

CROWN FOUNDATIONS PART THREE

1: Cross & Crown, sailing or rowing?

I think many of you know that we used to live in Oxford, and still have a house there. Before that, we were in Cambridge for seven years - and the rivalry between Oxford and Cambridge is infamous. They often don't refer to the other University by name, usually "the other place" - or worse. and nowhere is this rivalry more obviously expressed than in the annual boat race.

In both cities you would come across the rowers, often obsessively dedicated, up early, on the river day after day - and some of the guys were just massive. block out the sun if you're behind them big - but then rowing is physically demanding and from my very limited experience exhausting.

Sailing is a very different discipline - the power isn't generated by physical exertion in the same way - though it is still tiring and demanding in its own right. The skill is positioning the sail, catching the wind, to by doing that allowing that power to speed the boat along.

It might be pressing the analogy too far to note that sailing boats were those that ultimately would travel longer and further - but I want to suggest to you that this second image is the better image for the Christian life.

You see, much as I believe in the CROWN framework, this trellis for growth that a rhythm of life provides, it does bring with it a few risks.

We can make the mistake of getting there by trying harder. We can create our own 'set of rules' and then strive to keep them better and better. We can create vantage points to look down on others from, I'm a "CROWN" Christian, or beat ourselves up when we "fail" to reach the standard we've set ourselves. We can become closet legalists.

This might be like the rowing, lots of energy, exertion, straining and striving - though we might feel like we're getting somewhere we're not going to be able to sustain the pace.

One of the crucial, I'd say fundamental aspects of forming a good rhythm of life, is positioning ourselves to catch the wind of the Spirit. It will still demand some effort on our part, but, the real power will come as we're swept along by what God is doing in our lives.

So, as you create a rhythm, it might be good to ask yourself from time to time, am I rowing here, or sailing? Is the Holy Spirit taking hold of what I offer?

It's a good image isn't it, but I also want us to think about it theologically. To help us do that, I want to first pick-up where we left last time:

Romans 5:17 *For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!*

Now we believe that establishing a rule of life with patterns that are alive and God-filled can help us to reign in life - but who are those who reign according to this verse? Those who receive abundant GRACE, and the GIFT of righteousness.

Grace - the love lavished on us we don't deserve, the favour upon us that we have no claim upon - but is given to us anyway.... this is how we connect with God through the gospel, AND it is also how we should continue in our walk with him.

Tullian Tchividjian, wrote this: *We tend to think of the Gospel as God's programme to make bad people good, not dead people alive. The fact is, Jesus came to first effect a mortal resurrection, not a moral reformation, as his own death and resurrection demonstrate. Progress in obedience happens only when our hearts realise that God's love for us does not depend on our progress in obedience.*

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Jesus didn't die to set us free, for us then to return to finding our way by our own efforts. Instead he made the way, won the access, crossed the divide so that we can position ourselves to continually receive from his blessings, this is the abundant grace Paul writes of.

Now this doesn't mean we lie back and do nothing. Rather, we make sure that we are encountering God in each rhythm we form, letting him shape our patterns.

This God focus, releases us from slogging onwards in our own strength, so that like sailing, what we offer is taken hold of by a power greater than our own. So position ourselves for a day to day experience of Grace as we let him do what only he can do, we see God at work, which means that he gets the glory.

So let me ask you a question?

- 1. Can you think of a season in your Christian journey when it has either felt like sailing or rowing?**

Think about that, talk to those around you, or leave you comments below... and we'll continue in a moment.

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2: Grace not Law

So, have you ever received a stressy email - the kind that [boom] makes you step back as you read it - woaahh! Maybe you've sent a few.

To help us get to grips with this idea of everything flowing from Grace so we can catch the wind of God's Spirit I want to turn to one of the bluntest sections of the Bible - in it St Paul is giving a real blast to a church that is losing its way...

So - flak jackets on... Let's turn to Galatians Chapter 3.

3:1 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. **2** I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? **3** Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? **4** Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? **5** So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? **6** So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

You fools! You idiots, don't be so stupid, have you been cursed?

Remember - you received the Spirit and God's power how? Through faith in the message of the cross - not by trying harder?

Paul was angry because they were at risk of messing things up - even that their faith might be in vain....

Jesus gave the pharisees a similarly hard time - quoting Isaiah as he criticised them, that they taught the doctrines of men, meaning their worship was in vain - Mark 7

He concludes in v13 saying that by their traditions they make void the Word of God... Ever had a void transaction when paying for something? What does it mean? It doesn't count, the money isn't taken. Nothing happens.

So the pharisees with their rules and law took the powerful WORD of God and stripped it (literally *empty it*) of its meaning, its intention and therefore its power...

St Paul is saying, don't go there! It is *faith* that enables God's WORD to find fulfilment and God's life to overflow... It is a gift to you, so he urges them to continue in that faith - continually seeking and relying on God's goodness.

So what does this mean for us? When building a rule of life we must not create a new law.

We are not seeking to create a set of 'rules' by which our performance as disciples can be graded – or, worse still, compared. The bible is explicit and crystal clear.

We have nothing to prove. Paul had already reminded the Galatians they had been justified, a legal term describing the fruit of the cross. We weren't just forgiven, we were declared completely blameless. Innocent. Unpunishable.

Don't strive to become the child that God has already declared you to be; simply accept it and pick up the authority that goes with that identity.

So the question has to be, how can we be people of the Cross and Crown? Can these tensions hold together? Here, I think Ephesians Chapter 2 really helps:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
Ephesians 2:8-9

The measure of our relationship with God is always the cross and blood of Jesus. Nothing more, nothing less. The great exchange: his righteousness for our sin, his glory for our shame, his innocence for our guilt tells us who we are in him.

So, what place does a rule of life have? those verses from Ephesians that speak of GRACE continue in verse 10: *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Now workmanship is perhaps better translated work of art - literally we are God's poem... Now a poem has a form, a rhythm, a beat, and if our own rhythm of life aligns with that beat, aligns with the heartbeat of God, then he shapers into we begin to enter into our destiny, doing the good works he prepared all along for us to do.

But do you see the flow - Saved by Grace, It's all a Gift, The shapes us to his heartbeat, we fulfill our destiny.

There are still works, but they flow from his work in us. A rhythm of life then should position us for him to mould us, to aid that process of growth, and to release us for the work he has prepared.

So let me ask you a question?

1. How are you entering into your God-given destiny?

Think about that, talk to those around you, or leave you comments below... and we'll continue in a moment.

CROWN FOUNDATIONS PART THREE

3: Death and new life

So, do you feel like God's work of art? If you're his poem, do you feel more like Pam Ayres than one of the literary greats?

But if the point of CROWN is that we position ourselves such that our rhythms are so aligned with God's heartbeat that he forms us for our destiny, the question has to be, how can we do that?

I say to you, that we cannot wear the CROWN, without coming through the CROSS.

Richard Rohr writes, We must recover grace-oriented spirituality if we are to rebuild Christianity from the bottom up. In Romans and Galatians, Paul gives us sophisticated studies of the meaning, purpose, and limitations of law. He says its function is just to get us started, but legalism too often takes over. Yet Paul's brilliant analysis has had little effect on the continued Christian idealization of law, even though he makes it very clear: Laws can only give us information; they cannot give us transformation (Romans 3:20; 7:7-13).

And isn't it transformation we want? So where is this transforming power.

Let me bring us back to image of the sail? Remember we talked about forming patterns that the Holy Spirit could take hold of, rather than, like rowing pushing on in our efforts alone.

Now, tell me, what is basic shape of a mast?

A CROSS.... Upon that, the sail is hoisted to catch the wind...

Staying in Galatians, St Paul writes in chapter 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

This is the language of baptism and new life, where our old self dies (symbolised by burial under the water), and our new life in Christ emerges from the water - risen, alive and victorious.

Only the risen life, accesses the resurrection power of the Spirit - this is the life that catches the sails - We die with Christ / We're Raised with Him / we Reign With Him

This dynamic is apparent in the life individuals too -

George Mueller - *do read his biography*, he died to fear about money (he decided before God to bring his needs to nobody except the Lord himself) and saw breakthrough, miraculous provision for a network of orphanages again and again. Mother Theresa, had to die to comforts and sensibilities to tend the broken and dying. Simon Guillebaud, (wrote Choose Life) died to fear of safety / death taking great risks to lead a revival moment in Burundi.

It seems to me that if we really want to see power in the Christian life then something has to die so that something glorious and powerful can emerge. It is not just Jesus on the Cross, we need to die with him - our old self - so that with him, we might experience his resurrection life.

Theologically you might say this is the process of sanctification - becoming more and more like Jesus...

So how can we begin to apply it to shaping a rule of life? Any rule we form has to position us at the centre-point of the mast. The CROSS is the mast on which we hang our sail to receive the breath of the Spirit. But what does this mean in practice?

Some simple thoughts:

- 1) If our rhythms include thanksgiving so we consistently recognise and acknowledge God's goodness and Grace.
- 2) If our rhythms position us to hear God's word to us, we die to setting our own agenda as we respond to his word to us, we find him to be faithful. A WORD rhythm helps us in this.
- 3) When we rest, take sabbath, we acknowledge that we are not in control - and that God can handle what there is that needs to be done and he is our provider. We die to control. A Re-Create rhythm helps with this.
- 4) We make sure our service is about Kingdom and not tasks, so we are looking for God to do what only he can. We die to striving. An Offering rhythm helps us with that.
- 5) We share the journey with others, being accountable, celebrating where we see God work, and encouraging each other in the growth and life developing in us. We die to self-centredness. A COMMUNITY pattern helps us here.
- 6) We look beyond ourselves, to reach those beyond the church. Seeing someone experience GRACE for the first time, reminds us of the gift is. We die to fear of rejection. A NETWORKS rhythm helps here.

If we want to wear the CROWN, then we have to come through the CROSS.

We are saved and not ashamed, we count the cost to follow Jesus, dying to the old life – and living his resurrection life as bearers of the coming age.

Next time we'll look about how we keep going when things get tough.

But let me ask you a question?

1. How have you experienced dying with Jesus to experience his life in you?

Think about that, talk to those around you, or leave you comments below... and we'll continue in a moment.

CROWN FOUNDATIONS PART THREE

4: Death and new life continued

We've been talking about building patterns on the foundation of God's goodness and not creating new human rules. To help we've used the image of the sail, to catch the wind of the Spirit, likening the mast to the cross, where we die, and Jesus' life is released.

But I want to say, if we really go for that, it will be tough, and contested by the evil one. If we build God's rhythms we'll be faced with our wrong attitudes, fears, strongholds and doubts. It will reveal stuff we don't like. We will have the choice to go to the cross with them, or shrink back. With that in mind

In theological terms, you could chart this as journey through the book of Romans - a book which has had just most the profound affect on lives through the ages, the reformation was born from Martin Luther's revelation here.

It is often said the high point of the letter is chapter 8, *What can separate us from the love of God? ...We're conquerors, no, "more than" conquerors?*

But Romans 8 is the culmination of an argument that St Paul has been building - do study this more, it will blow your mind, but this is a simple summary -

Romans 1-2	We all face God's judgement and need his forgiveness - there is no exception.
Romans 3-4	God makes us right with him through faith in the work of the cross
Romans 5	We are moved from death to life - joining Jesus' household
Romans 6	Our old self has died with Christ in baptism, our new life is alive to him
Romans 8	There is no condemnation - we are his children living the life of the Spirit - we are more than conquerors.

Isn't that amazing, that whole journey is a picture of Grace - we were lost, but *Whilst we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8*

Hang on a minute you might say, I get the flow of this, but you've left out Romans 7 - what's that about?

Well spotted. Romans 7 is a very well known passage - and it has caused lots of debate and argument over the years.

It's the bit where St Paul laments the fails to do the things he wants to, and the things he doesn't want to do he ends up doing.

19 *For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing....*

v24-5 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Theologians have pondered whether he means his life before he was a Christian or whether he is describing his life as a Christian. The answer to some extent dictates the expectation we might have of what the Christian life really looks like.

The answer, though, may be more profound than that. I Heard this wonderfully summed up by Paul Maconachie who said of Romans 7 - Paul is talking about areas of our life that have gone to the cross, and areas that haven't.

We have authority and victory in areas that have gone past the cross, that have been crucified - and we struggle in those that have not. He concluded - it's not rocket science!

Put another way, you can't jump to Romans 8, without passing through Romans 4, 5, 6 and 7. If you do that, you don't have triumph - just triumphalism - something rooted in emotion and human enthusiasm more than Christ and his power and victory.

Victory comes when a part of us has been crucified, when we no longer rely upon ourselves but him. This is a spiritual dynamic - the point at which heaven breaks in to earth... It also continues us in the flow of grace...

Think about it - we surrender our own ambition, our own agenda, our own abilities to be the answer and let God be God - and when he moves, it's an act of Grace, a gift of his abundance and provision.

We are more than conquerors in the things that have gone to cross.

So, if you are struggling with a rhythm you are building, the answer may not be try harder, or to problem solve or just give up. It may demand a deeper question.

Is there something that needs crucifying, that needs to die with Jesus? If you press into this dynamic you will move towards personal revival.

But let me ask you a question?

- 1. Think of a time you've got stuck as a Christian. Reflecting back, did something need taking to the cross?**

Think about that, talk to those around you, or leave you comments below... and we'll continue in a moment.

CROWN FOUNDATIONS PART THREE

5: Cross Crown & Community

Now, I want to stick with this idea of a rule of life positioning us to experience God's transforming Grace as his victory and resurrection power is released in us. But I want to extend this thought to communities.

You see, it is not unusual for people to share a rhythm with others in the church. For example, a Missional Community might all agree a Networks rhythm together and keep each other accountable to that. *It could be something like, we aim to meet up with a Person of Peace each week, helping them take a step closer to God.*

(A Person of Peace by the way is someone outside of Church who is open to you and God, more on that when we get to Networks)

Now, shared rhythms can lead groups, even churches to experience breakthrough together. Breakthrough is one of the buzz-words in church at the moment - a bit of Christian jargon... It covers lots of bases - it could refer to a deeper experience of faith, God moving in healing, or salvation...

It's not a biblical word, but then we could say the Bible is full of things we might consider or describe as breakthroughs.

But has it ever struck you how particular ministries or churches seem to enjoy victory in particular aspects of the Christian life?

Holy Trinity Brompton in evangelism through the ministry of the Alpha Course, Vineyard as pioneers of healing (now taken on by the likes of Bethel), others like Tim Keller's Redeemer church in New York teaching biblical truth with relevance and conviction.

I love it, I think these are gifts to the wider church to show us what might be possible under God.

Now I've had the privilege to visit most of those churches, sometimes attend conferences and seminars that get you under the skin a bit - and apart from an obvious love for and dedication to Jesus, what is apparent is the journey that each have been on to see the impact and fruit they do.

These churches have created a culture in which the victory they have in this area multiplies through their church community leading to significant growth.

The leaders will say it has often been costly, sacrificial, sometimes painful - but pursuing it has reaped a great kingdom reward.

My observation is that the journey has taken each of them through dying with Christ - into his risen life.

For the vineyard church it meant praying week in week out for healing for over a year with no results. Nothing. What do you think happened in that year of waiting? Maybe they got more hungry, more desperate, it was certainly made clear that this was nothing they could do through technique or their own strength, but maybe they also pushed past the worry of nothing happening, perhaps the fear of failure or even cynicism all was put to death.

The doubt was crucified with Jesus - worrying about what people might do if nothing happened died with him - and the glorious resurrection power flowed from utter reliance on Grace.

Or HTB, utterly expectant that God will bring people back to himself through the Alpha Course - a culture where so much of the church is actively involved in evangelism - confident that God can, does and will change lives - planting churches and rejuvenating empty church buildings across London and now beyond.

What did they die to? Fear of rejection - they put to death unbelief that people are no longer interested in the gospel, instead risen power has anointed their evangelism and they are a movement for revival in our land.

Or Redeemer, unafraid to let God's word speak for itself in the culturally cosmopolitan and liberal setting of Upper West Side Manhattan - confident that the gospel has not lost its power, however sneering sections of society may seem.

They've put to death the lie that we need to airbrush the bible telling people what they want to hear - and instead unleashed the word of God, letting it do its work to convict, transform and heal lives.

When we begin to share a common language for discipleship, it becomes easier for us to urge each other on. It becomes easier to imitate the example of others. We find a unity which God will bless.

Whether in a triplet, Small Group, Missional Community or a church as a whole, we can experience love, challenge, encouragement and accountability which help us push beyond what holds us back and into greater blessing.

So let me ask you a question?

- 1. Where have you seen a church experience break-through in its ministry? Where did it's people die to their own preferences and choices? What helped them do that?**

Think about that, talk to those around you, or leave you comments below... and we'll continue in a moment.

CROWN FOUNDATIONS PART THREE

6: Rhythms built on Grace

In this third series of talks then, we have been exploring how we can build a rhythm of life that isn't driven by striving, just working harder in our own strength. CROWN is not five extra things for busy Christians to do.

We've been reminded that those who reign in life, are those who receive abundant GRACE, and the GIFT of righteousness in Jesus Christ.

Now this is sometimes hard for me, I am by nature a problem solver, and probably my instinct is to jump in and sort things. This might be true organisationally, and also in my own journey of faith.

I've had to learn, and am still learning, to bring God into that loop. Gradually I'm coming to see that his solutions are usually better, ok, *always better*, and often much less work.

My experience is that the earlier we bring God into the loop into forming our rhythms the better. What a tragedy it might be to say, LORD, I now get up at 4am every day, pray for three hours, I fast six days a week, but my friends say I'm tired and grumpy and I can't form a Community rhythm as nobody wants to hang out with me - only for the LORD to gently reply, *But I didn't ask you to do that.*

The introduction to the Scargill House rhythm is helpful, both emphasising the work of the Spirit and the support of a wider family. *'With the creative assistance of the Holy Spirit, by following the example of Jesus, and with encouragement and guidance from the brothers and sisters who share this pathway, we try our very best to: [live out our rhythm of life]*

And we will need that support - this isn't a journey we can take without God, or others. Following a rhythm, can mean the laying down of our lives for his Spirit to reshape, it is an expression of our love for Jesus and our desire to become more like him, it is a commitment to grow...

But I want to say to you, that if we are to reign in life, then it is his life within us that will be the answer...

And there will be times that his life is only truly experienced as we crucify our old selves. We may need to die to independence if we're to experience interdependence in COMMUNITY.

We may die to our smartphones, and this idea we are our own masters and providers if we're to truly REST.

We might need to die to a self-centred view of life, if we're truly going to OFFER ourselves and resources to God's plan to renew creation.

We may need to die to distractions if we're going to settle at Jesus' feet and be nourished by his WORD.

We may need to die to our busy schedules if we're to make time for others to make Jesus known in our NETWORKS.

So, as we begin to form our own rule of life, there are some key questions it will help to come back to, diagnostics and pointers to keep us on track.

You might ask:

Is this rule one that God is asking me to form? (Does it reflect the principles of Scripture, and the leading of the Holy Spirit)

Does this rule reflect my true identity as a Child of the King, made in God's image?

Does my rule feel like rowing or sailing? (Is it life giving, am I experiencing God at work in it)

Are the attitudes, values, sin or blockages I need to crucify to see breakthrough in this rhythm?

So, to wear the CROWN, we come through the CROSS, placing ourselves dependently before him - so that everything he does is GRACE.

We come to Jesus like children open hearted, but empty handed - and see him fill them with blessing - it's what he does!

Building a CROWN rule is positioning ourselves, sails up, for him to work in our lives. It's a lifestyle that can say - not only have we experienced the grace of his salvation - but also we enjoy grace day by day as we see him work in every area of our lives.

Perhaps these verses from the Message translation of Proverbs 3: 5-10, sums it up well -

Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure it out on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track. Don't assume that you know it all. Run to God! Run from evil! Your body will glow with health; your very bones will vibrate

with life. Honour God with everything you own; give him the first and the best. Your barns will burst and your wine vats will brim over.

Shall we pray as we close.

Father, thank you that your divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Jesus who called us by his own glory and goodness. As we form rules of life with him and for him, teach us to position ourselves to catch the wind of your Spirit, and give us courage to crucify everything in us that holds us back that your life might be abundantly revealed in us. Amen.

Next time, we'll focus on one of the elements of the CROWN rhythm unpacking some of the core principles to forming an effective rule of life in that area.

So do talk to those around you, leave you comments below... and we'll be back next time.