

WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

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

Call Him Saul

I met Saul “by accident” one night when we bumped into each other at an open mic night at a local bar here in Ocean Springs. In my quest to get to know people, listen to their stories, and earn their trust as their pastor here, I have been frequenting a lot of open mic nights — Those nights tend to be less “touristy” and have a gathering of more locals, people I can see repeatedly and build a relationship with over time. And that is where I met Saul. Now, open mic nights can be a risky mix, musically. There can be a well-polished musician, playing to try out some new songs in front of a live audience. But he might be followed by another musician, playing for the first time in public, with all of the nerves and anxiety that accompany the gargantuan task of taking the risk of letting others hear you play for the first time.

But then there is Saul — Saul exceeds them all. Saul is a guitarist. A guitar “shredder,” to be exact, and his musicality and his craftsmanship to his playing far surpass anyone else I have heard in these first months of being in Ocean Springs. Then I learned his story:

Though he now lives locally, Saul is indeed a professional musician, and has toured worldwide with bands I grew up listening to in the 80's. Saul and I hit it off immediately, and we have since become good friends. He lets me know when he is playing in the area, and I have been to hear him several times now, even taking family or friends to hear him play at places like the Julep Room, a local bar alleged to have been frequented by both Elvis and Marilyn Monroe back in the day. I guess Saul and I do make for sort of an odd combination, one that sounds like something out of a joke: “A Presbyterian pastor and a heavy metal guitarist walk into a bar...” But we don't care, and I am loving getting to know Saul and his story.



And so it was that I found myself recently sitting at a restaurant on Government Street, having lunch and enjoying conversation with my new friend. And then this weird pairing got even more surreal:

Though it was November, the weather was nice, one of those warm days where the sun is still bright but there is a cool breeze blowing in from the gulf. So, Saul and I were sitting outside, at some street side tables. Then, one by one, friends of Saul began to walk by and greet him, and then join us. First one, and then another. Until there were about half a dozen other guys, musicians all of them, sitting at the table with us, drinking beers and swapping stories. And that was how I found out about these guys' past and careers: One of them had been a studio musician for and toured with Van Halen. Another with Poison. Yet another with Thin Lizzy and Steve Vie. And yet another had been tour manager for Lita Ford.



It really was a ridiculous picture. Here were these men, all swapping stories of their glory days, the places they had toured, the venues they had played, and the artists and fans they had known. And in the middle of them, I sat sipping my Diet Coke (with light ice). Me, who spent the 80's as an awkward, skinny, goofy teenager, trying to remember his locker combination and get the courage to talk to a real girl.... And here I sat in the middle of this group of highly accomplished rock stars who had toured the world at the apex of their craft. I would like to tell you that I sat among these guys and held my own, that I spoke with confidence to them as a pastor and a

peer. But I didn't. I felt very keenly that they and I had nothing in common. I was fascinated, yes, and a bit star struck....and self-conscious. And I felt very small. Isn't it weird how, even years later, experiences can take you back to being an insecure teenager all over again?

Then something amazing happened

As we all sat, and as they talked, one-upping each other with stories of concerts and conquests, of Bacardi blackouts and heavy metal bands, suddenly, one of the guys looked me straight in the eyes and said, **"You know, in all of this, all these years later.... Maybe we are still just looking for something we never found.... Maybe we are all looking for the father none of us ever knew."**

And that is when I knew: That! That is what we have in common. I have never been a Rock n' Roll god (and there's a pretty good chance I never will be). But I have been a rejected son, orphaned, searching for the love and acceptance of his father. Trying harder and harder, but finding that nothing he does will ever be enough. And feeling the shame, the guilt, the anxiety that comes from a father's love withheld. And my new friend's question shook me and reminded me — We all have that in common. Pastor or performer, minister or musician, sinner or "saint".... In one way or another, we are all looking for the father we never knew!

And maybe that goes to the heart of why we are in Ocean Springs

The conversation with those musicians last week may be the most recent and the most clear, but it is not the first time I have run into this reality. Not by far. It is in the waitress Stephanie and I talk to at Glory Bound. It is in the bartender who finally opens up and says, "Ok, this is my story" at the Government Street Grocery (which, despite its name, is a bar). It is in the guy I sat with and listened to who told me how his life had fallen apart, and how he had fled to Ocean Springs to try to pick up the pieces, a guy who told me that he "used to have faith, but not any more." It is in the young man whom I have now met with several times, listening as he details hurt and hypocrisy in his family which led him to walk away from the faith of his father - But who looked at me the last time we met and said, "Pastor Mark, I think you are becoming like a surrogate father to me." The hurt, the disappointment, the fear of rejection, even as adults, but still as children, is real, it is tangible, and it is relentless.

And yet I believe God is moving and calling out right into the middle of all of these voices. The conversations and the connections have been undeniable — The sort only God can bring about. I believe, with all my heart, that God wants to save the lost and rescue spiritual orphans in Ocean Springs. And maybe, just maybe, He might use a pastor, one who has struggled to let go of the past, only to find that sometimes it is the past that won't let go of him; and a fledgling little core group of a church coming alive to grace. And as we show up with them, as we listen, as we hear...God might use even us to tell many that they are indeed loved, and that there indeed is a Father they can know.

So please pray for us

- Pray for Saul, and his friends. Pray that I would be able to earn their trust, hear their hearts, and speak to their questions. Pray that God would save them and bring them home to Himself!
- Pray for the new, just beginning core group that Stephanie and I are getting to know and starting to



host into our home. We had a meeting with them just last Sunday, a meeting where we shared even more of the story and the vision for this church. Pray that God would draw Christians to this new little band of brothers and sisters, believers who themselves can come alive to the beauty of grace and adoption, and who can then share the vision and answer the call for what this church can be in Christ.

- Pray for my “fishing trips” to Government Street, for the new people I am meeting every time I go, and for new conversations to become continued conversations, that there might be opportunity and fertile ground, prepared by the Spirit, for the gospel to take root in their lives, that they might come home to the Father.

And will you consider becoming a partner and an investor in this work

We are, of course, heading quickly into the holidays. And that means you will surely be inundated with good causes asking you to give. I will not try to compete with that. But I will promise that we are seeing God move in amazing ways — And I am praying that eternity itself will be different through what God does to save lives and build His church here in Ocean Springs...and beyond! And I believe that your gift, big or small, one-time or recurring, can be something God uses powerfully in what He has planned here on the coast. 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!



Thank you friends, prayer supporters, and financial partners. We truly thank God for you. May God bless you, always, in His love and His grace!

A closing encouragement:

"To be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in His son— it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is." — C S Lewis