

VIDEO Intro



Ron's Ministry Update

First and foremost, on behalf of Cookson Hills, I want to say thank you for having me here today! I am looking forward to sharing the scriptures with you. We are so grateful for your partnership with Cookson Hills. Your congregation has been supporting CH as far back as we have records 22 years. And I am sure it goes back much further than that! Thank you!



Let me introduce myself. My name is Ron Riley and I am the Executive Director of Cookson Hills in Kansas, Oklahoma. Prior to my work with Cookson Hills I was in located pastoral ministry for 25 years. During that time my wife Donna and I worked with at-risk youth in the church, public school, and even in foster care. We were blessed to adopt 5 kids along the way.

Our world can be a dark place, especially for kids.



In the United States, 48% of kids have experienced trauma in one of its various forms.

Many of these children and many others are at risk of losing their home, their ability to receive an education, and have no other support systems to help them.

Thankfully God has placed His Church in this world to help all who are hurting and in need of a savior.

Christian foster parents, ministers, Sunday School workers, and missions like Cookson Hills are providing hope to those lost in darkness.



At Cookson Hills we provide a home, school, and therapy for Children who are at risk. Providing a place of safety and security for children every day.

The work we do is supported by generous churches and partners like you. Our staff is comprised of Christians just like you who feel called to serve as Houseparents, teachers, and support staff.

This generosity of giving and service makes Cookson Hills a place where kids can experience the joy of God's grace. They are able, with God's help, to begin to write a new story for their lives.

If you would like to know more, you can visit with me after the service, or find more information at our website, www.cooksonhills.org.

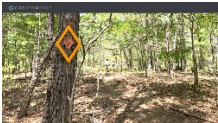
Light In the Darkness



One of my favorite past times at Cookson Hills has been walking the many roads, trails, and fields that make up our 1,000 acre campus.

I think these walks teach me something every time I am out. There is always a sunrise, an animal sighting, or some other part of God's creation that will catch my eye and remind me of the goodness of God.

As a newcomer to the trails system at Cookson Hills, one of my early questions was how I would know which way the trails went. (I mean I didn't want my first sojourn into the wilderness to become like the Israelites and be out there wandering around lost for forty years or even forty minutes.)



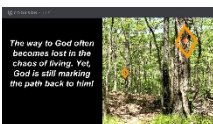
Thankfully I had some guides and they pointed out the way, and in the few places we were unsure of the way we looked for the colorful markers that showed the path of the trail. Those who had come before us knew the way and had in years past taken the time to mark the trail.



These blazes, as they are called, give the hiker confidence that the direction they are moving is the right way.

God has marked a trail for each of us.

- Although for many that trail has been lost.
- Like some of the families and student we work with at Cookson Hills, life's underbrush of crisis and sin has obscured the path. Perhaps you can remember a time in your own life when the path to God was uncertain.
- That is how it is for many of your neighbors, coworkers, and friends.



The way to God often becomes lost in the chaos of living! Yet, God is still marking the path back to him.

- In Beginning of human history, the path was marked, but humanity listened to the enemy, ignoring God, and lost the way. So, God called a people to himself, led by Moses. This nation was to be a light to the world pointing back to the Glory of God.
- At Sinai, God's Glory Blazed on the Mountain as he descended and gave to Moses the ten commandments and the rest of the law that unpacks and explains these ten words.



The Ten Commandments were trail markers to bring humanity back to God.

- How did Moses' people do, at following the trail markers? How did they do at being a light to the world?

Or a more relevant question:

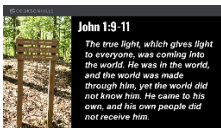
How are we, as a society today, following those trail markers? How are we as the Church doing at pointing the lost back to God?

What would happen if as a people we embraced the centrality of the law and the prophets to love God and love others?

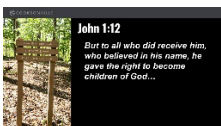
Jesus came to put our feet back on the right trail.

- To call the world back to God.
- To offer the perfect sacrifice to atone for our sins.
- And show us how to truly live out God's purpose for our lives.

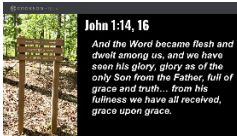
Jesus, the living word, became the greater fulfillment and the true Blaze of God's presence among us. In the first chapter of the gospel of John we read:



The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

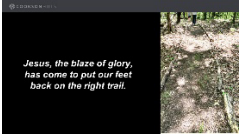


But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...



And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” (John 1:9-12, 14, 16 ESV)

I love the Old Testament Sinai imagery there in [John 1:14](#) “The Word, Jesus, dwelt (tabernacled/tented) among us, and we have seen his glory!”



Jesus, the blaze of glory, has come to put our feet back on the right trail.

Trailhead: Every journey with Jesus has a beginning, a trailhead.

A place where the spark of faith ignites, and you take the first step toward the trail.

For our students at Cookson Hills, this journey starts with a guardian whose sees us as an answer to their prayers. The student steps away from the chaos and crisis that has crowded out the trail to Jesus and step into a clearing a space where the choices to follow Jesus can be scene.

All followers of Jesus can relate to that. The moment of clarity when you figure out, I need to find my way to Jesus if I am going to make it.

Of course, the trailhead is just the start.

The Trail: If faith is a journey, a trail, that means we are moving forward and making progress.

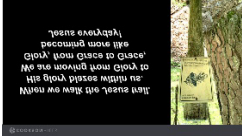
When you go on a trip or even walk a trail there are signs and markers along the way that mark your progress. On a trail there may be a small sign calling out a certain tree or a point of interest. On a road trip your phone or GPS announces mileage or time progress.

Our students at Cookson Hills learn that they can have goals for their life. Items on their list might include, controlling their temper. Learning self-control. Humbling themselves and not being so prideful. These are recurring lessons and progress can come slow at times. But, day by day they can mark their progress toward their goals.

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul encourages us to keep moving forward in our faith, through the indwelling presence of the Spirit.



He says, **“(as we) behold the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed...from glory to glory (by) the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:17-18)** The Holy Spirit, is our trail guide. He is transforming us as we listen to him.

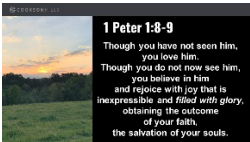


When we walk the Jesus trail. His glory blazes within us. We are moving from Glory to Glory, from Grace to Grace, becoming more like Jesus every day!

I have seen God’s Glory in many of our kids. Now understand the middle can be a messy place in life. That place between where we started with Jesus and the destination where we want to go. And the kids will and do mess up, get lost, but the longer they are at Cookson and working with their Houseparents, SW, and Teachers the more like Jesus they each become.

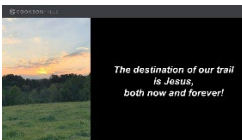
•The same is true for you, me, your children, and grandchildren.

The Destination: All trails have a trail-end, the Bible calls this the finish line of our faith.



Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:8-9 ESV)

•When we put our faith in the Glorious Jesus, when we leave our way behind and walk his trail, when we move from Glory to Glory, allowing God's Word and His Spirit to transform our character, all of this becomes the salvation of our souls!



The destination of our trail is Jesus, both now and forever.

- This is our mission! This is what Cookson Hills is about, this is what this church is about.**
- Leading families and children back into the path of Jesus, clearing away the weeds of life, so that they can start a new journey with Jesus.**



I don't know where you are today, but no matter where we are the best next step is always to take a step toward Jesus. Look for his blaze on your trail and step toward it.

- Move toward Jesus by clearing out the clutter of this world by allowing God's Word to work in your life through the power of his spirit.
- Take a step of faith toward Jesus in service. What missional call has he placed on your heart?