“We have almost two hundred members,” he said to me. “So,” I wanted to say back, “I can swim from one end of the pool to the other in one breath.” Instead, I said, “Really? Wow! That’s a goodly sum!” A goodly sum? “What's wrong with me,” I asked Jeremy as I walked away from yet another conversation with a complete stranger, knowing nothing more about him than where he lives, how new and big his church is or how many people are at a Wednesday night service. I think he was married, but that is only because of my stellar powers of observation and the wedding ring he was wearing.

“I think maybe I’m missing it. My church has only three members. One of them is married to me and the other two share my name and, if I tell them there is a lion outside or that we as Clarks have a special tiny hole at the tip of our thumbs and if we blow hard enough it will make our leg kick, they believe me. So, they may not count. Maybe we don’t get it, or maybe we don’t belong here, either way we’re weird man.” I included Jeremy in the “we” even though he had said nothing about a “goodly sum.”

“No, most of these people don’t need to be here. These leaders should all go to a two day worship conference. They don’t need to be here,” Jeremy responded. ‘Here’ was Catalyst, a conference for the leaders of tomorrow and we were “rubbing elbows” with attendees as we walked the halls checking out the conference booths that circled the arena.

Jeremy does not say a lot, but when he does, it is a good idea to listen. In my humble opinion, he was very perceptive and mostly right. I say mostly because it is rare to be completely right. It seemed most of these leaders had come to Catalyst to learn more on how, as opposed to why, we do church. While walking, we were being inundated with how to do church better. As we passed booth after booth, it became evident that at least 75% of them were primarily focused on the Sunday or Wednesday night event - Church in its institutional form. From booth to booth we were reminded that church is big business.

None of the services being offered at these booths were wrong or even misplaced, but I was still unnerved by how inwardly focused we are. These booths were run by Godly entrepreneurs and they had come to sell us what we want. But it was not the supply that unnerved me, it was the demand. I am sure I am naïve. I have never been a paid member of a
church staff, my experience with the practical day to day organization that goes into running a large church is limited, but it was disheartening that so much money and attention was being lavished on the church service.

There were booths on how to streamline Sunday morning from better slides to better sound, or how to get more people to your church thru internet, television and radio. And there were plenty of classes for Sunday school with curriculum and video. It all reminded me of a statistic I had recently heard: 75% of the North American church thought the worship service was for them. That is to say: they thought that worship was designed for their encouragement and for their well being. That is very American and absolutely false.

While walking the halls, I began to wonder if there was any correlation between our streamlined service designed for efficiency and comfort and the statistic I had recently heard. Please hear my heart: there was nothing wrong with any of the services being offered and I agree that we should pursue excellence in our presentation of the gospel; I’m simply observing that most of our resources and energy seem to be focused on how to do a church service better.

I want to make this clear: this is not a review of the conference. This is simply a journaling of my journey. It is the observations of a self proclaimed mad man, an extremist and a crazed revolutionary who, if he hosted his own conference, few would listen to. I have nothing but respect for those who hosted this conference and my prayer is that they continue to play a role as catalysts to myself and this coming generation of leaders. So hear my heart. These are observations not meant to offend but to encourage - assuming you want encouragement from a mad man.

It was a great conference. It was well put together. The speakers were some of our times most amazing men. All Godly leaders within the church today, these men are heroes to me - men who impacted my life through their writings, teachings and examples. I had an opportunity to shake hands with some of them, and I'm pretty sure I acted like a girl who had just experienced Elvis shaking his hips or, to be relevant to my generation, Bono cooing in my ear.

I loved the fact that there was a leadership conference focused on my generation. The teaching was amazing, the production good. The band was tight and sincere. The hosts were funny and the organization was phenomenal. All in all, Catalyst was amazing. They put a conference together for 9000 individuals, all believers, every one on a personal journey coming together in our love for Jesus and her bride. It was quite an event and went off without a hitch. But it wasn’t what I had hoped it would be.

“Relevant” defined everything that was both positive and negative about my Catalyst experience. It seemed to be a conference on how. That is fine. Yet I had hoped to come and experience why. Where was the wild abandon, the God worship that my generation needs and has a passion for? When it came to experiencing why we do church, the conference was hip, but safe. I like being hip, but I’m tired of safe.

I had wanted to hear, not just from those leading but from those attending, how church was changing. What kind of revelation was taking place and what kind of revolution it was birthing? I wanted to find creativity and ingenuity and meet people who where busting the paradigms of how church was done. I wanted to meet fellow revolutionaries, believers who did not define success solely by numbers. I had hoped to worship. These things did happen,
but not in the gut wrenching, deep calls to deep way. And, when I did have a God experience, it had more to do with my hunger than the surroundings. This is not a complaint; I simply had come with expectations of mining the depths of why and not how we do church. This was not that kind of conference.

There was a central theme from every speaker, a calling up and out, an encouragement to go deeper in hearing God, farther in believing and obedience. God’s calling on our lives was confirmed. We were encouraged to wait on His timing and use His wisdom in our pursuit, to pursue people as opposed to policy. However, there was an underlying tug of war regarding the future young leaders of tomorrow’s church and how they should proceed. The system or way in which we do church was challenged and championed by various speakers. There were two speakers that captured the conflict I was feeling in my heart as they presented their thoughts on how to move forward.

The first said the church needs to stop “chasing relevant.” He went on and encouraged tomorrow’s leaders to step out in obedience. He promoted innovation, creativity and a willingness to bust old paradigms. He suggested relevant had become a new buzz word and that we as leaders need to be willing to risk looking irrelevant in our pursuit of God. That to chase after relevant would always result in arriving late.

The second speaker said that we as young leaders have legitimate dreams placed in us by God. That God in His mercy will guide us; then as a side, he mentioned he had noted anger in tomorrow’s leaders. He acknowledged a desire in my generation for change, for community, and then stated that most of us had high ideals, but were not living them out. He suggested that this anger was based from issues of our youth, born of family splits and lack of community during our formative years. There was a hint of frustration in his tangent. It felt as though he thought us youngsters needed to be properly reprimanded, that we needed to get back in line.

Don’t get me wrong, I am pro spanking, have had my fair share - most of them deserved - and, regarding this man, I’m more than willing to accept correction. So I am sure there is some truth to his assessment, but might I also suggest that some of our anger or frustration is simply the natural byproduct of a revolutionary being asked and expected to do church the way it has always been done. That we believe like always, church must change. That like him and those others who have gone before us, there is a burning fire in our hearts for revelation and revolution.

Both of these men are amazing and are heroes to me. Both are revolutionaries. Both have stepped out in obedience and been catalysts for change regarding church. I’m not here to say what is or is not relevant today or that one ministry or church is more relevant than another. I am simply saying, on behalf of my generation, yes to obedience and asking those who came before us to remember what it was to be a young revolutionary, to guide us as we chase obedience, to trust that God can use us and that the implementation will not look just like it did yesterday.

I am not speaking of anarchy or rebellion but of the revolution started by the impact of Jesus’ love. That revelation has sparked revolution in the hearts of believers ever since. Believers are daily hearing God, believing and then obeying. What can I say, I am getting older, but I am still young enough to want in on that revolution, and, in all honesty, the day I get too old for that I will be dead.
Learning from someone else’s revelation is just common sense. Yet, in the past, I have often felt that to lead properly I had to get in line behind their revelation. If I just modeled what they did, I would experience success. But to lead properly we must have our own revelation from God. We must be willing to risk chasing a revolutionary God. We must be crazy enough to obey, willing to fail, and still expect to succeed. And should a line form, it will be behind us.

I believe this next generation of leaders is going to be responsible for taking the church into the Promised Land. That beautiful land that flows with milk and honey; that same land that is infested with murderous giants. This next generation will be defined not by age, but by a willingness to obey, regardless of what it looks like. Their relevance will be found in obedience. They will be surrendered warriors who are tired of the safety of the desert and willing to risk life and limb to take the Promised Land by force. They will be practiced in His presence and bold in their pursuit of spreading His glory.

The crossroads for today’s leader, for today’s believer, is whether we choose to chase relevant or risk it all and chase obedience in whatever form it comes. The true definition of relevant is found in the heartbeat of God. And with every heartbeat relevant is redefined. Only those whose heads rest upon the breast of the Master will experience relevance. It is always those who are practiced in the why that God wants to use in defining the how.

As the booths revealed, we can become predisposed with keeping our finger on the pulse and learning the newest formula. Yet, if we become too focused on the how, the why can dangerously become an afterthought. I think Jeremy was right, most of us as leaders don’t need another conference on how; we need to experience why again and again and again.

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