

September 10, 2023

Braving Change: Week 1

Welcome to our 15th Anniversary Month at ReaLife! I want us to spend the next couple of weeks not only looking BACK and being so grateful for all the things that God has done through ReaLife, but CHART A COURSE for what the NEXT 15 years can look like!

However, our world is changing so fast that I think we should break that down into three, five year segments!

I read a book several months ago where the author used the story of Lewis and Clark and the Louisiana Purchase to parallel the world in which the church is facing today.

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson commissioned Lewis to make his way to “present day” Washington & Oregon States to see what the Path to the Pacific could yield to our fledgling nation.

To this point in our history, no American had ever been to the Pacific Northwest! This would be the grandest of all journeys!

As with all EPIC TREKS, there would be highs and lows, surprises and challenges, victories and defeats, such was the case of this incredible adventure, and so it is in the Life of the Church as well!

I. Incredible Adventure

We'll celebrate next week the 15 year adventure that is ReaLife! The trouble with getting older is what seemed to happen just 5 years ago was really more like 10-12 years ago!

Most of you know that our adventure started off pretty rocky. Just as we were putting this all into motion, they discovered cancer in Debbie's kidney! We were in the process of buying this building, which was a miracle all in itself!

Thankfully for all of us, Debbie is still with me. Our kids played vital roles throughout the last 15 years, and there is nowhere we'd rather be than with YOU!

II. Incredible Realization

It didn't take long for Lewis and Clark to realize they were over their heads. You see, no American had ever been to the Pacific Northwest! The furthest we had settled was present day St. Louis.

The conventional wisdom of the day is that the rest of the country was just like the Eastern part of our country. That's why they took rafts and canoes! The plan was to canoe up the Mississippi river, across the Missouri River to the Columbia river, and get out on the shoreline of western Oregon.

However, when they got to the Lemhi Pass in Colorado, they saw something that no one had ever seen before: The Rocky Mountains!

How do you canoe UP a mountain? You don't!

Sergeant John Ordway (of the Corp of Discovery) declared this, "The mountains continue as far as our eyes could extend. They extend much further than we expected. They were the most terrible mountains we had ever beheld!"

Meriwether Lewis, in that moment made a statement that rings even truer today, and will be the key to our series: The world in front of us is NOTHING like the world behind us!

According to his journal, Lewis believed he would walk up a hill, look down a gentle slope that would take his men a half day to cross with their canoes on their backs, and swiftly float to the Pacific Ocean. Nothing could have been further from the truth!

Can I prepare you TODAY, for the next 15 years? You must understand, the world in front of us is NOTHING like the world behind us!

Question: What are we to do?

This is the question I want to walk through with our church leaders, staff, and department leaders over the next few months. But I can give you this beginning direction: We can't do what we've always been doing! We can't just try harder, pray more, sing different songs. We are entering a "geography" that is brand new territory!

Did you know that 1,500 pastors leave the ministry every month? There are many reasons. This week a friend of mine passed along this article to me. It was entitled: 'This past Sunday I preached my last sermon as the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Arlington Heights'.

I have become part of what is known as the Great Pastor Resignation that came in the wake of the pandemic. Barna did a national survey of pastors, and as of March 2022, 42% of pastors considered quitting.

The top five reasons given are as follows:

- The immense stress of the job: 56%
- I feel lonely and isolated: 43%
- Current political divisions: 38%
- I am unhappy with the effect this role has had on my family: 29%
- I am not optimistic about the future of my church: 29%

1.) The weight of all those lives

2.) 1,000 Bosses- “In my previous congregation, a member who was a former state senator for the Pennsylvania legislature refused to volunteer for our boards because he felt that church boards were too cutthroat.”

3.) Unrealistic Expectations- I need to be a Professional Speaker, I have to act as a CEO, I need to be a Professional Fundraiser, Counselor, HR Director, Master of Ceremonies at all the church functions, a Theologian...

4.) Finally, you are expected to be a pillar of virtue, meaning you must be blameless or morally pure. Your spouse and your children should all be perfect or close to it. Most importantly, you must be unconditionally loving, meaning you have to love everyone in your congregation and show them grace and forgiveness, no matter how poorly they treat you.

All of this, and people still pick and choose if they’ll come to church any particular week, and rarely Serve or Give regularly!

What really got him was determining that his church had a FIXED mindset over a GROWTH mindset.

Growth Mindset is when a person is willing to take chances, enjoys learning new things, and is not afraid to fail. Conversely, people with Fixed Mindsets don’t like to be challenged. They perceive failure as the limit of their abilities. They tend to be scared of learning new things, particularly if that education disrupts their current worldview.

What I have learned over the last 10 years, the majority of people who attend churches are in the FIXED MINDSET category.

Question: So how did Meriwether Lewis make it to the Pacific Northwest?

III. Incredible Partnerships

1.) William Clark- Initially, President Jefferson did not want Lewis to take William Clark on the journey. In fact, for all practical purposes, Lewis lied to the President of the United States! Although he was not permitted to give him the rank of Captain, Lewis gave him that title for the entire journey.

2.) Corp of Discovery- 33 in total! Lewis wanted to find the best possible men he could and recruit them to join his expedition.

3.) Sacagawea- proved to be an indispensable addition to the expedition. At one point, when the group was surrounded by a warring Indian tribe, where the men feared they would probably all lose their lives, it turned out that the Chief was Sacagawea’s brother that she hadn’t seen in over 10 years!

Why give you a history lesson today? Because Meriwether Lewis couldn’t do it by himself, and neither can I!

If ReaLife is to make another run of 15 years, there needs to be the assurance of Incredible Partnerships that will continue to be formed for our days ahead!