

September 24, 2023
Braving Change: Week 3

In this Anniversary Month, we've spent the first couple of weeks LOOKING BACK and being grateful for all the things that God has done through ReaLife. But I'd like to pivot in these next couple of weeks and CHART A COURSE for what the NEXT 15 years can look like!

Our series has been driven by a Church Leadership book I read earlier in the year that compared where the church is today to the adventure of Lewis & Clark attempting to find the Northwest Passage.

It was relatively smooth sailing until Lewis & Clark came to the Lemhi Pass in present day Idaho. It was there that they got their first look at the Rocky Mountains! To this point in our history, no American had ever been to the Pacific Northwest!

Here's what they discovered: The world in FRONT of us, is NOTHING like the world BEHIND us!

There's no doubt the CHURCH is going to face some Rocky Mountains in the days ahead!

One of the big mistakes that Lewis & Clark made was the wrong assumption of the journey in front of them! They "thought" the West was just like the Eastern half of the US, but nothing could have been further from the truth! They soon discovered they COULDN'T canoe UP the Rocky Mountains!

For myself, the staff, and the Leadership team of ReaLife, we have to be determined to Lead Forward into this uncharted territory, and Bring MORE / Develop MORE leaders for our days ahead!

Question: What will drive us the next 15 years?

I. Maintenance or Missional?

Sadly, every church STARTS with a plan or a dream to last forever, but TIME bears a disappointingly stark reality to that equation.

In the last 5 years within the Assemblies of God...

- 2018: Opened 327 - Closed 314
- 2019: Opened 265 - Closed 296
- 2020: Opened 214 - Closed 262
- 2021: Opened 213 - Closed 321
- 2022: Opened 265 - Closed 346

In the last 5 years, we CLOSED 300 more churches than we OPENED! That's like almost closing every A/G church in Pennsylvania within the last 5 years!

Question: Do you know where some of the hardest, most resistant places to Gospel are in our world?

You might think the Middle East / the Arab World, but that's somewhat expected. Our missionaries are declaring places like England and France as some of the most darkened places to the Gospel!

Didn't the Great Awakening happen there? Wasn't that the place of countrywide revivals that lasted months and years at a time? Yes to all of that!

But TIME has a way of shifting the Church's focus from MISSIONAL to MAINTENANCE!

Can I ask you to buckle up? We're trying to CHANGE the world, but let's be honest, most of us remain UNCHANGED!

I thought this week, what would happen if I didn't show up on Sunday? Or through the week, or the next Sunday?

Trust me, that's not an egotistical comment on my part, it's more of an indictment AGAINST me!

Has my Leadership been Missional or Maintenance for RealLife? Is there still a FIRE burning in our souls to Reach lost people, Disciple lost people, Help lost people become Redeemed people!?

You may know the name Matt Redman? He was the worship leader at a larger church in England. He was writing music, performing in venues around the world. And one day his Pastor realized that their church was taking on a concert feel. They wanted to engage in worship, but nothing else. Lines were out the door for Worship Nights!

So you'll never guess what the Pastor did! He pulled the plug on the Worship Team! Told the band they were done. Told Matt he could lead from a single guitar, or they'd just sing acapella!

The world Today does not NEED, nor DESIRE, another silver-tongued Orator. What this world demands is...

- Are we Authentic?
- Do we really Believe?
- Do our Words and Actions truly match?
- Are we people of Character, Care, and Constancy?
- Are we still the same when the Music Fades!?

If you were going to do some intensive Rock Climbing, what kind of guide would you choose? A well seasoned, ultra professional guide, or an adrenaline junkie?

Question: How many would agree that there had to be some level of trepidation in Acts 1 when Jesus ascended, and left the disciples with their mouths open, and their eyes looking into the sky!?

They realized they were a man down, so here is how Luke records it.

Acts 1:24-25 (NIV)

Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry..."

Later, Paul describes the Apostolic Ministry:

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Reader's Digest version: I must Decrease, YOU must Increase! The disciples knew this! There's a New World out there. We're not doing Church like we did 50 years ago, we can't!

We need a FRESH Revelation.

When you have an Insatiable Desire, God will OPEN the Impossible Doors.

15 YEARS AGO we had several couples that committed TIME, MONEY, PRAYER, EFFORT to invite people. THEY CAME IN EARLY, STAYED LATE, CLEANED THE BUILDING, TAUGHT KIDS CLASSES, GREETED AT THE DOOR, they were known as the CORE TEAM.

We were MISSIONAL, because our very existence depended on it!

I wonder... How hungry are we today? How Missional are we today?

- We have a renovated building
- We finally have some money in the bank
- We now hire someone to clean the church

I want us to Pray about...

- Being Apostolic
- Being Missional
- Is it time for the Music to fade?
- Who's going to be the 15 Year Core Team?