

WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

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

Cruisin'

Ocean Springs and this section of the gulf coast are known for their festivals and parties. Later this fall, the Peter Anderson Art Festival will draw close to 100,000 people to Ocean Springs (a town of less than 20,000 people). We just had a songwriters' festival here. And of course, because we are in the spiritual and cultural shadow of New Orleans, Mardi Gras is one long party all up and down the coast, running from early January until late February every year. Still, there is one event, one week here that stands out above them all. "One gathering to rule them all," if you will....

Cruisin' the Coast, which kicks off this week and lasts for eight days. Cruising is like Christmas, your birthday, and a trip to the toy store, all rolled into one, especially for anyone who is into classic, restored, or hot rod kinds of cars. Sports cars, racing cars, antique cars, cars that shoot fire from their exhaust manifolds....They are all here. If you are into cars - Cruisin' the Coast is your Super Bowl! And that means that car enthusiasts from all over the United States (and beyond) will descend on the coast by the thousands this week. Every parking lot, empty lot, and sandlot up and down Hwy 90, which runs for miles parallel to the beach, will be filled with car lovers as they check under the hoods and see what's inside each other's hot rods. There will be concerts, swap meets, races, and demonstrations. Celebrities will be here, like Jay Leno, who is known as a classic car collector, and who always comes to town for Cruising'. And all the while, the highway itself will be jam-packed, bumper to bumper, with cars that are just cruising from one end of the beach to the other, with no real destination in mind. Seriously, at Cruisin' the Coast, the point is not where you are going – but that you are going there in style. The whole goal is to see and be seen. And through it all, image is everything. With a few exceptions...



I have a friend, Ken, who brings his car to Cruisin' the Coast every year. Ken is a great guy. He has had an incredible, fascinating career, he's a blast to hang out with – and he is part of our support team for what God is doing in Ocean Springs (which means I like him extra much!). But while everyone else is flashing their ridiculously red hotrods, or their beautifully buffed restoration cars this week, cars that are meant to make others ooh and aah and take notice from a mile away....

Ken brings a **1977 Chevrolet Silverado Suburban**. Yeah, he brings a suburban to Cruisin' the Coast! Now, don't get me wrong: This is a beautiful automobile, one that Ken and his friends have spent years restoring and building out just like he wants it. It has the C10 Estate Package. It has a 454 Big Block engine. And it has front and rear air! Seriously, Ken and his friends have done a fantastic job restoring it.

But, as Ken himself told me (and I quote with permission), “It will not impress, but it suits my style: Comfortable, easy, and a bit different.”

In fact, as Ken and I sat and shared a PoBoy (Fayards, Washington Street...Trust me, you'll thank me after) during Cruisin' last year, my friend said something to me that has rung in my ears ever since. As we watched (and heard) all of the bright, shiny, souped up hotrods cruise by on the strip near us, Ken said: **“Some people want the flash and the eye appeal of fancy cars. But every car has a story. And I am interested in hearing the story they have to tell.”** That is profound!



I pray that same desire will mark everything we do in Ocean Springs - And how we do it!

The last two months marked the one year anniversary of establishing this ministry here on the coast. It was August of '22 that I began in earnest to walk into the bars and get to know people downtown toward building a parish on Government Street – A group of non-Christians who are mine as I am theirs, and whom I am pastoring with the goal of being able to bring the gospel into their lives. And it was September of '22 that Stephanie and I held the first “come and see” meeting for a new, fledgling core group in our house. When I think back on this first year, I am amazed and humbled at all God has done in such a short time. And I am more convinced than ever that ministry here, **like being a missionary to a foreign culture**, must by necessity be a long-term commitment and process of learning the language and building relationships toward the gospel.

That goes for **both “prongs” of our ministry focus**: For evangelism to the lost in the parish, and for discipleship to know Christ in a core group and a “church in embryo.” And as we go, we must learn to see and value things that are absolutely opposite to what and how the world around us evaluates things.

This world values flashy things. Instant things. Fast things. Loud things. Image is everything, and image sells. Just look at the commercials, the instagram feeds, or the things that pop as you scroll past the ads on Facebook. We want loud, we want sizzle, and we want now. That's the way of this world. And yet, I fear, too often the church is complicit in that value system. We claim to be biblical... But we want to know “how much, how many, and how fast.” We are drawn to and celebrate ministries and pastors that are loud, flashy, and attention grabbing. We value the rush and the experience, sometimes at the expense of the heart and the substance.

But that was not the way of our Savior. Look at what Jesus did: He came walking among His friends, His disciples, and the lost and broken around Him. He saw them, he heard them, and He had compassion on them. He sat with them, He ate with them, and He listened to them. And He began to model to them the heart of the Father for His lost and wandering children. The ministry of Jesus was not loud - It was targeted, and it was intentional. And it reverberated unto eternity like nothing else has since. And I pray that it will be His ways, not the world's ways, that will mark this church and this ministry.

First with a core group of Christians

This group is meeting at our house on Sunday nights. We recently completed a study of Jesus' heart for His church, as seen in Rev. 1-3, and now we are studying the Biblical theology that shows us how all of Scripture works together to reveal Jesus Christ and His gospel. Recently, a young couple in the group started bringing their guitar and leading the group in worship songs. That has been a fun, important step in our development as a "church in progress!" I am spending time starting to disciple men in the church toward growth as godly men and husbands and (Lord willing) future church leaders. And Stephanie has also started a Bible study for the ladies on Thursday nights. The Lord is bringing new people to this group, people who have moved to town or who need a church home, and along the way, we are praying and seeking that the Lord will grow a group of believers who are learning to share their lives and the hope of the gospel into and with each other....

And then with the lost all around us in Ocean Springs

We are encouraging the members of our core group to pray for and begin to look for their own parish, their own group of non-believers that God has placed within their "spheres of influence." And you know that I am focusing my efforts in the bar district of Government Street. There, I am meeting bartenders, musicians, waitresses, and patrons whose lives are adrift, broken, and lost - Because they are separated from their Creator. And as I walk with them, I am finding a group of people who are desperate for someone to listen to their stories. Crying out for someone who will sit with them. And amazingly open when the Lord shows me the right time to begin to speak to them of the things of God - of the gospel - and of the fact that there is indeed a Savior.

God is writing His Story into people's story here

With believers in the core, and with lost on the street. Fast, showy, man-centered, or man-rushed ministry on our human expectations and timelines will never work here. But the gospel.... My friends, **the gospel changes everything!** And **evangelism is about going....and sitting....and listening.** Because... **the heart of God is the heart of a Father running toward lost children.** And through His Son, He came to bring reconciliation and hope – Hope for the lost and hope for the church.

It is not flashy. It is not loud. Often, it is not even visible. But it is Biblical. And it is powerful. And it is the one thing that can really change lives for eternity. My friends, will you pray that we will listen well. That we will **disciple believers in the gospel**, and then **bring that same gospel to lost people**...not just with the message of Jesus....but with the manner of Jesus!

We invite you to be a part of this story

- Please pray for our ministry to disciple this beginning core group of believers into a healthy church.
- Pray for opportunities for us to connect with, sit with, and listen to the lost, that we will have the opportunities to share the gospel, and that they will have ears to hear.
- And pray for new opportunities to share this vision with other churches and Christians - That a vision for Christ-like evangelism will spread and change all whom God is calling to Himself!

And my friends, would you consider partnering with us and making a financial investment toward building disciples and saving lost people on the coast? Whether it is a first time gift or as an ongoing supporter - Your gift will make a difference! 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)
- More information for all of this and updates on our Ocean Springs story can be found at our website: www.PlantHopeOS.org



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Thank you for being part of this journey with us, my friends.

May we travel this highway well!

A closing encouragement:

We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.” —Martin Luther

