

BY CRAIG B. COOPER



TO MATURITY
DAYS

***31 DAYS
TO
MATURITY***

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** Disclaimer fine print (You know there always has to be more than just one fine print). Any resemblance to person, places, or events that these blogs may make you think of is probably right. I have not tried at all to hide anyone's identity. If they were foolish enough to do it then the world deserves to know. It's the least that I can do. How else do you become mature except through extreme embarrassment?*

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31 DAYS TO MATURITY!

TESTIMONIAL

I have tried it all. Literally. With the amount of effort that I have expended to become mature I should be a spiritual giant by now and have written the 67th book of the Bible.

Instead my closet is packed full of self help maturity books, a *How to Grow Your Soul* workout machine, and various long distance bills to 1-800-GETFRUIT hotlines. My wife is threatening to call the county to come and condemn my closet.

On the third shelf of my closet is a year's supply of *8 Pills a day to Maturity* nutritional supplement special that I heard about on late night Christian TV. Do you realize how much space 2920 pills in 120 bottles take up? They promised that I would pack on the maturity pounds right away. I guess I should throw them away because I couldn't make it past the first week. With each 8 pills you had to drink 2 ½ gallons! Water evidently is a symbol for the Word of God. It took me all morning to drink 2 ½ gallons! I was constantly late for work. All I can say is that I'm sure that it works for some but it was just too much work. I want my soul to mature not my bladder.

One of the more promising times I had in my journey was when I joined the local chapter of *18 Step Maturity Group*. We met each week and were to hold each other accountable to read our Bible and not sin. Unfortunately all it did was teach me how to sin better. I couldn't believe what people did. I had no idea. I grew up in a Christian home. I decided to leave the group when people had to come to my jail cell to hold me accountable.

The last thing that I tried to gain maturity before I came across this amazing book you are holding is the *5 Steps to Maturity Workbook*. I figured that surely I could do just 5 steps. Was I a wimp? Of course not! Immature, yes, wimp no. I could do 5 pushups so surely the \$39.95 special from the ad in the back – way back - part of the Christian magazine would be no problem for me. And boy did I tear up the packaging when that bad dude workbook came in the mail. I spent all evening reading the first page. Actually all there was one page. Remember it was just 5 steps. You can say that easily on one page.

After a week I threw the page, I mean workbook, into the garbage

disposal. I couldn't get past the first step of *Capture Every Wrong Thought*. I mean really? How do you do that? I guess I should have bought the expanded workbook for \$19.95 more because I didn't catch a wrong thought all week. I tried sneaking up on them, openly scaring them, calling them names and nothing worked. After spending \$48.28 at the local Home Depot store on glue traps, mouse traps, rat poison, bug insecticide, and finally a custom PVC contraption that *The Discovery Channel* would have been proud of I gave up. I just didn't think I had the patience or the bank account to make it through 4 more steps. I guess I was a wimp.

But then one day I saw a shining light in the sky and I heard a voice that said read *31 Days to Maturity!* It was neat to get a voice like that but I didn't think that God sounded like Goofy the Walt Disney dog. They say that He moves in strange and mysterious ways. It would have been easier to pay attention though if it hadn't been a shining disco ball light. I'm not complaining though because it changed my life.

But seriously, maturity nirvana has now come my way. Ask anybody, as long as it is my Mom. All it took to achieve my prowess was reading 1 of Craig Cooper's blogs every day for 31 days. Every day you will feel the soul strength growing. You will find new brain synapses connecting under your pillow when you wake up every morning. It's better than the tooth fairy when you were a kid.

I have no idea how the program works but it does! It's sorta magical. Sorry, the publisher says I can't say magical in a Christian book. It's sorta spiritual. Wait a minute the publisher doesn't like the word sorta either.

I don't know how it works but it does! Just read one blog a day for a month and you will become a mature monster like me. These 31 blogs are from the first 150 blogs my hero Craig wrote over a 3 year period about becoming a mature believer. Just look at him. He's my ideal of a maturity monster. Don't tell anyone but if it can work for him you know it has to work for you.

Yours Truly,

Skeeter

THE FIRST 7 DAYS

Becoming mature is hard work, even with this book. So I start you off a little bit easier the first week. The first 7 blogs are a lot lighter. Some say they resemble helium but I prefer hydrogen because when you bring a match around it you get a big bang affect. Hey, if it was good enough to create the world (just kidding!) it's good enough for your beginning.

Remember go slow. I really don't recommend that you workout with 2 blogs in the same day. There have been reports of cerebral hemorrhaging in extreme cases of weak Christianity and believe me I can't afford a law suit. Matter of fact, I can't afford any kind of suit, maybe a blazer but definitely not a suit.

The publisher says I have to say the following:

Please check with your Pastor before beginning any fitness program. If you have any of the following conditions a counseling appointment with him is highly advised before starting:

- *A passionless heart.*
- *You are pregnant with sin.*
- *You have no back. Commonly called Spineless Syndrome.*
- *You have trouble breathing when the Holy Spirit's wind comes around.*
- *You smell strongly of smoke from your frequent trips to the outskirts of Hell.*
- *Severe muscle pain around the jaw when you try not to talk.*
- *You are obese from gorging on too many episodes of American Idol.*
- *You are over 45. (I don't know why I said that. I am just trying to cover all the bases.)*

Please note: The price of this book does not include the love offering required for the counseling session.

DAY 1 *Have You Ever Prayed for the Fire of God?*

Have you ever prayed for the fire of God? I used to. It sounded so cutting edge spiritual.

I wanted to be all that God wanted me to be. **“Lord, bring your fire! Consume us,”** I would pray loud and long.

I don't really know what I was thinking. I guess I thought that literal fire would come out of heaven and burn up all the sinners and burn out all the sin in my friends, or some version of that. Maybe I thought I would see flames of fire dancing around the auditorium like God did for the Israelites in the wilderness.

I now realize I was clueless.

I don't remember exactly when the fire came. It was such a small flame at first that I barely noticed. But I knew I wasn't cool anymore. My friends didn't think I was cool either.

Believe or not, as the flame grew in my life I had to ask what it was. I was looking for something else. Not really sure what, just something else. I ended up telling the Lord that I didn't like all of the heat and pressure that was now coming into my life. Have you ever done that? **In all honesty, I was much blunter with God.** I said something like this, “what are you doing?” Followed by, “why me?” Finished by, “when is this going to be over?”

I didn't like all of the burning up of things from my life. In hindsight, the removal of things was the easiest part. It was the burning up of me that was causing the heat blisters. The flame started moving around in my soul and burning up motivations, attitudes, pride, and even my purpose.

I am still being burned up. Evidently there is a lot of wood to burn.

Most everybody knows I am being burned up now. **I look like the ashes in a camp fire pit.** It's not glamorous. I won't make the cover of *Christianity Today* anytime soon.

The problem is that most people think it's the devil getting his way with me. If only that was true, I could rebuke the devil. It's hard to rebuke what you prayed for.

I am praying that the oxygen supply will give out soon.

How are your heat blisters?

DAY 2 *I Need a Soul that can Lift Weights*

My soul is so wimpy. I need to start lifting some soul weights to get it stronger. I am tired of getting 'sand kicked' into my mind, will, and emotions. This has got to end. I would love to have a buff, muscled, lean, and mean soul but how?

I'm not totally sure. But here is my current workout routine that is helping.

1st Workout Station – Do the Right Thing ... Always!

This workout machine is killing my soul. Always? That is the part that makes me feel like I am dying.

2nd Workout Station – Replace Fat Flab with Alive Muscle

But I like my fat. Well not really. But I do like my French fries, mashed potatoes, ice cream, wimpy worship, addiction to multimedia, and pasta that produces fat.

Broccoli? No way. Capture my thoughts? No way. Wait a minute; I wasn't supposed to say that.

3rd Workout Station – Find God's Presence and Stay There

I used to think His presence was just to be entered into on Sunday at the anointed faith filled church that has the cool logo and latte bar. But lately God has been showing me at this workout station that He is around at work and at the mall. Strange concept but I am being diligent to look for Him wherever I go.

I am improving. I did notice Him at Dairy Queen when I was getting a large blizzard ice cream. Wait, was that God or a sugar induced coma.

4th Workout Station - Beat Down Pride and Stay Humble

This workout station is basic instructions in the martial arts. I am learning to do karate chops and high kicks against my enemy called Pride. My instructor tells me that I have to ruthlessly punch him while thanking God for my real strength.

Some days I do pretty well but I can hardly walk today because I pulled a ham string muscle on the last high kick.

Oh well, there is always next week. Till then I am getting breakfast in bed from my wife. Bless her Lord!

5th Workout Station – Practice Spiritual Disciplines

My personal trainer tells me that what I do in my off time adds greatly to my workout sessions. He tells me to get plenty of water through the word, focus my concentration with meditation on the Lord, and let my prayers be continual. He says these are disciplines that must be a part of my life outside of the gym.

OK. I can see his point. But I did get strange looks while standing in the line at the grocery store praying. The check out lady made a manager come over while she put my stuff in the bags. What's up with that?

6th Workout Station – Repair Wrongs You Have Done

My cholesterol and blood pressure is too high. Do you have this problem? It seems to afflict many people. My doctor says that I have to get the bad stuff out of my body. I told him, "Ok, take it out."

He just laughed. He told me, "You have to take it out by getting the poisons out of your body through changing your bad behaviors." He continued, "Apologize to your body for mistreating it and start treating it correctly."

"You mean I have to ask forgiveness for the wrongs I have done and make it right," I asked?

"Yep"

"Whoaa....that is rough."

"I know. You can do it. Please pay your bill at the front counter."

As I walked out the doctor's office with a bill that I thought was too high, I thought, "This workout stuff is harder than I anticipated."

DAY 3 *Death is so Inconvenient!*

I have been ministering for over 30 years. Yes, I know that you must be thinking that with all of the wisdom I have it must be longer.

But no, I started working in small groups 3 decades ago as a freshman at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Who would have ever thought that I would have ended up in a church of small groups? I guess it is obvious now, but it wasn't then.

As I look back at that young man of 18, I remember myself as very zealous, passionate, arrogant, and no experience and not realizing it.

As I think about these 30 years my biggest regret has been seeing how many people have stopped ministering for God that once were on fire for Him. Many of these were my friends. Most have not lost their personal relationship with Him they just stopped reaching out to others in ministry. The percentage of people that have done this is higher than I want to admit.

As a leader I regularly think about this. I want to know how to lower the percentage that drops out of the race. In their daily walk most don't leave God but they never make it to their destiny either.

The reasons that people say they pull away are as varied as the number of people. But surely there has to be some root cause underneath the reasons? I want to propose to you what may be the root. As the presumptuous man of 18 I once was I feel that I am even more presumptuous at 48. But here are my thoughts...

I think the root cause is *death*. Yes, death – or the lack there of to be more precise. There is a paradox in the Christian life that I do not understand. On one side you have God promising blessings and giving you prophecies. On the other side, God tells you that the way up is down, the way to leadership is servant hood, and the way to heaven is through the death of the cross and I am to take up mine daily.

Death is simply inconvenient. I don't like dying. It is not fun and I see little benefit in it. Let me share with you 3 deaths I have noticed all great men must pass through. Deaths that are very inconvenient.

I am a bucket of appetites. I want to eat, have fun, be fulfilled, look good, and a thousand other cravings all of the time. Many times these appetites take control and God loses out. I don't like dying to them. Frankly, it gets old killing myself all of the time. I feel like a bucket with a thousand dagger holes in it. I know this is discipleship 101 but the **first death to appetites** is so inconvenient.

The **second death** is dying to a vision God gave me! This seems so unfair. As we grown God gives us a vision of our destiny and purpose. This is exciting – for a while. Then He comes and wants it back! This is truly strange by my human understanding.

For example, God promised Abraham a son and a great nation through him. As an old man, Abraham finally gets his promised son. Then guess what? God wants the son back! He asks Abraham to kill the son that He gave him! God is very strange. But I have personally seen no exceptions to this process. God always asks back what He gave you. “God gave me the promise, why is He taking it back”, you ask? I will leave that to you to figure out, but it always happens. Many people won't give God His vision for us back. This is so inconvenient.

After all of this, I must **die a third time** to getting offended at God. Doesn't it make sense to get mad at God? As a human it does. My appetites, which I didn't ask for, are raging. I then follow God and He makes a promise that looks like He is going back on. Why shouldn't I be offended? He definitely doesn't make much sense. “Normal” people don't do this. I still love God, but I am mad at Him. My mind is reeling. Death to offense is much more painful than I ever imagined. It is gory and traumatic. It messes up my plans, emotions and goals.

I guess it all comes down to submission – with a good attitude. I know this is a morbid subject...but **the people that I admire the most are the deadest**. May we continue to walk as dead people – and become the most alive at the same time. You go figure it out...I can't.

Death is so inconvenient.

DAY 4 *How Do I Know When I am Dead?*

Yesterday I wrote how we need to die at least 3 deaths minimum. Rough I know. But remember you are the one that wants to become mature.

Since yesterday I have wondered how would I know when I am dead? You know, not physically, but the part of me that is me, the part that gets in the way of God.

I have a partial answer. Quick aren't I?

*Romans 6:11 (NIV) In the same way, count yourselves **dead** to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

Dead men don't sin.

Dead men don't have stress.

Dead men don't have opinions.

Dead men don't get offended.

Dead men don't get angry.

Dead men don't have to give their side.

Well, since I have done all of these just in the past month, I guess I'm not dead yet.

I think I must be on the slow budget priced death plan. I need to upgrade to the premium death plan and hurry up and die. I'm ready to plan my funeral.

I wonder how I could speed it up? But, I am afraid if it sped up anymore I might die.

Still alive and kicking. Unfortunately.

DAY 5 *Shaking*

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, Hebrews 12:28a

Christians are right in the middle of being shaken. He is making you into a king for His Kingdom. Shaking means everything about us - body, soul, and spirit is being prodded, moved, and rearranged in order to see what is of Him and what is not. What remains 'stuck' to us is Him. What falls away is not.

Shaking is a part of His success training.

Shaking is when God says there is too much stuff in our life and it's time to get rid it.

Shaking is when God says there are too many distractions and it's time to become single minded.

Shaking is focusing us on what He wants us to do.

Shaking is removing from us the things that we thought were important but He doesn't.

Shaking is about showing us things that we presumed were from Him but are not.

How do you know if you are being shaken? Have 'things' fallen away from you? This includes activities you used to do, beliefs you used to have, friends you used to hang around with, possessions you used to own, or even dreams dreamed? If yes, then you are being shaken.

Shaking is a God thing. Shaking is a good thing. The short-term pain is immense but the long-term gain is equally immense. He is shaking everything loose that He didn't put there. We accumulate many things in our journey through life. Some of the things we accumulate we got without ever really realizing it. Other things we intentionally picked up.

The current shaking is violent and prolonged. But rest assured, you will not lose everything. What will not be lost in the shaking are those things that we heard from Him and then did. Everything else if we will let it happen will be removed.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. Matthew 7: 24 - 25

What does building on the rock mean? Doing things Jesus asked you to do, nothing else. These are the only things He wants to remain.

I know for myself many things are falling away from me. I feel lighter, more open, and transparent. I also feel naked, vulnerable, and a little frightened.

God walks very simply. He walks with great purpose. But He travels lightly. He is getting us to the same place.

Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, Hebrews 12:1b-2a

Shaking won't last forever. Eventually you will be left with what He put and wants in your life. At that point the shaking will stop. He is bringing about the prophetic promises on your life and positioning you for inheritance! Let's run lightly.

DAY 6 *Where Does Potential Go? Seduction and Offense*

I have seen many people lose their potential in God, too many.

I have seen people walk away from God because of obvious sin at one extreme and others drift away because they lost their passion on the other extreme.

Lost potential is probably the saddest thing for me to see as a leader in the church.

As Christians there are so many promises given to us. These promises come through the Bible, God speaking to us, and individual prophecies. These promises speak of our potential, the potential that God wants to see us walk in. I don't know how many Christians actually achieve their potential. But my observations are they are few. Where does the potential go?

Potential is lost in the process.

Potential takes 3 steps. In the first step we get a promise for a specific area, then we must go through the process, and then we arrive at our potential. Promise leads to process which turns into potential.

There is a process to inherit the potential for our promise.

People often don't survive the process.

Matthew 22:8-9, 11, 14 "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' ... "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ... "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

This passage is talking about salvation. But we can use the same principle taught in these verses to illustrate achieving our potential. When we are given a promise our clothes must be changed into the appropriate clothes that we must wear to walk in the promise. When we are given a promise, we are immediately enrolled in the School of

the Holy Spirit to give us a new set of clothes to be worn when we get to our destination – the promise.

The promise only speaks of what can happen! Not what has happened. We must change clothes first. This means we must change habits, behaviors, motivations, so that we are able to walk in the promise. This changing of clothes is what I call the process.

I believe people lose their potential primarily for two reasons: First Seduction and second Offense. While they are changing clothes and dreaming of the promise, the enemy brings either seduction or offense into our lives to derail us.

Seduction is the enemy's counterfeit promise. He tries to offer you something appealing to get you to substitute his promise for God's promise.

There are three main seductions that I have seen Christians fall into. The first two, are getting involved with the wrong person romantically or taking the wrong job. As zealous Christians start to move out for God, the enemy will counterattack by being sure some attractive person or job offer 'appears' in their life. It is not God's will for them. It is a blatant attempt to seduce them with second best. God has His job and his spouse for us but most Christians just jump at what seems desirable and doesn't have discern whether it is God or not.

The third seduction I have seen is 'Instant Ministry'. If the enemy can't keep us from following God he will bring along a ministry 'opportunity'. The greater the promise on your life the greater patience it will take to get there fully. In order to stop your *full* potential the enemy will bring along a ministry opportunity that is better than where you are currently at but will also never take you to your *full* potential. If he can't keep you from moving, he will seduce you to move in the wrong direction.

Offense is the most powerful process for derailing Christians. The ways that we get offended are innumerable. But they fall into two general areas. First, we get offended at God. He didn't do, act, say, or behave the way we thought He should. Secondly, we get offended at a person. Almost always the person we get offended at is key to helping us achieve our potential. They didn't do, act, say, or behave the way we thought they should. Of course, usually when we get offended we always have a good reason, usually spoken in Biblical words.

Let's pray for more discernment. The world needs the potential inside of us.

DAY 7 *Don't Panic or Presume But Do Pause*

Don't Panic or Presume, but do Pause for Purpose!

NW Georgia now has by some reports the second highest unemployment rate in the country at over 13%. Even for those people who have kept their jobs there is a great temptation to walk in fear and anxiety. For many people this is the first time that they have been through so much economic uncertainty. I know this is true for me. Let me share with you a very simple word that I believe is crucial to getting through this time without making the situation worse.

Let me share with you 4P's, 2 P's *not* to do, and 2 P's *to do*.

First, don't *panic*. When whatever causes you to fear comes in, don't panic! You must *pause!* That means stop whatever you are doing and breathe deeply, walk outside, turn on worship music, etc. but *pause!* Do something else and refuse to make a decision till the *panic* is gone! If you make a decision in panic mode you will overreact, most likely be wrong and regret it later. When *panic* comes, *pause!*

Second, don't *presume*. Presume means you assume that the way to proceed forward is the way you walked in the past. This may or may not be right, but don't *presume* this automatically. Instead, ask God what is the *purpose* for your life, problem, situation, etc. Tell God that you want His *purpose* for the future to come about. Most of the time when we go through hard times God is wanting to realign us for something else. If we presume that we are to continue as always we will miss the new purpose He has for us. Don't presume, ask first. If you don't hear anything from the Father then walk according to the wisdom you have learned in the past. But walk slowly, listening for His voice as to where to go next.

Don't Panic or Presume, but do Pause for Purpose!

2 Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

DAYS 8-14

Feeling a little sore yet? Don't worry you are looking better already. It's worth it. I imagine your kids are asking you if hair is growing back in your bald spot. I'm sure your spouse is wondering if you have at least started dying your hair on the sly.

I know you are tired and worn out after these exhaustive first 7 days. But it's worth it. Keep your pace, drink plenty of highly carbonated sugar drinks and you will make it through.

We are going to pick up the pace slightly in the next 7 days. We will be moving from a crawl to a slow walk. If you need a buddy to hold you accountable then we do have a 1-900-PROPHECY line that is almost free of charge. Just call it any time and we will call you all kinds of names to keep you going. Feel free to talk to us as long as you desire. Your success makes us happy – and money.

DAY 8 *Simplify to Clarify to Finish*

Studies have shown that Americans are the most distracted people on the planet. We are bombarded on average with 10,000 advertisements per day. We watch an average of 6 hours of TV per day. The amount of information we take in every day is mind boggling. One edition of the *New York Times* paper has more information in it than the average person got in their entire lifetime 200 years ago!

All of this information can steal your destiny. To make a difference *during* your lifetime you have to focus on one thing. That means that you know what that one thing should be. You can't be great at a dozen things, probably only 1, maybe 2 at most. That means you have to shut out all of the clutter around you – *simplify*- to discover what you are to do. When you clear your mind of all of the clutter you start understanding what you are to accomplish. Simplification helps you to focus. If you are not careful you can lose yourself in all of the activity, noise, information, and other stuff and think you are doing something when in fact all you are doing is listening and processing information from others.

You find your purpose in the still small voice inside of you, the one that comes from the Holy Spirit. The world cannot tell you what you were created for. Your close friends that know you well can help, but in the end it comes down to you and God. Once you slow down enough to hear the Holy Spirit you will get your purpose and then you must stay simplified as you *focus* on the finish line!

Information has its place. I probably read 35+ books and listen to 120+ hours of audio messages a year. But if I am not careful I can spend all of my time processing and viewing information instead of creating something new. To create something new takes meditation and reflective thought. It takes soul searching and spending many hours with the Creator of the Universe getting insights. None of these actions are valued by our society. Knowing the latest political news or celebrity diet is what we value.

How do we cross the finish line of the race we are appointed to run? Here are 3 pointers that will get you started: *Slow Down*, *Say No*, and *Simplify*

Slow Down

If you are moving fast all of the time you will pass the exit you need to take.

The Holy Spirit is never in a rush. If you are, then you will walk alone. The Holy Spirit only speaks significant direction when you are relaxed and enjoying Him.

Do you think the answer to your lack of time problem is to increase your efficiency? Forget it. You are doing too much. It's not wrong to rest.

"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." - Leonardo DaVinci

Say No

Just Say No to everything that does not help you cross the Finish Line.

At the end of your life you will be glad you did.
Ask for wisdom on when to say yes.

"Simplicity requires ruthlessness." - Timothy Ferriss

Simplify

Clutter distracts.

Clutter includes unnecessary things, people at the wrong time, and events that only fill time.

Less is better.

Things require time sapping maintenance.

When you simplify you get clarity.

Simplicity helps you to focus.

"There is no greatness where there is not simplicity, goodness, and truth." - Leo Tolstoy

Don't be deceived by the cultural lie, the race does not go to the busiest or well informed, but the focused.

DAY 9 *Choosing Destiny Not Destruction*

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

I have been a Christian for over 35 years. One of the saddest things I have seen is Christians who love God that end up destroyed. It happens all too often. The Bible is clear that the Devil's end game is to steal from us, destroy us, and even kill us if possible. God's desire is to always bring life, life to the fullest.

I have asked the question countless times, how does a person's life get so messed up when once it was so good? How does the Devil come in and destroy?

Recently I heard Larry Kreider of Dove Christian Fellowship International in Lancaster, Pennsylvania talk about the steps to destruction. He talked about how no one is destroyed overnight. It is a process that starts with something simple. The process of destruction starts with not handling unmet expectations correctly.

What are unmet expectations?

This is when we think something is going to happen and it doesn't.

This is when we think someone is going to do something and they don't.

This is when we have a hard time accepting what is going on.

When we don't handle unmet expectations correctly we get disappointed and it starts the process towards destruction.

Here are the 12 D's to Destruction. They are in the order that they come into our life.

Disappointment – *Because of expectations that didn't happen. Very beginning of Bitterness.*

Discontentment - *Grass looks greener other places. Negativity starts to occur.*

Discouragement – *Will it ever change?*

Doubt – *Start to question everything. Cynical. Danger Zone Spiritually.*

Disbelief - *Final form of doubt.*

Disillusionment - *Wanting to Quit.*

Deception - *Can't see clearly anymore.*

Disobedience - *Through Sins of omission or commission.*

Discord – *Spread bitterness and division to others.*

Dysfunctional - *Messed up because God is no longer in center of life and affairs.*

Despair - *You lose it. Some even consider suicide. Hopelessness.*

Destruction – *Destroyed. Ruined. Broken pieces in your life.*

Destruction doesn't just happen. It is a choice. It starts by not properly handling disappointments. When disappointments come your way immediately go to God and receive grace from to handle them. Give Him your disappointments and forgive Him, yourself, and others where necessary. If you don't a root of bitterness will immediately start growing in you.

We can get off the train to destruction at any time. It's our choice. Everything starts with disappointment. Don't let disappointment rule your life. End it with God's grace, healing, and love. Thank God that He is still on the throne and let Him abort the destruction process and give us life.

Replace the path to Destruction by letting God *Deliver* you and bring you to your *Destiny* by quickly dealing with your disappointments!

DAY 10 *Surviving Difficult Times*

We all go through difficult times. Many people are going through them now. Unemployment, under employment, broken relationships, etc.

If you are in one of those times, I want to give you a few short points that I hope will help you survive the shaking that is going on in your life. These have been learned from personal experience and have helped me.

1. *Stay Flexible.* The days of things always being like they were are disappearing. Listen for new direction continually. I have found that when God gives new direction it is often only for a short period of time. Realize that many more changes are probably going to be required.

2. *Stay Close.* Because circumstances are continually changing we need to stay closer to God than ever. Increase your ability to hear His voice.

3. *Don't Become Negative.* Negativity kills. Guard your mouth first. Simply refuse to be negative. It brings in many other things that aren't good. After guarding your mouth, take every negative thought captive.

4. *Walk in Faith.* Faith is the antidote to negativity. Faith is saying and believing that God will do you right – all of the time. Faith is believing that your best days are ahead because God has already been there and arranged it for you. Ask the Lord to release the faith that is already inside of you!

5. *Don't ask these Questions.* There are 2 questions off limits – or bad theology – to ask God. You can ask them, but they will drive you further away from God. These two questions are:

Why did you do this to me God? God doesn't bring bad circumstances into your life. John 10:10 makes this very clear. God is good – all of the time. If we think God is behind our difficult times then how can we honestly believe He will get us through them?

What did I do wrong? If we are not careful, this question will drive us into introspection to a place where we get depressed. Do not let your difficult times drive you inward but upward. In all honesty, we often do

things that bring on difficult times. But immediately turn upward to God and if we did something wrong and if He wants to deal with it He will tell us. It is much better to be led by His voice than ours or others.

6. Ask these Questions. There are two questions that are advisable.

Help me to understand what is going on? This is a valid question, but we may not get the answer soon. I have found that God will usually answer questions about what we are going through, but only after a length of time has passed.

What do I do now? This is the best and most effective question to ask of all. In 1 Samuel 30 it talks about a difficult situation in David's life before he was king where his home was destroyed, wife and children kidnapped, and his men ready to kill him. Look at what he did in verse 8. He did not become negative, blame God or others. He immediately turned to God and asked Him what to do next. God instantly gave him the answer. David then moved with great flexibility and faith and recovered all.

You can make it through your difficult times. Stay flexible, close, and have faith. Begin every morning asking God what he wants you to do next. Don't ever stop asking, even when the difficult times aren't around.

DAY II 4 *Benefits of Knowing the Holy Spirit*

I have had the Holy Spirit living inside of me for over 35 years. But it's only been a fraction of those years that I have pursued getting to *know* Him.

There is a big difference between having Him live inside of me as a Christian and *knowing* Him. That difference has made all of the difference in my life.

Knowing Him is *knowing* Him. It's not knowing about Him.

Knowing Him is knowing His voice when He talks to me.

Knowing Him is carrying on a conversation with Him.

Knowing Him is asking Him not just for answers to prayer questions but for His opinions.

Knowing Him is the best relationship that I have ever had.

Knowing Him has produced 4 benefits in my life. The funny thing is that I really never asked for any of these things. That's the fun of knowing someone. They just rub off on you.

Benefit # 1 – Contentment

Contentment is realizing that where I am now is enough.

Contentment is not striving for *more* and being willing to say no to more.

Contentment with godliness really is great gain.

Benefit # 2 – Enjoying the Moment

Enjoying the moment is looking at a wildflower in a field that no one else will ever see.

Enjoying the moment is listening to someone talk without worrying about what I will say next.

Enjoying the moment is realizing that this moment is the most important.

Enjoying the moment is living like the sparrow.

Benefit # 3 –Not Having to be in Control

Not having to be in control removes control from me.

Letting others walk as they want allows me to run.

Not having to be in control allows me to find calm when there is busyness all around.

Not having to be in control allows the Holy Spirit to lead others.

Benefit # 4 –Losing the Need for Approval

When I talk to Him my need for approval diminishes.

When my need for approval diminishes the need for success fades.

When my need for success fades I stop doing things that don't really matter.

When I stop doing things that don't really matter I find the Holy Spirit is enough.

How is your journey to know Him going?

DAY 12 *My Issues Have Issues*

Issue -Definition: *A problem, challenge, or blockage that needs to be dealt with*

The Holy Spirit is dealing with my issues. I have a lot of issues. My issues have issues.

I am finding that there are 3 ways to react to the Holy Spirit when He is dealing with my issues.

1. Ignore Him. This is my first response. It used to work. It doesn't seem to work very well anymore. I think the Holy Spirit's memory is getting better.

2. Endure Him. I say something like this, "OK, I hear you. The issue is now on my to do list. It will come up automatically on my planner when the due date hits. Do you see it written in?" Then I go on living life as normal. To call my issue a low priority is an understatement.

3. Embrace Him. Let me give you a word of advice from that famous American shoe company – "Just Do It". Embrace whatever the Holy Spirit is telling you. Quickly. Get it over with. It's the fastest and least painful way.

Ask the Holy Spirit to just pull the band-aid off. The pain goes away quicker.

DAY 13 *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**.

What are your thoughts?

DAY 14 *Need Power? Meet the Holy Spirit*

Boy, do I need more power!

I love being a Christian. I love the Lord. I want to be righteous!

But it seems to be getting harder to do the things I love. Is it that way for you?

I'm not sure what it is that is making it harder.

Frankly, the only thing I know to do is to get to know the Holy Spirit better. Why?

I met Jesus at salvation but it says in *Acts 1:8* that He sent the Holy Spirit to us and the Holy Spirit would come with power. So if I already have the power inside of me why don't I experience it more?

First, here are some things I am learning about the Holy Spirit.

- 1. He is a person** and I am to pursue Him like I do in my relationship with Jesus.
- 2. He has an infinite supply of power.** Problems are not a problem for Him.
- 3. I keep 'cutting Him off'** from giving me the power I need.

How do I 'cut Him off'?

At least 4 ways:

1. I Don't Make Him Lord. In Christianity, we are used to the phrase, "Make Jesus Lord." But do you know that we need to make the Holy Spirit Lord too? What does that mean? It means the same as it does for Jesus, that when the Holy Spirit speaks we need to unconditionally obey. To get full power He needs to be made fully Lord.

2. I Don't Listen to His Voice. It is the Holy Spirit that is inside of us. So we have to learn to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit inside of

us. He speaks to us directly! When we refuse to listen to Him as a person it limits the amount of power that we can receive in our life. Don't limit how the Holy Spirit can talk to you.

3. I Don't Want All 9 Fruits He Plants. It says in *Galatians 5:22-23* that the Holy Spirit can radically change who we are through 9 fruits that He wants to plant in our life. Those 9 fruits are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. Don't limit the Holy Spirit by picking and choosing what fruits you want Him to plant. Ask Him to plant all 9 in you as fast as He can and as He sees fit! Our character needs them! How are we going to look like Jesus without them?

4. I Don't Want All 9 Gifts He Brings. It says in *1 Corinthians 12:8-10* that the Holy Spirit also brings 9 gifts that He wants to give us. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are often more controversial. Many times we are taught that the Holy Spirit doesn't bring gifts anymore. Or we are taught that not all of the 9 gifts are available to us today. This is one of the major reasons we don't have enough power. The 9 gifts are: prophecy, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, miracles, healings, discernment, faith, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Ask Him for all 9 gifts today! When we put a 'throttle or governor' on the gifts we are automatically putting a throttle on power in our lives. We need the fruits to be and the gifts to do! Our life needs them! How are we going to do the things Jesus did without them?

When we say no or we are simply passive in any of these 4 areas we 'grieve' the Holy Spirit as it is described in *Ephesians 4:30*. Grieve means we limit the Holy Spirit from moving in us. He can be in us but not allowed to move in us. When we say yes we **open the door to a new person called the Holy Spirit who always brings power!**

DAYS 15-21

I know, I know, I have been there. The lactic acid build up in your emotions is horrendous. But it will drain away I promise! Better days are coming.

I am going to warn you ahead of time that the next 7 days are going to cause some burn. But please don't quit you are already half way through the workout program. Just getting started was the hard part and it's all downhill from here. OK, I lied about the downhill part but you are encouraged aren't you?

The fire of God always causes burn. I can't help it. He's just a fire type of guy; fire in the desert, fire on the brazen altar, burning bushes, tongues of fire, He just likes fire. Now me if I was God I would be the ice cream type. Soft serve ice cream at the altar, follow the Oreos blizzard by day, come into my presence with milk shakes, etc. But I can't make you mature so we have to go with the fire thing for now.

DAY 15 *Does God Like Me?*

Do you ever think this? I often struggle with this thought, sometimes worse than others. Am I the only one?

Here are 3 things that help me to think He does like me after all:

1. God says He does!

The Bible is quite clear that He not only likes you, He loves you!

John 3:16, "For God so loved the world..."

Gal 4:7 - So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

We know God doesn't lie. So if I think he doesn't like me guess what is happening? My mind and emotions are lying to me. Granted, my mind and emotions are not evil characters in some horror movie, so let's not call them liars. My self esteem can't handle that. How about ignorant? Yea, that sounds better?

So tell your mind to be quiet, it doesn't know what it is talking about!

2. He doesn't make me perform like a puppet.

When you like someone you accept them just the way they are. You don't make them perform to some level of behavior.

Eph. 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

God likes me so much He has already done everything that I should have done. That's cool. Really cool.

So what do I do now since I don't have to do anything to get Him to like me? Like Him back.

3. He treats me like a son or daughter not a slave.

Galatians 4:5 God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.

I would imagine that slaves are constantly living in fear of what is going to happen to them next. But sons know they will be taken care of simply because we are sons. We don't have to worry about the future. That is a slave mentality and not son thinking.

Repeat over yourself every day until you believe it. "God likes me. I am His son. He chose me to be His son. He not only likes me, He loves me!"

Take that you old ignorant mind!

DAY 16 *5 Ways to Avoid Mediocrity*

I have the disturbing problem of wanting to stop. Sometimes it is just not worth it to me to keep moving forward with God.

Now, I don't want to lose my salvation. I don't want to lose my relationship with God. I just simply want to stay where I am at and have no one including God expect any more of me. The visions I have been given, the promises I have had prophesied over me don't seem to matter at these moments.

Are you this way? Do you ever have the tendency to go to the middle, average, acceptable, or status quo position?

Here are 5 things I have to do to try to stay out of drifting into mediocrity:

1. Never Say, "This is Enough"

When the battles come, I find myself saying something like this, "Well, what I have done is good enough. It's better than most others do. I have been fighting for a long time; maybe this is all that I am supposed to do. I am getting older and it's only right to sit back." Have you ever said something like this?

I call this going into maintenance mode. Take appropriate time to rest and dream. But don't lose your mission. I know when I am at the end of my life I will regret having ever lived in a maintenance mindset.

2. Never Say, "I Give Up"

Usually when I say, "I give up" it means I need a rest. Say, "I need a rest instead." Never say, "I give up." It is the first step to going into maintenance mode. These 3 words start lubricating the mind to get ready for its slide backward.

Faith says I don't know how I will get through my problem, but I will continue to take risks, move out, and look for new opportunities to stretch my faith and allow God to move.

There always comes a point in every leader's life when everything is stripped from him. Faith is what you have left.

Use the 'I Give Up' times to get some rest and let God build your faith.

3. Banish Wrong Thoughts

We process many thoughts per day. Some of them help us in our journey forward some of them definitely don't. These types of thoughts can wear me down if I am not careful. Here are some thoughts that I have to avoid as much as possible: I am a victim, worry, fear, perfectionism, and negativity.

I have to avoid as much as possible people, places, news casts, magazine articles, etc. that plant fatalistic negative thoughts in my mind.

I am a child of God with a hope and a future! It's hard enough to remember this without entertaining all of the other negativity in the world. I can't avoid the negativity, but I can minimize it through what I watch and read and try not to become negative over my own life's circumstances.

I need to remember what every mother says over their children, "If you can't say something good, don't say anything at all." Still great advice.

4. Banish Jealousy

It is often a great discouragement when I notice someone else doing what I want to do and they seemed to get there so easily.

One word of advice: Jealousy is a momentum stopper. It takes my eye off my mission and kills me slowly.

I need to thank God for where I am at daily and trust in Him that He will do me right. I am just as much a favorite son as the other guy.

5. Banish Distractions & Diversions

I have so many things trying to come into my life and demanding attention? How about you? Distractions and diversions almost never help us to move forward. They simply distract and divert us.

I constantly finding myself becoming "*tranquilized by the trivial*" as Soren Kierkegaard once said.

I want to become a ruthless killer! A killer of things that don't help my get me to my mission. So help me watch my words and thoughts. I need the help!

Bye Bye Mediocrity. Hello Mission!

DAY 17 *How to Change the Spiritual Atmosphere Around You*

In the Present : Talk about the good things God is doing.

About the Past : Talk about the good things God has done.

About the Future: Talk about the good things God is going to do.

DAY 18 *Huh?*

There are 3 simple actions to receiving from the Lord. Really that's all there is.

Huh?

Exactly.

The word *Huh* is English slang for "I don't understand, a question, or what?" It's a perfect illustration of receiving from the Lord.

Let's use the story from Matthew 5 to illustrate the 3 actions.

Matthew 5:21-28 (NIV) ²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." ²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." ²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. ²⁶ He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." ²⁷ "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." ²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

The 3 actions can be summed up using the word HUH as an acronym.

Action 1 – **H**umility : *"Lord, help me!"*

Action 2 – **U**noffendable : *"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."*

Action 3 – **H**ungry : *"Even the dogs eat the crumbs"*

Going *Huh?* to the Lord will change your walk with Him. It's saying I need help Lord. I don't understand. Daily ask Him for help and then listen for His response.

The challenge to listening to the Lord is that often He will respond in a way that will offend you. How would you like to be called a dog by Jesus after asking for help?

He does not offend just because He can. There are at least two reasons we often get offended with God. First, He says things that are designed to reveal our heart. To get us to examine why we are really doing what we are doing. His statements cut through our motives and masks that we usually don't even know we have. Second, we are often offended because God's ways are often so different than man's ways and we don't understand.

But if we stay hungry like the Canaanite woman and keep pressing in pushing past any opportunities to get offended we will receive what we need. The woman kept seeking and refused to be offended.

So keep using the English slang word *huh* with God.

Huh? I don't understand what you just wrote.

Sounds like you are on the right track to me.

DAY 19 *A Painful English Word*

I want to write about one of the most painful words in our culture. Silence.

See, just the thought of it hurts. We don't like being silent. We like lots of noises around us. Music, TV, radio, Wii, etc.

Silence hurts. You think I am kidding but I'm not! Create an atmosphere for just one hour where there is no noise around you and you aren't talking! It hurts.

If you accomplish this experiment, way to go! Here is the next phase of the experiment. Quiet your soul for an hour. Even when our physical surroundings are quiet our minds can be racing with all of the pictures and activities that have been going on all around us. This is really painful to do. It is almost torture. It is not easy to do and I don't like being silent and still.

The discipline of silence is a biblical principle that moderns have forgotten and Christians centuries ago did. Who cares you are probably thinking?

If you don't practice silence then you will never get beyond superficial thinking and living.

If we keep *noise* going then we can't think about what we are doing, should be doing, who we are, or who we aren't. External and internal noise keeps us from thinking on eternal things. Noise can also mask the chaos within us that we don't want to face.

Stillness in our culture is for losers, slow people, and those who will never amount to anything. Movement, now that is where it is at!

In our culture silence is a vacuum that must be filled. But our Church fathers and people in the Bible often speak of the need of being still to know that He is God.

True – in the end accomplishment requires movement. But movement for the sake of movement just causes a lot of activity that makes you think you are moving but you are actually just walking around in circles doing the same unproductive things over and over.

Activity brings many words. But silence brings understanding and knowledge out of the words.

Remember the story about Job in the Bible? He got much advice from his friends. Then at the end the Lord said:

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? (Job 38:1-2 NIV)”

It is in silence that we process things and separate the good from the bad.

I am challenging myself to longer periods of silence. 5 minutes anyone?

DAY 20 *We is a Powerful Word*

I love *we*.

I love having a group of friends I can relax with. I love being a part of a team in ministry that is making a difference.

I love working with my colleagues making great software.

But *we* is not enough.

*“Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! **We** prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew **you**. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’ Matthew 7:21-23 (NLT)*

Did you notice the word *we* above in the verse?

There are times *we* is good - especially in teams accomplishing something like this verse is describing.

But in the end we need more than *we*. The word that we need is *you*.

Did you notice the word *you* in the verse above?

Jesus did not say *we* was bad it is just not *you*.

In the end we cannot relate to God as a part of a group. It is not enough to be a part of a great team. It is not enough to attend a large city shaking church. God wants more than this. He wants to know *you* and not which group you belong to.

The word *know* means the Father wants to know you intimately.

Pursue *we*. It’s important to the people who get delivered and receive miracles. But pursue *you* first.

DAY 21 *What Happens When Don't Obey* – *Lessons from Jonah and the Whale*

Please note that if you don't know the story of Jonah and the whale from the Old Testament you are about to be totally lost. So borrow a book from the kids section at your public library on the subject and read up before proceeding to get maximum burn from this blog.

1. Life Gets Expensive. You have to buy a ticket to go somewhere else and in transit all your stuff gets thrown overboard. Please note, when you disobey God, Satan always makes sure there is a ship available to go somewhere else. This is not a sign of God's will.

2. Things Eat At You. Digestive Juices from the whale – I mean circumstances - eat at you. Eventually you will get bleached out – I mean stressed out. You can deny it but everyone notices.

3. After the Running You Always Have To Go Back. You always have to go back to where you left off from following God. He does not issue new orders or give a new word. The shortest way out is straight ahead.

DAYS 22-31

You made it! Well almost. You still have 10 days left. But it could be worse. You could be on day 1 and have to read all of the previous blogs over again. Now that would be painful.

By now you should be feeling amazing. Your pastor should have already asked you to do the Wednesday meeting at the deaf and blind school and your Music Leader has most likely enlisted you to make copies of the sheet music.

I'm sure that your spouse has noticed the slimming down of your soul and are encouraging you to wear that revealing little emotion things you got hidden away in the back of your feelings drawer.

It's a good time. Look in the mirror and be proud. You are becoming the man or woman of God that you have always wanted to become. So stay strong. Get up early, don't skimp on your pop tarts for breakfast, and continue to read for the next 10 days. The deepest is yet to come. Maturity is almost here.

DAY 22 *You Know You Think Like a Slave When*

You know you think like a slave when ... *you think you have to earn everything from God.*

I was reading the story of the Israelites being freed from Egypt (*Numbers 13:1-31*). They were promised a new land of abundant blessings and freedom. All they had to do was take a two week journey across the desert and then work with God to take the land.

Here's the truth, even though the Israelites were physically free their minds still thought like slaves. They had been in bondage for 400 years and over that time they had developed slave thinking that kept them from walking in the blessings God wanted to give them.

The two week journey *through* the desert turned into a 40 year journey *living* in the desert. Why? One reason is that they couldn't transition from thinking like slaves of Pharaoh into sons of God.

In Numbers 13:2 it says, "*Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, **which I am giving** to the Israelites*". God was going to work with them in order to **give** the Promised Land to them.

The Israelites could never get over the fact that God was going to give them the land. They were so used to having to fight for everything from their Egyptian masters in order to survive. So when the Israelites saw the obstacles of giants in the land and the fortified cities they knew they could never defeat these things so they gave up. The sad thing is that they weren't the ones going to do the defeating. They only had to walk with their Father who was going to do it.

They didn't understand that Sons receive by virtue of their position. Yes, sons have lessons to learn about being good sons, but a son of a King never has to worry about survival. They couldn't understand that someone greater than them was willing to give something to them when they didn't earn it.

What has God – your King – promised you? Are you trying to get it on your own even though God promised it to you? Do you think it is up to

you to make everything happen? You do have a role to play, but in the end it's your Father that is going to have do the defeating.

Ask God to show you where you think as a slave and not as a son. Ask God to remove this mentality from your thinking in order to live in your promised land.

It's much easier to take fortified cities this way.

DAY 23 *Declaration of a Spiritual Warrior*

I am NOT Passing through Life BUT possessing life.

I am NOT waiting till the end BUT helping to change the end.

I am NOT waiting to be rescued BUT I am part of the rescue.

I am NOT enduring the atmosphere BUT changing the atmosphere.

I am NOT just saved, I AM a spiritual warrior.

DAY 24 *How Do I Know If I am Humble?*

Can I even ask that question if I'm humble?

Does being humble mean I don't speak much? If so, I don't stand a chance at ever being humble.

Does being humble mean I quietly do everything people ask of me? Oops. If that's the case I think I have been humble only a few times in 50 years.

Does being humble mean I have no opinions? If that is true, woe is me, for I am filled with arrogance and self-centeredness!

I want to propose to you this definition of humility. *Humility is obeying God when He asks you to do something.*

Pretty simple eh? Only until God asks you to do something you don't want to do.

How do I know if I'm Humble? Do you obey God's voice? Do you obey Him when it costs you something? If you answer yes, you are humble.

Humility is the act of recognizing someone else's opinion as more valuable than yours and following it.

Humility is the act of recognizing someone else's authority as more important than yours and submitting to it.

Humility is *not* quietness, *not* having no opinions, and *not* always listening and never speaking.

Humility is having your own opinions, seeing your own value, having a voice; but choosing God's opinions, values, and voice when they are different than yours. Have you done that lately? Then you are walking in humility in those areas.

After realizing this definition of humility I finally understand a verse that has perplexed me for years:

James 4:10 "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."

I often thought it was God's job to humble me but according to this passage I am to humble myself. Here's another one confirming this:

*1 Peter 5:6 "**Humble yourselves**, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."*

If humility is putting down my desires and following the desires of God then it makes sense that I have to humble myself. God never makes us obey Him.

This week I challenge myself and all of you to humble yourselves. You can dress up in a burlap bag and throw dirt on your heads if you wish, I am simply going to do my best to follow God whether I want to or not.

May the obedient – I mean humble – arise!

DAY 25 *What If You Knew You Would Live Forever?*

What if you knew you would live forever? How would this change your actions and behavior today?

Maybe living forever is hard to grasp so for illustration purposes let's say you knew you would live for 3,000 years and you were born 900 years before Jesus. During your life time you would have seen the rise and fall of the Greek Empire, the Roman Empire with all of its different Caesars, the Middle Ages including all of the Protestant Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin, the formation of the modern nation states including America, the Civil War, and both World Wars. In addition to this you would still have 90 years before you die – a full lifetime left by today's definition.

What if you knew you would live forever? How would this change your actions and behavior today? Seriously, think about it.

Crazy thought? Maybe, but I propose to you that this IS how you are supposed to think and live.

Adam and Eve's original purpose in the Garden of Eden was to ***“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.”*** Genesis 1:28.

They would only get it if they did not ***“eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”*** Genesis 2:17.

Adam and Even had no idea as to what dying was. They were living their lives out according to the original purpose and making plans accordingly. They had a LONG TERM view of what they were doing.

Here's my point, God never took His original purpose for man away. We are to still be fruitful and increase in number subduing the earth. We are all still to spread God's kingdom wherever we go. I propose to you that we will not be able to do that if we don't live with a LONG TERM perspective as if we would not die.

Yes, I know that we all will die one day. But if we make all our decisions based on dying in a few decades then nothing will be built and sustained across the generations. We will constantly live with a short term view of life and as a result, our decisions will reflect that mentality.

How would you change your behavior towards your family if you knew you would still be around them 1,500 years from now?

How would you change your ministry if you knew that 700 years in the future – the year 2811 - there would be ministers building on what you are building now and you would be there to see it?

How would you order your time when you are 85 years old knowing you still had hundreds of years left to live?

How would you change your finances if you knew you were to be helping out future family members in 250 years?

How would this change your perspective about what you choose to do with your life? How would this change how you would do it?

After you think about these things I propose that you live that way now.

Are you crazy Craig? Maybe. The truth is that the Kingdom of God will not grow very fast if we continue to make decisions based on our short life spans. In addition, you WILL see all of the things above that I mentioned! You will see them from your perspective in heaven, but you will see them. You will know one day whether your decisions were based on a short-term view or a long term view.

I know we all will die but I challenge you to order and live your life as if you weren't. You will be glad you did and the generations coming after you will be glad you did too.

How would your life change today if you knew you would never die?

DAY 26 *Am I a Man of God?*

I ask myself this question a lot, "Am I a Man of God?" Have you ever asked that question?

To be honest, I feel strange answering the question in the affirmative. It seems arrogant in some way. But if we don't answer in the affirmative it means I am a man of something else. I definitely don't like that choice. If I can't answer in the affirmative it means I am a man of others or myself and not of God.

How do I honestly answer this question? Let me start by asking another question, "What do I do when people pull away from me or my projects? Do I run after them and implore them to stay? Do I change what I do in order to make them happy?"

I am often like Saul in the Bible.

*Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. **I was afraid of the people** and so I gave in to them. 1 Samuel 15:24 (NIV) (24)*

The back-story is that the people were waiting on Samuel the Prophet to come and offer the sacrifice. They grew impatient and wanted Saul to do it even though God did not authorize him to do it. Saul then grew nervous about the people turning against him. When he saw that the people were pulling away from him went ahead and went through the religious motions of offering up a sacrifice without the Lord's leading. He choose to do what the people wanted instead of what God wanted. This cost him dearly. He lost his throne and the generations after them lost their place in the palace. Offering the sacrifice was a temporary victory with the people that cost all of his succeeding generations. The throne left Saul and went to David. This was good for David and his family but it was not the original plan.

Point? A man of God doesn't move because the people want him too no matter how much it costs. Are we God's man? Our actions will reveal this not what our mouth says.

"You're only as strong as your ability to be affected by the opinions of others." – Bill Johnson

What if God asked you to do something that would cost you some friends; or if you are a leader 75% of your followers? You may say He would never do that. That's not true. He often does exactly that because He does not determine His direction by public opinion surveys. He knows where He is going and He is inviting us to go with Him. The reality is that many times it is just you and Him.

Do we care more about what God thinks of man or us? It's hard for me to be honest sometimes with this question. What if God asked you to leave your prominent ministry or successful business and go somewhere and start over again?

"When we love our ministry more than Jesus there follows disaster." - Antonio Rozinni

If our identity and purpose is on our accomplishments, Facebook friend list size, size of ministry, success of business, income levels, or something similar you can rest assure God will ask you to give it up because it is a false identity. I guarantee you that the Lord will work to show us where our false identities are in order to get our identity as a son from Him.

The great men and women of God and business have had to learn to stand when people were opposing them – in a place where there are no applauses except from Him.

"The voice that is the loudest for you is going to be from what you fear the most. What you fear you will worship." – Bill Johnson

A man of God means you do what God says. That's it. By opposite inference it means when you don't do what He says you are not a man of God. I pray that I and a whole army of others will arise as true Men of God!

"A fear of God silences every other fear." – Bill Johnson

DAY 27 Who Knows You?

“Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’ Matthew 7:21-23 (NLT)

Who Do You Know? Do you know Him? That is important. But I have an even more important thought.

It’s not who we know that is the most important it’s who knows *you*.

Who we know and hang around is extremely important. You will become who you hang around without a doubt. But in the end it is not who you know that is *the* most important. It’s who knows *you*.

Does Jesus know – intimately know - *you* or just the group or church you are a part of?

Wow, I have got to go now. I have to plan a date with you know who!

DAY 28 *If You Have to Understand...*

I don't like this verse.

Philippians 4:7 "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Seriously. I don't.

Think about it - if you want God's peace then you have to give up understanding. It's not a given that you won't understand, but you can't make it a requirement either.

OK, I am going to throw a tantrum. Picture me laying on the floor kicking and screaming, *"I want to understand, I won't to understand, I won't to understand!"*

What I am learning the hard way is that if you have to understand then:

1. *You Don't Get Peace*
2. *You are being Led By Your Mind and Not Your Spirit.* The sons of God are led by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:14).
3. *You Can't be Led by a God You Don't Understand.* This means you will have to bring Him down to your level which is an extremely hard thing to do.

But doesn't He want me to understand? Yes. But He wants you to trust first. Trust in Him as a Father, as a good God, not because He is logical to you and His plan meets your approval.

My battle is described in *John 6:61* *"Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"*

Yea it offends me! My mind doesn't like being left out. It gets mad, desperate, and fights for control.

Am I the only one?

Revelation by Spirit before Understanding with the Mind

DAY 29 *What Location Do You See God From?*

There are generally 3 locations to see God from once you are a Christian.

Moses' tabernacle in the Old Testament illustrates these 3 locations because it contained 3 places people could see God. First, there was an outside area called the outer court. In the center of the outer court there was an enclosed tent that had 2 rooms. The first room was called the Holy Place and the inner room was called the Holy of Holies.

The Israelites could not go into the 3 locations at will. They were told where to go and see God based primarily on birth family and gender. They didn't have a choice in the matter. Whatever location they were assigned to that is where they stayed their entire life.

Israelites 3 Locations of Seeing God

Location 1 – The Outer Court: People in this location could see God in nature around them by viewing the sky and mountains. They also heard truths about God from the Priests. But they could not meet God face to face.

Location 2 – The Holy Place Room: People who got to go into this room could actually read about God themselves from the scrolls and they also got to tell the people in the Outer Court what they read about Him. But they could not meet God face to face.

Location 3 – The Holy of Holies Room: God Himself resided here and the High Priest alone got to meet God face to face.

When Jesus died on the cross the curtain dividing the 2 rooms split open telling the world that no matter what location you were born into you could now go into the Holy of Holies. Everyone could now see in and was welcome to meet God face to face. It was God's original plan for mankind for us to spend time with Him face to face.

Why then do I resign myself to a far away location and call it good

when I now have a choice? I do have a choice just like the Israelites, I can choose to view God from:

Christians 3 Locations of Seeing God

Location 1 – Just experience God through the things He has created and listen to a good sermon on TV or at church given by the speaker. This location is where the largest crowd of Christians hang out.

Location 2 – Choose to read about Jesus myself by reading the Word of God and even share it with others. This location is made up of the group of people that are willing to minister to others.

Location 3 – See, talk, and know Him directly – face to face – spirit to spirit.

Location 3 is awesome – at least the times that I have been there!

Why don't I go there more? I know it is not a crowded place. Is that the reason? Am I scared to go where the crowds don't go? Why don't the crowds move from location 1 to where God's full presence is? Why do I spend most of the time in location 1 and call it normal Christianity? Why don't I want to talk to God directly? Why do I want to get all my news about Him through others?

Not sure why I struggle with these questions so, but I pray I never stop struggling at the least and embrace His face to face at best.

Do you struggle with this same thing?

DAY 30 *Media Drowns Out the Whisper*

This is a short blog. On purpose, I don't have much choice. On average, within 28 seconds something else will grab your attention and I am a distant digital memory.

I believe that the number 1 *cultural* hinderance to hearing God is...
Media.

Blogs, Tweets from my followed celebrities, Facebook news feeds that never end, TV episodes that everyone says you must watch, YouTube viral videos of the week, 24/7 News Channels, 2500 Texts a day, emails ad infinitum.

How do we hear God?

Only when we are quiet. Even then He usually speaks in a whisper.

Quiet? Are you kidding? Only losers sit without an internet connection to keep them occupied. That's why I got an iPad! I don't even have to get out of bed now to log in.

Think about it. We can't hear God because a new news feed from the Huffington Post just hit Google Reader interrupting my 13 seconds of Godly meditation that was occurring against my will because my wireless connection had a slow down.

Maybe if God had a Facebook account we could hear Him better. If He would only post to my wall what He wants me to do that would be prime. Then I could 'like' Him.

I am ending this blog now because you already have 3 instant messenger beeps and 4 texts to respond to. I know you are busy.

Busy with media.

DAY 31 *What is Your Priority List?*

What is your Priority List? I am proposing new ones!

Have you heard of the priorities list? Many churches teach it to help people know how to allocate their time according to the right set of priorities. It usually goes something like this:

*First God
Second Family
Third Church
Fourth Work
Fifth Yourself*

I have heard this taught in a myriad of ways for decades. Here is a confession: I have never liked this list. I have never taught anything like this for as long as I can remember. The problem is that I don't know how to practically use this list to run my life.

For instance, there are times I have to work a lot of hours at work in order to keep my job and to pay the bills. Work is definitely first at those times in terms of focus and hours. But this list says that I am putting my fourth priority first when in actuality I am doing it because I love my family. If I were single I would definitely be doing something else.

As a pastor there are times I have to spend a lot of time doing ministry. For instance, there may be a death in the church or a wedding to officiate or crisis counseling sessions. Should I not do these and make these people wait because they are the 3rd priority? Sometimes maybe, but I can't do this all of the time.

What happens when I go on a family vacation for a week and don't spend as much time in devotions? Am I putting God second?

You get the idea. To me ranking what I do as first, second, third, etc. is the wrong approach. What is first in terms of my time is constantly changing depending on the needs of the moment. Yes, God should always be first in my heart but in terms of quantity of time this may not always be the case.

I propose a set of new rules on how to live. I don't rank these rules as

first, second, or third, etc. I don't think that is the right approach to allocating time. I propose that you live these 4 rules all of the time to the best of your ability:

Always Listen to God
Always Love Your Family
Always Work Super Hard
Always Live Your Passion

Your thoughts?

CONGRATULATIONS

You made it! Don't you feel like a maturity monster now like Skeeter? I know you do. I can feel your anointed awesomeness through the pages all the way back through the bookstore where you got this book through the publishing house to me. If that ain't powerful then nothing is.

You can now eat all of the spiritual fruits you want whenever you want however you want. You need the love fruit? You got it baby. You need the patient fruit? Just wait its coming. You need the self control fruit medley, you mix it up and serve it with pride!

There is no spiritual machine like you. You are able to give out any of the spiritual gifts even when it's not Christmas. Santa Claus has nothing on you. When oppression comes your way you have your gifts of healing already packaged up. When confusion enters a person's mind you give them a stocking full of knowledge, wisdom, and prophecies. When hunger enters a house you have miracle chestnuts roasting on the open fire. Be thankful to God you made it!

If you feel the need to continue the workout you can read the other blogs that didn't make this book, some say because they weren't very good, and get a regular dose of soul pumping from Craig's blog. You will find the link at www.craigbcooper.com.

Until I see you next time at the gym!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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

I don't know how mature I am now but I had a great time writing this book. I hope you enjoyed it. You can get more information about me, my family, blogs, church, books, articles, etc. at www.craigbcooper.com.

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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.

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