

WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

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

There Is An Incredible Beauty to the Gulf Coast

Although we came here to accomplish a mission, along the way, Stephanie and I are enjoying the context and the cultural and natural beauty that surround us while living on the coast. Sand dunes and sunsets, water winding through bayous, shrimp boats and their ever-following pelicans... Everywhere you look here, there is an unmistakable beauty and a charm to southern, coastal living.

And in Ocean Springs, one of my favorite "beautiful places" is the live oak trees that line Washington Street, which itself runs through the art and music district, intersects with Government Street, and then makes its way to the beach. These incredible trees, some of them hundreds of years old, line the street and cover its path with a canopy of thick limbs, green leaves, and Spanish moss that make the path along Washington to the water cool in the summer and beautiful year round.



Except at night. At night, what was green, cool, and inviting takes on a different tone. The limbs, with their crooked and spindly tentacles, block out the light and make everything dark. The Spanish moss blows in the wind. It all looks completely different. What was beautiful and inviting becomes gloomy and foreboding. Even spooky. The kind of area you hurry through so as to not be caught alone.

Until something happened that changed all of that

Sometime, shortly after Christmas, a bunch of city trucks showed up on Washington Street. They climbed ladders and raised bucket lifts, and they went to work up in the trees. And when they were done...it was dazzling. Someone threw a switch, and the lights sparkled and twinkled with the white lights of Christmas. The effect is beautiful - and profound. What was dark and scary became light and beautiful. Darkness was pushed back. Light had won, not only the day, but now the night! And everyone noticed the difference. People are driving and walking the path in the street again. One long-time local even told me that this is the first year that the trees have been lit up and made to shine like this - but we are all hoping it will not be the last.



We Are Praying For God to Bring Lasting Light to the City of Ocean Springs

Ocean Springs is a city of festivals, art, and music. People come here to vacation, to party - and to escape. But, if you look just beneath the surface, it is there. A despair. A depression. And a deep darkness. People know it is encroaching on every area of their lives, their work, their families. It is a darkness so great that they not only see it, but they feel it, to bottom of their souls. They know that they are lost - they just don't know that there is light for them to find The Way.

But into this, Stephanie and I believe with all of our hearts that God wants to do something beautiful and life changing here. In fact, He is already doing it. Here as we come to the close of our first "year" on the coast (although it is really just our first six months), we are amazed at all that God is doing and the contacts, intersections, and conversations He is bringing.

When the darkness is great, light shines all the brighter. And we are seeing people who are being drawn to that. They may not know what it is they are responding to yet (we have had people say that almost word for word), but the Lord is giving favor, and He is giving connection. I am finding it when I walk the Government Street district, when I sit with people in the bars, and when I listen to their stories. And we are also seeing it in the lives and the fledgling core group that is starting to meet in our home — a group made up at this point of six families who are already becoming dear and precious to us, as we have the privilege of entering into and walking alongside their own stories of responding to the light of the gospel.



Soon, Christmas will be over, and there will be the annual rush to take down the decorations and the lights. Trees will be taken from homes and put out on the curb for the trash man. Lights will come down, from houses, from buildings, and, I assume, from the oaks on Washington Street. And then the darkness will return.

But Stephanie and I are praying and seeking for God to do something far more lasting within lives of people here in Ocean Springs. We are praying for Him to bring a light that will "shine into the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it" (John 1:5). And we are praying for that light to change even eternity itself, as people leave their darkness and come to the Son.

So please pray with us

- Pray for the conversations, relationships, and friendships with **lost people** the Lord is bringing us into contact with here. The fields are truly ripe unto harvest. I have never seen anything like it. Pray that first conversations will lead to twentieth conversations, and a building of trust out of which the gospel can be shared, witnessed, and received.
- Pray for the **core group** that God is bringing together. We are planning, Lord willing, to start Bible studies in our home on Sunday nights in January. Pray for us as we get to know them, love them, and minister to them. Pray that the members of this group will grow in grace and in their calling as a community of witnesses of the gospel to each other and to those around them.

- And pray for **patience along the way**. When people ask me how things are going down here, I often respond with something like, “Well, it’s like we are on a two thousand mile journey, and we have just pulled out of the driveway....but it’s going great so far!” I don’t mean that to be cheeky. I am simply very aware that the work here is just beginning, and it is going to be a long, long journey. Still, there is so much that we are celebrating, rejoicing in, and amazed at that God has done here at the beginning of the story and the end of this first year.

So, here at the “end of the beginning,” will you consider becoming a partner and an investor in what God is doing on the coast?

As we all come in just a few days to Christmas and the culmination of the advent season, Stephanie and I thank each of you who have joined our team this year. Your prayers and your support are **life-giving** to us, and we believe they are going to be **life-changing** to people here in Ocean Springs and to the church God is going to bring from it.

We invite you to also consider joining with us financially. Would you consider: Making an end of year donation? Becoming a quarterly supporter? Or becoming a monthly supporter?

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. Merry Christmas, and may God bless you, always, in His love and His grace!

A closing encouragement:

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone!”
– The Prophet Isaiah