

The Ultimate Fixer Upper Reveal

I just finished reading Joanna and Chip Gaines, [The Magnolia Story](#). By the way, it's a great read, even for guys like me that end up as accidental HGTV viewers. In the book, the Gaines share amazing stories of how their lives intersected and through courage, faith and perseverance God began to build things in their lives that they never dreamed would happen.

For me there is a biblical moment in every one of their shows, It's the big reveal. They bring the home owners by their newly redesigned house with a huge photo of the pre-renovated house masking its fresh paint, new porch, replaced shutters and new landscaping. Of course, it's the dramatic climax of every show as they roll the huge photo away, a moment complete with tears, hugs and 'wow's.

The biblical moment for me is the connection we find in Ezekiel 40 when God reveals to Ezekiel the New City and the New Temple.

He brought me there (to the new city). In visions of God, He took me to the land of Israel and set me down on a very high mountain. On its southern slope was a structure resembling a city. Ezekiel 40:1-3 (CSB)

This was God's big reveal as he walked Ezekiel through the New City and Temple which represent a time when we *all* will see the glory of God's perfect work. Complete with eye-popping design, renovation and beauty.

I'm reminded that this world is *a fixer upper*. The societal landscape is full of weeds, leaky pipes, stained carpet, faulty tile, and messy closets. They present themselves as lies, injustice, starvation, human trafficking, hypocrisy, hate and dirty politics. But even now, God is at work.

We have the same responsibility that Ezekiel received in verse 4:

*He spoke to me: "Son of man, look with your eyes, listen with your ears, and pay attention to everything I am going to show you, for you have been brought here so that I might show it to you. **Report everything you see.**"*

We get to share the big reveal of our soon-to-be home, that Jesus is preparing. It's what we do as believers.

Remember His promise?

In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you. If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself, so that where I am you may be also. You know the way to where I am going.

I don't know about you, but after a rough year of lies, violence, injustice, terror, and protests, I'm ready for our new digs. In the meantime, let's do the two things He's asked us to do. Do "big reveals" of the Kingdom to come and pick up a hammer and renovate the fixer upper we have in front of our eyes today.

Fake News that Many Christians Believe

Frankly, I'm tired of hearing about fake news. Fake news draws in the gullible at an alarming rate. You've certainly had friends on social media post links about all sorts of deliberately crafted lies in order to press an agenda. And

It's not just the world outside the church. We see incredulous, hyperbolic news to support the Christian worldview also. But we all know that the concept of fake news is not new. And it's not confined to social media. It's not only from TV preachers and Christian music that doesn't square up to the truth about life or God. Lots of fake news just sneaks into our consciousness like a thief, stealing our joy, courage and authenticity. The enemy has been posting fake news for centuries. Here are four examples of fake news many Christians believe.

God will accept you once you get your act together.

We so often fail to approach the throne with confidence because we feel that Jesus is angry and dissatisfied with us as followers. We magnify all our failures and live in a shadow of shame and self-condemnation.

Here's a truth bomb from Brother Paul:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:1

After the resurrection Jesus pursued a reunion with a denier, a doubter, and a number of deserting disciples.

He's not the ogre waiting for us to forget to floss so he can swat us with his golden fly swatter. He's not a passive god who sits around drumming his fingers on the throne, watching CNN for the latest on world-sized problems while yawning at our infinitesimal requests.

That's not who God is. He is with you and He is for you.

Salvation happens when you get all the facts right.

Salvation is not an intellectual hoop to jump through. It is belief in Jesus even though you are sometimes struggling to

understand everything. Children certainly don't understand everything and yet Jesus tells us to come to Him as children with all our uncertainties and struggles.

The church often minimizes the process of salvation to a doctrinal game of jeopardy. On the contrary, your faith is not dependent upon you having the correct view of the 70 weeks of Daniel. Thank you, Jesus! It has always been about faith and faith is not without its mysteries. In fact, faith is all about the mystery. Celebrate the mysteries and love Jesus.

If you pray right, you'll get everything you request.

One of the greatest struggles most believers experience is the perplexity of unanswered prayers. It's easy for us to view prayer as a giant vending machine with the candy bar stuck in the machinery. The more we invest in it the more frustrating we become with the process. This is the time to move forward in prayer knowing that God has a better view of our lives than we do. Trust that He will work in His own way and His own time. But NEVER stop partnering with Him in prayer. You will find the reward of unanswered prayers: greater faith and dependence upon God.

God wants you to be pain free.

Pain is one of God's greatest teaching tools. The pain you experience will further your growth, cause you to depend on Him, and allow you to help others.

Paul's thorn in the flesh, though a mystery, was painful. Still he writes:

But he (Jesus) said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

Pain is actually a sign that God has not given up on you!

So there you have it—Four fake news items all Christians struggle with from time to time. What fake news have you discovered. I'd love to hear about it. Hopefully discovering fake news is good news today!

Praying Before the Day

The second chapter of Joel reminds us to not only live for today. We must live for THE DAY. It's a constant struggle to keep our focus on the fact that everything around us that we can touch with our hands will all be gone, leaving only our relationships and connection with our Source, Jesus. So how do we live for THE DAY when things once clouded will be seen face to face?

1. Return to God (v12)

“Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”

Spiritual preparation begins and ends with prayer. All our striving to be somebody must be overshadowed and minimized. Our prayers should reach the throne of God in wholeheartedness. Turning to God means that we cast aside our own desires for a greater calling: *knowing and trusting Him.*

2. Reunite the Family (v.16)

Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and nursing babes; Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, And the bride from her dressing room.

God invites us into the celebration of the feast to come. Our

task is to gather and unite the often splintered family to receive the groom.

- This happens before THE DAY.
- It requires forgiveness and reconciliation in the face of our deepest wounds.
- We are instigators of grace in all its aspects.
- This is the hard work that brings the Kingdom of God to this blue marble called Earth.

3. Receive the Savior (v. 19)

“Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them”

The symbolism of bread, wine and oil tells the entire story of redemption.

- Bread- His Body
- Wine- His Blood
- Oil- the ointment of healing

4. Restore the blessings (v. 25)

“So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust.”

The locusts have ravaged the cosmos. They’ve wrecked our world. They eat into blessing. Whether it is a wound, a broken relationship, or a death. The story of redemption is a story of reconciliation of the things that were taken from us. God’s promise is strong. We must celebrate that He will make all things new.

5. Recapture the dreams (v.28)

Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams. Your young men shall see visions.

Beloved, live in the reality of the redemption story and your

dreams will be rekindled and will flourish like the opening of a rose. Dead dreams will rise from the ashes of our brokenness and pain. We will look forward and not backwards We will view life as the great saga of grace that it truly is. If only we will could celebrate the majesty and holiness of today! This morning we are one step closer to the coming of the Bridegroom amidst the perils of the present.

Even so Lord Jesus, Come!

[Download Listening Sheet](#)

Solving that Annoying Problem of Church Growth

For some people, church growth can be rather tedious. Parking problems, the new people to get to know, the reduction of political power due to the influx of new people that don't know you, the extra wear on the carpet, the noise of young children, the overuse of bathroom facilities...you name it. So as we contemplate growth I thought I'd share a few ideas that could very well solve the spread of people throughout the foyer of your church's worship center.

So, ***just for fun***, may I submit to you 25 tried and true ideas for solving the annoying problem of church growth. Pick a couple and see what happens.

1. Begin your message with the phrase, "You know what's wrong with you people..."
2. Place the Student Sunday school space near the "Ruth class" for ladies 70 and above.
3. Move Business Meetings to Sunday Morning and open

up the floor by asking, "So does anybody have beefs?"

4. Begin that year-long sermon series on the 70 weeks of Daniel.
5. Place a Polygraph machine on the front pew to be used during the invitation time.
6. Place tire puncture strips in the parking lot for cars going the wrong way before Sunday School.
7. Pick a NASCAR driver as your favorite and complain about all the other drivers (this works best in Alabama).
8. Place the Roller Coaster "You must be this tall" sign at the entrance of the Worship Center. (And make it stand about 5'8 ½")
9. Keep the Christmas Pageant livestock in the church choir room year round.
10. Announce that on high attendance Sunday, if the goal is met, everyone will kiss the pig!
11. If your auditorium slopes downward to the platform give every kid under 12 a handful of marble before the service.
12. Give the deacons the ability to "gong" the special music.
13. Place the outdoor welcome center tent a few feet from the septic tank.
14. Replace the pictures of former pastors with pictures of Larry, Moe, and Curly.
15. Start arranging marriages in the single department.
16. Put a blank for weight on the membership forms.
17. Invite the "Cops" crew along during hospital visits.
18. Demand madatory drug tests for all senior adult excursions.
19. In order to feel relevant, say "Dude" 15 times from the pulpit each Sunday.
20. Have organist play hockey cheers at pivotal

moments of the sermon.

21. Place armed guards in front of the Sunday School Supply Closet.
 22. Before the offertory hymn have the worship leader scream, "Show Me the Money"
 23. Charge tolls for use of restrooms.
 24. Illustrate all sermons or Sunday School lessons with scenes from "Walker Texas Ranger."
 25. Use the "The Voice" format for staff hirings.
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6 Surprising Things about Leadership

I sometimes hear myself say, "Nothing surprises me. I've seen it all. The good, the bad and the slightly unattractive." But that's not exactly true. I am constantly surprised.

I've seen sucker punches on the church parking lot, midnight hospital runs, camel poop stains on church carpets which incited business meetings, witches getting saved, and also *lots and lots* of things I can only explain by saying "Well, you just had to be there."

In fact, *leadership* surprises me. I came into the ministry with certain preconceived notions about how everything worked and more than a dozen times, I've left a conundrum scratching my head because I learned that I had it all wrong. Just the opposite of my clinical understanding was true. Here are six simple truths that surprise me.

Leadership is NOT getting everyone to agree on everything.

Unity is primary to the church. Paul used lots of ink communicating the power of unity and the tragedy of schisms within the church. But if you ever get to the point where you feel you've got to get unanimous votes, you'll set yourself up for failure, disappointment, and unnecessary obsessing. There is power in uniting what your deacons, staff, and leaders **do** agree on while also respecting those whose opinions vary even in the nuances of a ministry strategy. The most successful leadership teams I've seen are the ones that can disagree but choose to galvanize the mission by presenting a united front to the church after a decision is made.

In the words of one older deacon, *"I don't like the drums up there. I'm not comfortable with it. But if that's what our strategy is going to reach my grandkids, let's do it. I've got plenty of Happy Goodman Family CDs in my car. I'm all good."*

That is leadership and, yes, it is surprising, crazy-talk leadership.

Leadership requires fear and hate.

When I think of leadership, I think of the word *courageous*. But inherent in every leader, there must also be fear and hate.

We must fear many things! We must fear leading alone. We need each other. The warmest words a pastor will ever hear during conflict is, "I've got your back." We must fear complacency, sin, temptation, impurity, and missing God in the mission.

We must also hate a few things. We must hate gossip, lies, shadow missions, and a score of other things that jeopardize our mission and the church. Leaders must hate with great skill the things we **should** hate.

Think about it. We serve a God who hates. In Proverbs, the Bible tells us of this Holy God who hates seven things:

Haughty Eyes

A Lying Tongue

Hands That Kill The Innocent

A Heart That Plots Evil

Feet That Race To Do Wrong

A False Witness Who Pours Out Lies

A Person Who Sows Discord In A Family

Be a godly leader and hate the right stuff.

Leadership is as much about the journey as it is about getting from Point A to Point B.

Jesus was a traveling leader who had a busy three-year tour of the Middle East on foot, boats and donkey. But if you read the gospels, the destinations usually took a back seat to what happened along the way. Demons, storms, dead guys, Romans, tax collectors, roadside meals, wave walking... Wow! There was a lot to see along the journey.

As Forrest Gump said: *"Now, it used to be, I ran to get where I was goin'. I never thought it would take me anywhere."*

Our greatest moments in leadership often occur along the way and not simply at the destination.

Leadership is not about knowing what should be done.

There are lots of people who know what should be done, but churches are often hamstrung because nobody is DOING what should be done. Mental gymnastics and philosophical leadership should be left to the Pharisees. We are called to be disciples. The very word connotes action.

Leadership is about failing often.

Yes, this seems very ironic. But if your team is counting on home runs every time they try to lead people, then frustration will soon follow. In the same breath, we must do everything we can to achieve our goals. It's true: God doesn't ask us to be successful; He asks us to be faithful. Results are a God thing, not an "us" thing. And sometimes the only way we get it right is by getting it wrong and correcting course.

Leadership is not a personality type

Leaders come in all styles, colors, shapes and shoe-sizes. Some of the greatest leaders I know are introverts. They are

listeners and when they speak, people listen. Do you know what kind of leaders you need on the team? Quiet leaders who listen and contemplate. Loud leaders who aren't afraid of a microphone. Skilled leaders who know how to fix a septic tank or a computer. Funny leaders who provide joy and excitement. (I think you know where I'm going with this.)

We need writers, huggers, finger-in-your-chest leaders, poets, carpenters, negotiators, and truth tellers.

There is a place at the leadership table for them all.

So there you have it- 6 things that surprise me about leadership. What surprises you?

Prayer of a Messy Follower

Thank You Jesus...

You've been so faithful to this messed-up follower.

You restore my sanity on a weekly basis.

You reach into the nothingness and give me everything I need.

You've been far greater and more powerful than everything I've faced.

If I did anything good, it was because of You.

You have never given up on me even though I've given you plenty of opportunities.

I can't begin to know the number of times you have overlooked my weaknesses.

I can't think of a time when You haven't been there for me.

I wish I had the words to express how You bring me such peace.

I can only say, You have been so good to me.

I love you, Jesus.

If I didn't take another breath, every step I've walked with You has been worth it.

I love the promise of Heaven, but if this life was all there was, I wouldn't change a thing.

You deserve so much more of me, Jesus.

So tomorrow I'm going to try to hand more of my life over to You.

I just know I've got more to give and I can learn how to love You better than I did today.

So I'll see You in the morning.

Mark 5: A Paranormal Event

Our world is obsessed with the paranormal. Horror and the supernatural are top at the box office. Paranormal games sell millions in the gaming industry. Tales of zombies, rising bed sheets in the middle of the night, UFO's threatening to steal all our resources, and vampires hitting on hot girls- It's all there! As I walked through our public library I was dumbfounded to find three shelves of horror and paranormal teen fiction books. Those books dominated that section of the library. Why is this? Some might argue that we all want to escape from the normal life but I would argue that students and adults take in these kinds of resources to better understand the real life that hovers under the radar of this planet. They are seeking explanations for the fantastically unpredictable and ever-present nature of the spirit world. What they find in most cases, is a misinterpreted gumbo of random theories and propositions about death, evil, and the invisible battle that rages within them. The Bible provides an interpretation of the supernatural and spiritual aspects of the cosmos. It doesn't dismiss the concept of demons and horror, but rather gives us an opportunity to process its

reality in a logical, orderly manner. Just look at the border war that took place between Jesus and demons in Mark 5

They Travel in Herds

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. [a] 2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. 3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. 4 For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 7 He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" 8 For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"

9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." 10 And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

Read Mark 5:1-10

If you look at the end of Mark 4 you will read about Jesus command over the natural forces of the weather. Now in chapter five, in a small village on the eastern side of the sea Jesus displayed His strength and cunning of the supernatural world. When Jesus enters the town he encounters a maniac. This guy was a mess-living Goth-like in a graveyard, obsessed with death, cutting himself and displaying supernatural strength. This wreck of a man had absolutely no control of himself. But this isn't a case of a boy behaving badly. There was something

much bigger going on here and everyone in town knew it. Jesus came to do some spiritual house cleaning declare this independence day for this man who was probably in his teens. The demons had no doubt who Jesus was and they knew that they had to obey. They wanted to leave but they also wanted to remain in the region. The demonic influence identified themselves as "legion- for we are many." Our habitual sinful habits operate similarly to demons. They come in packs. Often the alcoholic is also the heavy smoker, who is also the rage-aholic, who is also the absent father. Often the cheater develops a taste for other dishonest acts and creates a maze of lies to spoof a life of integrity to others. We see this often with fallen celebrities, defrocked ministers, and corrupt politicians. One revelation leads to a pack of other moral lapses. They build upon each other. Keep in mind that I'm not proposing that all these posers are demonized but rather that Satan's traps are often intricately layered and we have to keep our spiritual house clean.

Where are the areas of compromise in your life that, like weeds, have the potential to choke your integrity and relationship with God?

The God of Second Chances

Read: Mark 5:15-17

15 When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 16 Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. 17 Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

I'd imagine if you asked the people in that town, "what was the greatest miracle: the storm they heard rumored that Jesus

calmed or the deliverance of the town maniac?" I believe they'd say, hands down, it was the deliverance. In such a small town, everyone must have been aware of this guy's antics, the sorrow of a humiliated family with everyone offering pop-psychology answers to their deepest heartbreak, and the nights he screamed out and woke the babies. **THAT was "THE BIG ONE!"** That was the miracle of all miracles. Just looking at this teenager and wondering, "What happened? How did this kid surface from insanity. We've never seen him sitting peacefully, much less with clothes on!" In fact, the people in the town were so amazed and fearful that one Man could command so much power that they begged him to leave. It's another example of how people fear change, even when it is good. But only one thought must have been running through the former maniacs mind: "Ah Freedom"

There's nothing quite as wonderful as freedom, is there? His freedom happened overnight. But sometimes freedom is a series of small steps and right choices. In truth, we are all in recovery. We all have our shameful midnights and our treasured habits that we wish we wouldn't treasure so. Our solution is to relentlessly, daily return to the feet of Jesus and beg for His mercy.

Where do you need His mercy and second chances today?

Do you fear change?

Now It's Your Turn

Mark 5:18-20

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20 So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis[b] how much Jesus had done for him. And all the

people were amazed.

No one understands the power of a good story more than Jesus. As he got back on the boat the ex-demonized man begged to join Jesus but Jesus told him to stay and let people know what happened to him. Jesus knew he was more powerful in that town and telling that story. We all have stories and stories are important to the Christian faith. Personal stories are our greatest tool. And yet I'm convinced that many believers don't know their own story because they haven't taken the time to reflect on it. In the movie *As Good as It Gets*, the OCD writer, Melvin Udall, tries to convince his traveling companions, "Some people have great stories, pretty stories that take place at lakes with boats and friends and noodle salad. Just no one in this car. But, a lot of people, that's their story. Good times, noodle salad." But the truth is that good times and noodle salad does not a good story make. It is only when we reflect on the beauty of our own narrative that we will see God's hand that led us through those terrible falls and amazing rescues. Robert Frost in his famous poem-*The Road Not Taken* concludes, "I shall be telling this with a sigh some ages and ages hence..." What story will you be telling some ages and ages hence? Those who are so willing to claim that they were able to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps are the ones who really don't have a story to tell. It's the ones who realized that they had fallen and couldn't get up but suddenly encountered a superhero. Now that's a story! It's our story and it's worth telling ages and ages hence.

7 Ways to Pray

I'd love to be the kind of believer who oozes spirituality, but the real me is a scattered, messy, stumbling Christ-follower. My life is filled with to-do's, deadlines, meals on the go, and Skype. Is there any reason to think I could ever be good at prayer? Of course! And if that's something you've ever wondered, you can too. The reality is, most of us are way too busy to ignore the mystical, practical, whimsical, illogical gift of prayer. The only real way you will ever see continuous, intimate, radical prayer is to make prayer a breath, a time, a space, and a celebration. (I'll explain—hopefully.) Prayer should be a dance throughout your day. It's a constant conversation between two people—you and God. He seeks to hear from you. He wants to know your struggles, your joys, your sorrows. Newsflash: It's not a secret; God is accessible to you at any moment and in any place. You can stop and pray like you stop to say hello to the guy you see every day in the flannel shirt chewing on a coffee stirrer in the hallway. The only difference is that the guy in the flannel shirt is not invisible, and he didn't create the universe. You can learn to pray like you breathe. In with the epiphanies—the God-winks you see in your day—and out with cries for mercy and deep groans of desperation. Here are a few ideas on how to bring prayer to the forefront of your daily walk with God.

Simple One Breath Prayers

I pray the prayers of the ancient church. The oldest is my favorite: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy." Say it three times, and it'll begin to roll out off your tongue. It's a general prayer that says, "I'm at the mercy of the One who now reigns as my Big Brother and Almighty God. And I beg for His mercy throughout the day." Exams, parents, fears, future plans, broken relationships. It's a key prayer and it reminds

me that this Savior of mine wants me to acknowledge that He is there every step of the way, and He enters my life with power when I invite Him. Other one breath prayers include:

- Yes, God.
- Help, Lord.
- Show me, Jesus.
- Be my Father right now.
- Speak, God.

But for some reason I'm stuck on the ancient one: "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy."

The Prayer Bench

I am extremely ADD, an un-medicated collage of daydreaming and distractions, so it helps me to have a place to fall into prayer. Something that involves my knees. For me this is a prayer bench. It tells my body that I'm not answering the text, not surfing the Web, and not talking to anyone or focusing on anything else when I kneel at the bench. It's a God moment that sometimes lasts 117 seconds and other times lasts until my knee caps go numb. A prayer bench is just a tool—a place to go to say things to God. There's nothing powerful about the bench itself, but it reminds me that I'm a beggar who knows where to go for the good stuff of life.

Praying the Bible

When I don't know how to pray, I head for the Psalms. I read them aloud like a fortune cookie, only the stuff I read has real insight rather than random, surfacy gobledy-goop. It really, really works. It does. Try Psalm 28:1-2 as a starting place:

Don't turn a deaf ear when I call you, GOD. If all I get from you is deafening silence, I'd be better off in the Black Hole. I'm letting you know what I need, calling out for help

*and lifting my arms toward your inner sanctum. Psalm 28:1-2,
The Message*

Journaling

Sometimes I have to see proof that God is at work. And one way I do that is by keeping a prayer journal. I write prayers and worship thoughts. I share my struggles as if I'm speaking to God through my pen. This fermentation process allows me to review where I've been and where He has led me too. You can journal to God in hard copy or on an online anonymous blog. It's easy to create this through Tumblr, Blogger, or TypePad.

Tweet your Prayers

Some of my prayers are like e-mails. Short. Under, say ... 140 characters. For those prayers, I twitter. Twittering my prayers is fun because other people see what you are praying for and they begin to pray too! I don't have a huge Twitter following; just about 175 people. But I've heard from many who've been prompted to pray for the same stuff I'm praying for that day.

Road Trip

Once a year I make a little pilgrimage to the wilderness. I leave with a toothbrush and a Bible. I try to go where no one will find me. I turn off the cell and just have a day of silence. Do you know how completely rare that is? Just silence? I have time to wrestle through my sorrow, anger, fear, and confusion. God usually shows up after two hours or so and I get about as close to a supernatural experience as I'll have in the year. Try it once and it will change your life. A whole day disconnected from your life? Sure, it's strangely Victorian. But it's interesting ... every time I've done this, the earth continued to spin just fine without me.

Who knew? But if you decide to throw caution to the wind, be sure to remember the basic laws of safety—from weather, forest dwellers, and of course the boogey man.

Two or Three

And then I have my accountability guy. Actually I have two—I'm a tough case. I meet weekly with two guys, and we are allowed to ask anything and say anything. Sometimes the honesty is scary. But it's like a little mini-church, and we spend a good bit of our time in prayer for one another. It's an epic part of my weekly routine. I'm not a spiritual giant, but I've grown closer to God because I've made it a habit to take time to figure out ways I can connect to Him. I hope you'll try one or two or three or ...

Declarations for Every Day

- **Today— I'll live a life of celebration.** The brooding life is not holy. To many, it might look holy but a grave-digger and skeptic do not a Kingdom make.
- **Today— I'll simplify to remove distractions.** Our inability to hear God is directly linked to the static of modern life. It's perhaps the greatest plague of the church. We are uncomfortable with silence. The things we place before our eyes, the multitude of messages we receive on a daily basis, even the food that we eat potentially blocks our reception of God's voice. We often expel the voice of God through texts, emails, Facebook, radio, TV, and music.
- **Today— I'll meditate on Holy Scripture.** Don't just read it. Become preoccupied with it! Stuff your self full of

holy words and you'll see it bring a blessing of peace over your life because your eyes and ears are open to His Word.

- **Today I'll follow God's heart and not my own.** Keep in mind what God thinks of your heart: It is deceitful. Culture says, "Follow your heart." Please don't. It's a dead-end proposition. Discover the heart of God and follow His. Stop all self-promotion campaigns. We all involved in a throne battle. Ask yourself: "Who will I place on the throne of my life? To which king will I bow down?"
- **Today I'll clarify boundaries in my personal world.** The ability to hear God is directly related to our ability to say **no** to lots of things in your life- even a few good things. We understand that we are not capable of doing everything for everybody. Your closest friends will not understand it. Some will be disappointed in you and others will think you are a prude, but celebrate your boundaries. If you understand the purpose you have been created to achieve, saying **NO** (sometimes in bold and all caps) is not just recommended, it is required.
- **Today I'll seek discernment regarding my day.** Every morning, ask for wisdom and courage. You need them both in order to discern the voice of Holy God and to do whatever He tells you to do.
- **Today I won't tolerate negativity.** If you find yourself surrounded by negative, whiney, sarcastic people, consider the architecture of you life and think about doing a little renovation.
- **Today I'll have faith in the process.** St. John of the Cross, an early church father coined the term: the dark midnight of the soul. *"The journey in Faith—the midnight of the soul when the light has all faded away and darkness has completely descended."* He concludes that many Christ followers don't wish to endure the power of pain and tragedy that is necessary to pass through before the light shines again. An overriding theme of

the Bible is that suffering is not simply to be experienced but celebrated. It produces a deeper intimacy with God.

No matter what the day brings, if I rest in these declarations, I will be safely set.

What Kind of Church is It?

We often categorize our churches with fancy titles: Relevant, emergent, classic, reformed, fundamentalist, traditional, contemporary, liturgical, purpose-driven etc... The list is really endless and the subtleties of each model vary. But what kind of church are we? Really...

- Some churches are more like a country club, complete with secret handshakes, special membership privileges, and perks for members based upon your seniority and attitude. ***But we are not called to be a Country Club.***
- Some churches are more like a fashion show where once a week we are concerned more about what the members look like on the outside than who we are on the inside. ***But we are not called to be a fashion show.***
- Some churches are like a spa where healthy people come to be pampered with a painless personality makeover and self-help rallies devoid of the power of God. They'd never think about service or sacrifice because the church is meant only for enrichment—not spiritual warfare. ***But we are not called to be a spa.***
- Other churches are like courtrooms full of authority and judgment. Stern faces and hushed whispers are prevalent. Some believe that these churches are holy because of the formal atmosphere and the lack of tolerance for things like laughter, celebration and

dancing. These churches are dead they just haven't gotten the good grace to lie down. ***But we are not called to be a court.***

- And on the opposite side, we find the church of cool, where musicians display their gifts not to the glory of God but rather to the glory of themselves. The tendency toward outlandishness knows no bounds. They are different just for the sake of being different. Messages aren't centered on the God or the Bible. In fact, some sermons might cause you to wonder if there is really is a point beyond the emotions and the glitz of atmosphere. What is the vibe? This is the main question in the church of the cool. ***But we are not called to be cool.***
- Each model apart from the work of Christ is like a cemetery. You can put flowers on the graves, you can have tea parties next to the tombs, you can pipe in the best music and serve the best meals but without Christ, the cemetery is still full of rot. ***But we are not called into death.***

So what about us? Are we any of these churches? For most churches, we've been all of these from time to time. That's why it is so important for us to be desperate and dependent upon God. Do we want to see people who are hurting and in need come to us for help or are we satisfied with self-serving religious organizations that offer risk-free comfort and predictability. We were made for much great things; things that accompany wonder, miracles, new life and transformation. How far are we willing to go? Who do we chose to exclude? Jesus is still knocking at the doors of churches promising that if anyone hears His voice and opens the door, He will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Let's invite people to the table through worship and become the kind of Church He desires to enter.

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