
WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

Establishing a Prayer Team To Share God's Heart to Reach the Lost

She is fifteen years old

And 8,4448 feet long. And 129 feet wide. And 95 feet high. And she is beautiful.

She is the Biloxi Bay Bridge that connects Ocean Springs to Biloxi, Mississippi. Ever since Stephanie and I have been coming to Ocean Springs, for decades now, I have been drawn to her. I saw her destroyed during Katrina. And then I saw her rebuilt. And for the last fifteen years, since her reconstruction, whenever I have come down to the coast, I have tried to make time to run this bridge. I am not a runner at heart, but it is such a beautiful location, with the saltwater, the beach, and the coastal islands - The bridge just calls to me and beckons me to run.

And running the bridge is integral to our calling and the Lord leading us from Birmingham to Ocean Springs. For those of you who are in churches that I have had the privilege to visit and share our story, you have heard this: How I have been running the bridge for years, and how when I run, I am praying for Ocean Springs, for the people here, and for the Lord to reach them with the gospel. How I was running the bridge in the early fall of '20, praying for Ocean Springs, when the Lord spoke to me and said, "You need to find out what is going on in Ocean Springs." So I called a fellow pastor, and that began conversations, and the Lord used that to put a new burden, a new vision, and a new calling into my heart and to call me to come evangelize, disciple, and work to complete the Great Commission in Ocean Springs.



It's a pretty cool story, if I do so say so myself. With a dramatic setting. And a word from God. And a calling to reach people in a way that will change lives and change eternity. And when I share that story, people are moved, and some have even said, "I want to come run the bridge with you," because it all sounds so glorious. And it is!

But can I tell you....the day by day reality is far, far different when I go out to the bridge. Like I said, I am not a (natural) runner. And since we moved here in April, I have been so busy with meeting people, and visiting churches to raise support, and getting our work down here started...that I went the first five months down here without running the bridge. So now, I am out of shape. And the bridge is long. And steep. And the temperature down here on the gulf coast gets hot. About 18,000 degrees on average. And the humidity, let's not even talk about the humidity. And, even more than all of this...did I mention, I am not a runner?!

Which means that, when I run, it is a scary and a comical sight, all at the same time. There's lots of plodding, and lots of huffing and puffing. There's lots of sweating, and lots of times that I want to quit

and give up. And the pace is very, very slow. Painfully, laughably slow. What sounds so glorious to talk about when visiting a church does not look, sound, nor feel glorious when I lace on my running shoes and look up at this bridge. It is in reality just a 3 1/4 mile bridge (there and back), but at the moment I start to run, it looks like the longest, steepest span in the entire universe.

And there is a lesson there for this new ministry in Ocean Springs

Ocean Springs is an easy place to talk about. For anyone who has visited or spent time here, they know first hand what a delightful little coastal town this is, and how fun it can be to hang out here.

And it is also a great place to do ministry. In all of my years of being a pastor, for all the wonderful things I have seen God do in various seasons, I have never seen Him go ahead of Stephanie and me as powerfully as He is now. He is opening doors, He is bringing connections and conversations, and there is already much favor and much fruit from the time we are spending here trying to disciple a group of believers and trying to evangelize the thousands and thousands of lost people who call Ocean Springs home. The fields are ripe for harvest, and I already have DOZENS of stories I can tell of lives God is bringing us into contact with, and of spiritual battles we are seeing the Lord fight for us, and of things happening here that only God can do.

It all makes for some really great stories. True stories. Stories that I am having a blast sharing with supporters, and prayer team members, and churches that I have the privilege to visit to share with them the vision and the potential for what we believe God not only wants to do here in Ocean Springs...but what He is already doing. It is real. It is true. And it can all sound so...glorious.

But, my friends, while it is all true, and while God is going ahead of us, "filling the sails" with His Holy Spirit wind - That does not mean that the foundation and fruit of this evangelism and church building ministry in Ocean Springs is going to be easy, nor fast. There are a lot of ups and downs. There is a lot of just showing up, walking, listening, and waiting to see what will happen. There is a lot of coming alongside broken people, people who need the gospel, but people with whom we have to gain their trust before we can enter into their story and have the credibility to speak to them of things like hope and salvation in Jesus. There are lots and lots of first conversations, that we are praying will lead to second conversations. And even then, it may take fifty conversations, with one person, over a long period of time, with a lot of sitting and listening to hear, until the opening and the opportunity for the gospel is there with someone we are ministering to.

There have already been some sleepless nights. And being willing to enter into dark places. And along the way, fighting my own wounds, my own doubts, and my own less-than-mustard seed sized faith. And through it all, there is my own weakness and my daily need for the very gospel that I am

trying to take to and share with others, in the hopes that they might be saved and start to grow in Jesus.

My friends, I believe that God can and will build something glorious here in Ocean Springs. It can happen. I am more convinced than ever of the need - and the gospel potential.

But I am also convinced that, for all of the great start, and all of



the great conversations, and all of the great stories...ministry here is going to be a long, slow, sometimes painful, sometimes wanting to quit, but asking the Lord for strength to carry on.... "Running of the bridge." It is my prayer that we will persevere. And that He will get the glory. And that, at the end, there just might be something that can shine like a mountain for eternity, adorned with lives that He has reached and He has saved.

More than ever, will you pray for us and with us?

- Pray for the new church we hope to see the Lord bring from this ministry. This past Sunday, we had our first "Who we are, why we are here, where we are going" values sharing meeting with a group of people whom the Lord may lead to be part of our core! That was exciting. And what we have been praying for. But it was very first steps in what is also a long journey of walking and running together as a community of believers.
- And thank you for those of you who prayed for a new house for us through the summer - We hosted this meeting with this first, small group of believing families in our home, and it was a wonderful time of welcoming new friends and showing them gospel hospitality. Please pray with us that our home will be a place where many, both believers and the lost, will find welcome, and love, and safety to share their lives with us and to experience the grace of Jesus.
- Pray for me as I go on "Fishing Trips" to Government Street. The Lord truly is giving me favor there. I am meeting so many people, and they are eager to share their stories with me. I am trying to show up faithfully. And be with them. Toward the day when Government Street will be my parish, and I can minister to dozens and dozens of people there who, at this point, would never walk through the doors of a church, but who are desperate for someone with whom they can confess their struggles and share their lives.
- And pray for us as we run. We have a vision for ministry in Ocean Springs - a vision that I believe with all of my heart is given from God. But there is so much we have yet to discover about life and ministry in Ocean Springs. There will be mistakes and blunders, starts and re-starts. Even at its best, ministry as a broken person among broken people, trying to point them to One who heals and the One who re-creates, is a messy proposition. We don't mind getting sweaty. And it is ok if we don't run very well....just pray that we point them faithfully to the One who ran first to them and to us!

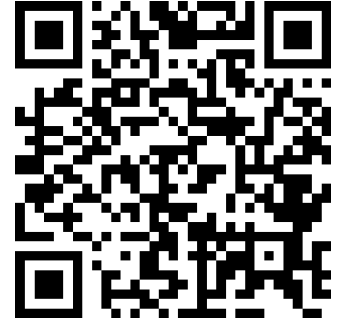


Thank you for praying — And for your support

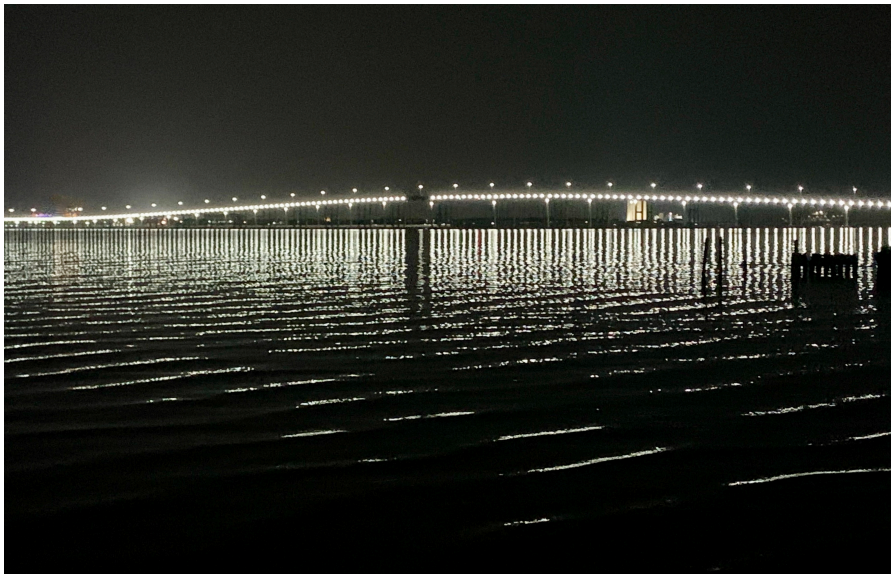
We are rejoicing in good, Spirit-filled starts and beginnings. But in this long race, this long work, will you pray about joining with us as partners and investors. We are thankful for those who can give any amount, monthly if possible, or as a one-time gift — No matter the amount, we thank you and praise God for you!

If the Lord leads you to also partner with us financially, here is how you can give:

- Use the QR code to the right, or visit <http://give.pcamna.org/to/1749>
- Checks can also be sent payable to "Mission to North America"
PO Box 890233
Charlotte, NC, 28289-02333.
(Write "Mark Horn, Ocean Springs Church Plant" on the memo line)
- And finally, more information for all of this and updates on our Ocean Springs journey can be found at our website: www.PlantHopeOS.org!



**They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles;
They shall run and not be weary;
They shall walk and not faint! (Isaiah 40:31)**



A closing encouragement:

"I believe God made me for a purpose....And when I run, I feel His pleasure." — Eric Liddell