3

Do you know what your gifts are? Do you want basic ministry skills? Do you know how to minister with a team? This manual starts you off with 14 lessons to help you get going.

Lead! - Book 4

What area of society does God want you to conquer for Him? What leadership skills and attitudes are necessary to see it happen? Read this manual of 12 lessons that will give you the basics to conquer and lead.

Group!

Do you want to learn how to lead a small group? Do you want to help others find their calling and walk in it? Then this manual with 12 lessons will definitely help you to get there.

