Pioneers - Characteristics and Pitfalls

By Craig Cooper

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Introduction

America was a very sparsely populated land until the 1800’s. There was a group of people in the late 1700’s to about 1850 who decided that the East Coast of America was too cramped, too rigid, had very little opportunity, and not enough freedom. So they headed west in search of new opportunities and potential. Today these people are called pioneers! In a similar way God is raising up pioneers in the spiritual realm. He wants people to experience more spiritual freedom, have greater openness in worship, and more opportunities by exercising all of their spiritual gifts! He wants to see people move out “west” in Christianity! As a result, He is raising up pioneers to blaze a trail for others to follow.

Characteristics of Pioneers

1. Sent Ahead to Plant the Next Progressive Move of God

Hebrews 11:8-10 

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 

By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 

For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Pioneers go in search of new territory because they do not want to settle for what they have. This is not the result of a rebellious or discontent attitude but an attitude of wanting to see something new. A person with a pioneering personality is never content with what they have until they have seen all of God that they can!

It is called a progressive move because it does not abandon the current move but builds on it. We go forward off the backs of those who have gone before us.

Pioneers face a lack of role models to follow. The very definition of being a pioneer means that there are very few blazed trails ahead of you. If there is already a highway in front of you then you know that you are settling where a pioneer has already been.

Pioneers see over the horizon a new land waiting to be conquered. They are people who want to see their borders enlarged. God wants them to take the Church to places where it has not been before. These include structural reforms, replacing man-made traditions and spiritual decline with new wineskins.

Application: Be encouraged if you have a dream or vision inside of you that is different than the norm. It is probably God wanting to plant something new on the earth through you. This can be in any area of life – business, family, church, or community.

Because you are doing something new you will face persecution from the existing structure. Pioneers challenge the very foundations (1 Corinthians 3:10) of traditional thinking and as a result are often seen as a threat. In reality, though, their current pioneering will be the land of the next generation’s settlers! They will be the floor for the next generation to build upon. Pioneers are a blessing, although this is usually not recognized until much time later.
Each of us has a territory that we are to map out, explore, and conquer. That is our assignment. As we walk in life God will reveal our boundaries to us. He does not keep it a mystery. But He does usually only give you the next step. He enjoys the journey as much as He enjoys you getting to the end. Enjoy the journey for that is what the Christian life is all about. The journey is Christianity! Remember, that when you reach the end your assignment is done and it is time for you to depart this earth. For the rest of eternity, we will be talking about the journey to others and remembering the victories, losses, and territory taken in the name of Jesus. They will be good memories of how great our God is and how greatly He used us.

2. Pioneers are Risk Takers

Pioneers are willing to face new enemies because of the vision they have inside of them. There are always new bears, cougars, and snakes in the areas that they are going. But they want to press on to a new land no matter the cost instead of staying in old territory with all of the familiar enemies.

Application: It is OK to try new things. Matter of fact, it is necessary. If new things aren’t tried we will not get new results. Experiment with new methods. Only by doing is the best way forward found. It is OK to make a mistake!

3. Pioneers Establish What will be Normal in the Future

Luke 5:36-38 He told them this parable: “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.

The ideals of the pioneers become the lifestyles and standards for the future church. The spiritual momentum in them determines how far the next generation of settlers will move. They stand in the gap between two different time periods that will produce two distinctive generations. They are able to take people into the uncharted waters of a new kind of society and lifestyle.

Pioneers are not tempted to stay on the well-established paths of the former generation because they instinctively feel the urge to set ablaze a new trail towards the dreams God has put in their life to achieve for their generation. To be a pioneer you cannot be afraid of being different. That is why it is so important to visualize the land where you are going with faith because that is the only thing many times that will keep your feet moving.

Pioneers believe in their hearts that in the end what they are doing is going to make a difference. The original American pioneers were motivated by thinking about their children and grandchildren having a better life than they have. They were motivated by a long term unselfishness that future generations reaped.

Application: It is hard to stand between two generations, two methods, or two wineskins. But there will be a special grace that goes along with the job to encourage and be gracious to both pioneers and settlers. Do not walk in pride to those who like the older wineskin because it will cost the new wineskin you are building.

Luke 5:39 And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’"

4. Pioneers Are Visionaries and People with Faith

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Pioneers are people with prophetic foresight that enlarge the vision of their followers. Pioneers possess an inner energy of hope that helps them create the future that they want.
Pioneers become high achievers. They have the ability to turn the times of crisis into times of opportunities. Pioneers are strong people that keep pressing on towards the goal by stirring up the inner strength (God) inside of them.

*Application*: To be a successful pioneer you have to know how to stir up the faith of God that is inside of you.

_Jude 1:20-21_ 20But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. 21Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

5. **Pioneers are not Specialists but Generalists**

In a modern society you can focus on doing just one task. But as a pioneer there are no support systems to pull on. You have to build your house, fix your carriage, get and cook your own food, make your own ammunition, etc. God gives them the same ability when they need it. A spiritual pioneer will find himself many times in varied and different circumstances in trying to help people follow Jesus. They can’t send them to the church’s counselor because there may not be one.

*Application*: Everyone has a unique calling and position. It’s important to find that. But God wants all Christians to have the basics of ministry – not just a select few. Constantly be increasing your skills of ministry to others.

“Apostolic churches train up warriors and teach them how to use their spiritual weapons, the word, praise, prayer, fasting, deliverance, the blood, binding and loosing, networking, teamwork, etc.” – Jonas Clark

6. **Must Move Under Intense Pressure**

Pressure produces great character. Pioneers are not chocolate soldiers who melt in the heat of the sun.

*Application*: Able to resist crowd and demonic pressure that prevents you from getting to the end of your journey. Doing the will of God is more important than resting on what others think is enough.

_2 Timothy 2:3_ Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

7. **High Standards**

Pioneers stay true to their convictions despite the contrary winds and pressure that come upon them. They realize they will “plant” who they are. So in order to change their “landscape” they must be breakthrough believers with higher standards than their “landscape”.

*Application*: No compromise.

_1 Timothy 1:19-20_ 19Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, 20holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.

8. **Constant Learner**

A pioneer is a constant learner. They must be because they have never “been this way before”. This is called progressive knowledge or revelation because with each step forward you have to seek wisdom for the very next step.

*Application*: Remain sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading in order to break your own limitations in order to get to where God wants you. Expect to constantly be learning new things – especially about yourself. Be willing to change and adapt as necessary.
9. Impacts Many People

Pioneers desire to impact the city and influence the nations. They are not concerned with just “their four and no more”. They want to make a difference on others.

10. Ability to Fight Discouragement and Not Give Up

Pioneers often take the wrong paths. Pioneers are able to see the mountains they are aiming for far off on the horizon. Unfortunately, the path to get to the mountains is often hard to discern. Physical pioneers may get “dead-ended” in a canyon or encounter a river that they can’t cross. They then have to start over and come up with another plan. This same thing happens with spiritual pioneers. It is not uncommon to try to do something several different ways before the desired result is found. We see this dynamic happening with the Apostle Paul in Acts 16 in trying to decide where to go and preach next.

Acts 16:6-10  
Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Sometimes tragedies or loss happen when forging a new land. Pioneers know how to grieve but they also know that there is a time to move on.

Another source of discouragement that has to be handled is that not all of their friends will make the new journey with them. Their friends’ calling is to “occupy” the land that has already been opened.

Many times pioneers get tired of fighting the new enemies – bears, cougars, and snakes. They have to be able to recharge themselves and get refocused on the mountains and not the enemy.

Application: Keep the vision God has given you always before you or the circumstances will overwhelm you.

Deut. 1:28-30a  
28 Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart. They say, 'The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there.' 29 Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. 30 The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you,

Pitfalls of Pioneers

One challenge for pioneers is the inability to communicate intelligently where they are going. It is hard to describe what they have only experienced in their mind or spirit.

Pioneers have their hidden weaknesses and limitations quickly exposed because of the hardship of the journey. The pioneer surround himself with people who will be honest and point their weaknesses out. It is the job of the pioneer to listen to those around him.

Pioneers, because they are moving in uncharted territory and like to move fast often act presumptuously. This means they move without thinking through the whole situation including asking what the Holy Spirit wants done. They just assume they know. The Holy Spirit is the only one that knows where the journey will end up and how to get there. Presumption will get a pioneer killed. As spiritual pioneers we need to constantly be dependent on the Holy Spirit for what we need and maintain a humble attitude. It is only with humility that we accomplish our task and don’t get “killed” early.
Summary

Pioneers live in a different place in their hearts and minds than most. As they pursue what is in their hearts, then in the end what is in their hearts will manifest in their circumstances. Those that are extremely blessed will see the full manifestation in their own lifetime. Otherwise, the next generation is blessed because their pioneering parent’s seeds have come to full fruition. They will reap where they have not sowed.

As we close, remember that each generation reaps where they have not sowed. We are eating the fruit sowed by our spiritual forefathers. So we must continue sowing seed so that a new crop can be enjoyed by the next generation. This is how we will go from glory to glory.

Hebrews 11:13-16  

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. – Apostle Paul

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