
WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

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

It was such a God thing

One of those conversations, connections, and intersections that only God could bring about — and that He has been doing so often down here. I was in a restaurant on Government Street, meeting with some friends who are supporters and partners in this new ministry. I was telling them the stories of what we are already seeing God do, and how He is bringing about so many incredible opportunities for relationships and for ministry toward evangelism. And then, right in the middle of our talk.... God did it again!



We met and started talking with a young man named John (name changed here). As we listened to John's story, he told us of having left home, and how he had lived some hard years. But now he had a new wife, and a newer baby, and so now John was realizing that it was time to "come back home." To get some things straightened out. And, most of all, he was realizing he needed to get back to a relationship with God, and that he needed a good church to help him do that.

So, picture this: Here I am, in a street-side restaurant, telling someone how God has been leading me to so many people who are open, ready, and receptive to sharing their story and to allowing me to begin to walk alongside them as a counselor, a friend, and hopefully a pastor...and here God did it right in front of us! It was incredible, and after we finished our time with John, my friends and I walked away praising God and looking forward to what He was going to do in this young man's life.

Over the next couple of weeks, John and I connected some more. He was eager to share his story, eager to meet, and eager to have someone as a friend and an encourager. He hadn't come to one of our fledgling core group meetings yet, but that's ok. When I meet someone, my first goal isn't to "get them to come to something." It is to earn their trust and become a part of their life, so that I can listen well, and start to shepherd them, over time, toward the gospel. And John seemed so eager for that...

And then the story changed

John disappeared. He dropped off the radar screen. I checked on him at his place of work, and I looked for him up and down Government Street. I texted him, and reached out every way I could. And when I finally found him, John told me a new story about his pain and his brokenness: His wife had decided she was leaving him. And she was taking their baby with her. And their car, John's only way to get to work. John had tried to go after her, but her parents were preventing him from seeing

her. And as John told me all of this, I could hear his heart breaking from pain, and fear, and such incredible loss and loneliness.

John asked me to pray for him, and I promised him that I already was. And I told him that I would like to draw even closer to him, to walk with him through this, and to try to help in any way. John said he would like that... But as of my writing this newsletter, he isn't returning any of my calls, and I don't know where he is.

All of this makes very clear two important truths

First, my experience and story with John illustrate exactly what I was talking about in last month's prayer letter: That although this ministry can seem glorious ("Evangelism on the gulf coast, in a town where people are eager to talk and share their story!"), and although there are already some incredible stories of God at work, opening doors like nothing I have ever seen before, that this ministry has to be a for the long haul type of ministry. I hope and pray that my story with John is not over. Rather, I hope it is just beginning. But in dealing with broken people like him (and us), it takes time, and it takes a a lot of listening. As exciting as first conversations can be, the real work of this ministry will take place over tenth, twentieth, and fiftieth conversations. It will take being willing to enter into the mud and the crud of life with them, to hurt with them, and find ways to bring the rain of the gospel into the dryness of their lives over time. I believe God can do that here — I believe He is already doing that here.... But I also believe it is going to be a long, slow, often painful path, with many steps forward, and then some steps back, to see people leave their darkness and find the Son.

Second, the timing of what John is going through makes it very, very clear: We have an enemy. He holds the lost people of this world captive. And our enemy does not cede territory easily. Rather, he will do whatever he can to prevent people from having their eyes opened, and from finding life and healing in the gospel. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus Himself told the story of a farmer going to sow seeds for a crop, and Jesus told how some of those seeds began to sprout and grow...but thorns sprung up with the plants, and they choked the life out of the plants, so that there was no fruit from the sowing of those seeds.



Now, we know that our God is Greater, far greater, than our enemy in this world. He is calling His sheep, and His sheep will hear His voice and be saved. It is what gives hope to our evangelism. It is why I say that I hope and pray that the

story of my involvement with and getting to share with John is not over.

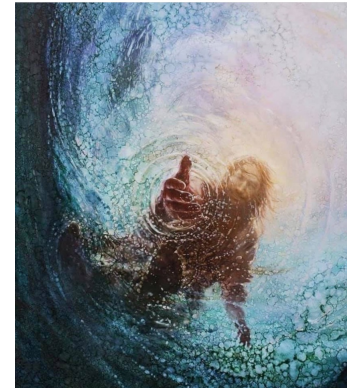
But the Bible also makes clear that, as we go forward as witnesses for Christ, we go forward into battle — "Not against flesh and blood, but against... the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6).

We need to be more aware of the spiritual battle we are all called to. Not to be afraid, for "Greater is He that is in us," and He promises that "nothing can separate us from His love". But we should also be aware. There is more to this life than what we can see, and we do have an enemy who roams about like a lion, seeking whom he can devour.

I am becoming more and more aware of that in Ocean Springs. We are in “the spiritual shadow” of New Orleans, and whatever is found there, is found here - from immorality, to oppression, even to things like voodoo and occultic practices. There are legacies of sin here, and generations held captive.

Now again, I believe that God wants to tell a new story in Ocean Springs — A story of light, of hope where there was none, and of rescue in the gospel through the blood and grace of Jesus Christ. Our God wants to set the captives free - and bring the lost sheep back to Himself!

But there is one thing you can count on in revival and in spiritual battle: When the Lord starts to move in His power, the very first one to be stirred up against it, is our enemy. He will ultimately lose, but along the way, he will do everything within his power to prevent people from having their eyes opened, their hearts awakened, and their souls come to cry out for the gospel.



In my time down here in Ocean Springs, even in these first few opening months, I am seeing the reality of this like never before. While starting to minister here, and on my “fishing trips” to Government Street, I have seen two different manifestations and situations that I believe could not be called anything other than absolutely demonic. Our enemy is disturbed, and he is afraid. Our God is going to save His people — and I believe He is going to do that in Ocean Springs. But our enemy will fight...and people like John are caught in the crossfire! Which is why...

When I ask you to be part of our prayer team - It is a life or death need

When I walk the streets of the Government Street District in Ocean Springs, the area that I am praying God will turn into my “parish,” my fishing grounds, my place of bringing the gentle touch of Jesus to people who are hurting and lost.... I am learning that praying before I go is a necessity, not a luxury. I have four elders that I am working with here on the coast, and a team of other friends in other places that I reach out to and simply say, “I am going...please pray for me.” And it is life-giving and courage giving to me to know that people like them are praying. Will you pray with us?

- Pray for John - Pray that God will use what is going on in his life, not as a reason to give up, but as a voice calling him home, back to the Father, back to where his life needs to be. And along, the way, pray for his reconciliation with his wife and baby.
- Pray for me as a go fishing for more people like John. The Lord truly is giving so much favor in such a short span of time. Last week, as I walked up to one of the bars, one of the servers said, “I’m glad you’re here, I’ve been waiting for you to come back...I have so much to tell you!” That was the first time I had heard that response, and it is encouraging for the inroads, slow but certain, that God is giving into people’s lives. Please pray for 10th, 20th, and 50th conversations.
- Pray for new people I am meeting along the way. That same night, a man sat down next to me and he also had a story of a failed marriage, and a lost career, and he told me how he had re-located to Ocean Springs because he loved the area and was looking for a place to start over. As I

listened to him discuss the weight of the things he had walked through, he made a striking comment. He said, "I used to have faith. I guess maybe I still do....it's just not the same faith."

- And just as much, pray for the believers Stephanie and I are meeting and getting to know. Believers that we pray may be part of a community of grace, that in the Lord, becomes a fledgling church. We are spending time with these believers individually. And the first Sunday of November, we are having them over as a group for a second meeting at our house - A meeting where we will discuss who God wants this church to be as an agent and means of God's Kingdom coming to Ocean Springs.

As you pray — as you enter into battle with us — Will you ask God if He wants you to be part of our financial support team?

I believe with all of my heart that God has His people in Ocean Springs. I believe He is going to reach them, save them, and bring them home, like prodigals being embraced by the Father. And I also believe we are in a battle for souls. Prayer is the most important way you can join that battle with us. But we also need financial support and regular partners for this calling God is building.

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!



+ Note: We send personal notes thanking every donor to this ministry. But one or two notices (not gifts, but notices of gifts) have slipped through the cracks in being communicated to us. If you have given a gift, and haven't received a personal note from us thanking you — Please let us know so that we can be careful to pursue accurate accounting and communication. Thank you!

A closing encouragement:

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"Everything sad is going to come untrue,
and it will somehow be greater for having
once been broken and lost." – Tim Keller