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Becoming Spiritual Pioneers Rather Than Settlers

Intro: I really enjoy history. One of the historical events that fascinates me is the Oregon Trail. The Pioneers of the Oregon Trail were incredible people. We owe them our gratitude. We are enjoying many things because of the sacrifices they made. (Oregon Trail Facts)

- As believers in Christ, we have a lot in common with the pioneers. Accurate image!
- God has called us to be spiritual pioneers NOT spiritual settlers. He has called us to follow Him on a journey, not to settle down. BUT, what does this look like? As we enter another ministry year here at Foothills, there are 5 Essentials for becoming spiritual pioneers that I believe God would have us corporately embrace. It will not be enough if 50% embrace these things. We all must embrace this!

I. Spiritual Pioneers Are On The Move

Phil. 2:12 “Not that I have already obtained it...but I press on...” (NASB)

Heb. 12:1 “...Let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.” (NLT)

A. Forward progress is the norm for spiritual pioneers

1. Movement is the norm for the believer’s life. Notice the phrases...”I press on...run with endurance...” Spiritual pioneers are on the move for Jesus.
2. The Christian life is not static. It does not stay the same. It moves forward gaining ground, seeing new territory.
3. It works this way individually and corporately. Individually, we should continue to change; continue to be transformed into the image of Jesus. Hopefully, we are more mature this year than last year. Movement!
4. Corporately, it is God’s will that we as a church continue to move ahead. That we embrace the mindset of spiritual pioneers on the move for Jesus Christ. We have NOT arrived yet. Therefore, we must resist the urge to get satisfied, get comfortable, and stay where we’re at.
5. Refusing to move forward is a death sentence for any church. WHY? Because that would be direct disobedience to God for His will for His church. He’s taking us somewhere and obedience demands that we move forward with Him! (His blessing is on us because we’re following.)

B. Forward progress is best way to live

1. Safer from attacks when moving

- I would rather be a moving spiritual target than one that's sitting still. It's easy to attack something that is stationary. We have a spiritual enemy that we must deal with whether we are moving or not. I'd rather deal with attacks while we're moving forward.
- Churches that are under attack and moving forward can handle attack much better than those who sit still. WHY? Because we rally together and fight together. Churches that sit still fight each other. We don't have time to fight each other.

2. The seasons change

- Pioneers that didn't make good progress sometimes lost their lives because they didn't make it over the mountain passes before winter. Their commitment to forward progress kept them alive. (Donner Party)
- Churches that refuse to move ahead get caught by the seasons of culture. Culture changes; people change; needs change. Churches that try to do church like they did 30 years ago have lost their effectiveness.
- Why is one of the biggest complaints about church today is that it is irrelevant to the needs of people?
- We will NOT get caught off guard by the changing seasons of culture because we refused to move forward. We will keep moving ahead.

3. Right where God wants you

- The best place to be is right where God wants you to be. If forward movement is His plan for this church then moving forward is where we want to be.
- Moving forward following Jesus guarantees His presence / His blessing / His power / we will see Him do amazing things in our midst. Why would I want to be anywhere else?
- Most churches don't see these things. WHY? They refuse to move forward. We will not follow the typical life-cycle of churches (Explain) Growth – Satisfaction – Slow death

II. **Spiritual Pioneers Embrace Risk**

Heb. 11:6 "So you see, it is impossible to please God without faith..." (NLT) So, what does faith look like?

Heb. 11:8 “It was by faith Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as an inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going.” (NLT)

A. Spiritual pioneers move out into the unknown

1. They willingly leave the land of the familiar in order to embrace and experience the promises of God in the unfamiliar. That’s what faith looks like and this requires risk!
2. Think about the enormous risk the Oregon pioneers embraced to travel 2000 miles in wagons and on foot in hostile territory? The risk was tremendous. The odds stacked against them that they would all make it. Talk about faith!!! Talk about risk!
3. Yet this is what God has called us to as His people. He has called us to make a difference in this geographic area. He has called us to something unknown to all of us. To something that has never been seen before in Molalla.
4. He has called us to take hold of a destiny that results in the radical transformation of a community. Where a community is changed because of the reality of Jesus.
5. A place where the hungry are fed / the needy are clothed / the broken are healed / where divisiveness is replaced by unity and harmony / where God’s people move outside the walls of their buildings to bless the community. Where the church believes it is their responsibility to make the community a better place to live and we actively look for ways to do this.
6. Some people have told me over the years that this is impossible. I guess they want to stay in the land of the familiar. BUT, God has not called this church to stay there. He has called us to embrace this unknown.

B. Spiritual pioneers believe the risks are worth it

1. No Oregon Pioneer left St. Louis Missouri thinking the risks they were taking wasn’t worth it. It was their belief that it was worth it that drove them forward. There was a great perceived benefit for reaching the destination.
 - 640 acres free / great farmland / no diseases / beauty
2. What would happen if we really trusted God as a church? If we were willing to risk for His purposes? Are the benefits really worth it? Do we believe that seeing God transform a community is worth the risks of the journey?
3. There are risks reaching out to a community. There are risks for you personally being involved. The destination may be glorious, but the journey may really stink at times.
4. The 10 year journey that we have been on as a church has been incredible. We have seen God do tremendous things. BUT, it hasn’t always been fun / or easy / or comfortable / or painless. BUT it’s worth it!
5. As a church, God is asking us to embrace more risk...more faith. He’s

asking you to do that individually as well. He wants us to believe that the risks are worth it.

6. One way we are going to embrace the unknown and some more risk is launching a Sat. night service. (Explain – to reach more people!)

III. Spiritual Pioneers Travel Together

Heb. 10:25 “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other...” (NLT)

The journey we’re on does NOT happen in isolation, but in the context of community. The Oregon Pioneers traveled in wagon trains for a reason.

A. Spiritual pioneers travel together for encouragement

1. The rigors of the journey can cause us to get discouraged. It’s not an easy journey God has called us to. Glorious yes...easy No! Therefore, God has commanded us to travel together, not alone.
2. Culturally, we just love the lone ranger type of person. Think about all these movies that personify this image? (Rambo / Rocky / Braveheart / Gladiator / Batman / Superman / Spiderman / It’s one person against the world!
3. We internalize these images and then apply them to our Christian experience. Then, we wonder why we can’t handle things ourselves?
ANSWER: We were never designed to.
4. God wants us traveling together in the context of loving relationships so that we don’t get discouraged and quit. If you feel like you’re the only one on the journey, you might be right! Maybe it’s time to join the wagon train!
5. The Bible says, “many hands make light work”. I can’t think of a better way to encourage one another than to serve together having plenty of people to make the work light. (talk about Sat. Night Service) (Reach 456)

B. Spiritual pioneers travel together for protection

1. There was a reason the pioneers traveled together. They would circle the wagons when they were under attack and protect each other. Tough making a circle with one wagon!
2. We must always be mindful that we are in enemy territory. We are traveling in a hostile environment. Traveling alone is just foolish and dangerous. We need each other for protection.
3. In this case, I love the imagery of the Roman soldier better than that of a pioneer. Explain how the Roman army would advance inter-locking shields)
4. In order to lock your shields together, you have to be close enough to someone to do so. Who are you locking shields with?

IV. Spiritual Pioneers Endure Hardship

II Tim. 2:2 “Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus...” (NASB)

A. Spiritual pioneers don't expect the journey to be easy

1. We live in a culture that worships ease / comfort / safety / security. Some preachers actually teach this is God's will for us. In fact, if things are difficult, some people think they are out of the will of God.
2. As believers, we need to adjust our expectations and embrace the fact that hardship comes with the journey. It's not the entire journey...but it is part of it. We have to stop looking for the easy way.
3. Some of the greatest trips I've experienced were certainly NOT the easiest. (Number of years ago – Elk hunting Hells Canyon – packed in 11 miles – shot 3 elk – the fun stopped there! Deepest in US! explain)
4. What God has called us to as a church is certainly glorious, but it is also challenging. There are some hardships that must be embraced. Like what?
5. It's not always convenient to serve / to give financially / to be overcrowded / to be willing to risk / Yet this is what we are called to endure.

B. Spiritual pioneers overcome the hardships of the journey

1. Pioneers don't allow the hardships to stop them from moving forward. Pioneers choose rather to overcome them.
2. As we face the challenges of the journey God has us on as a church body, we must be willing to overcome them. We can't listen to the voices that say, “You can't cross that river!” “You can't get over that mountain!” “No church has ever done that before!” “That's impossible!”
3. I simply will not listen to that type of talk here at Foothills. It's faithless / godless / it's settler talk not spiritual pioneer talk. We have a God that can overcome any obstacle. As long as we follow Him, whatever hardship we encounter will be overcome.

V. **Spiritual Pioneers Dream Of The Destination**

Heb. 11:13-16 “...They agreed that they were no more than foreigners and nomads here on earth. And obviously people who talk like that are looking forward to a country they can call their own...But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland...” (NLT)

- We have a heavenly destination to look forward to.
 - A. Spiritual pioneers are motivated by their ultimate destination
 1. Our ultimate destination is heaven. That's where we get to finally settle in. Our anticipation of heaven should never motivate us to become settlers in this life. It should serve as motivation to fulfill our earthly purpose well.
 2. We should never get so heavenly minded we are no earthly good. We should long for our final destination / long for when the journey is over / be encouraged by the promises of God in the hardships...BUT keep moving

forward.

- It's like looking forward to a vacation so much you just stop functioning in real life. Knowing that I have a vacation planned in the future is a real encouragement to me as I endure the winter months. (explain)
3. I see too many believers today with an attitude of just trying to hang on until Jesus comes or until they graduate to heaven. It's a real defeatist mentality. This is not the attitude God would have us embrace.

B. Spiritual pioneers are motivated by their earthly purpose

Eph. 2:10 "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus so that we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.(NLT)

1. See, there is an earthly purpose to fulfill while we travel to our heavenly destination! Spiritual pioneers know that they have a job to do before leaving this life and they are committed to getting it done.
2. We must become a church that is not only highly motivated by heaven, but also highly motivated to finish the job God has called us to as a church. We are far from finished. (Purpose statement) 45,000 people – 33% churched.
3. 10 years ago God entrusted to us His purpose for a geographic area. We are far from completing it. Let's stay motivated by our earthly purpose God has given us. Let's embrace the adventure God is still calling us to!

Are you a spiritual pioneer or a spiritual settler? Can you hear Jesus calling you to follow Him? Will you start moving / embrace some risk / travel together / endure hardship / keep dreaming about our destination? This is where God is calling us to