

# WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

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

**“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: A man from Macedonia...urging him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ And immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” (Acts 16:9-10)**

## My friends, when you pray, be prepared for God to answer... Often in new and unexpected ways!

In Matthew 9, Jesus, full of compassion for the lost crowds around Him, looks at His disciples and says, “The harvest is plentiful...pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest.” That tells us several things — First, the field, and those in it, belong to the Lord. It is His harvest. And He is going to bring the lost to Himself! And second, it tells us that, when you pray, and as you look for results, one obvious, huge implication is to expect the reply to come from yourself, “Here am I, Lord, send me!”

For several months now, Stephanie and I have asked you to join with us in praying for a growing heart and a growing harvest to come from a growing ministry out to and among the lost. Well, the Lord is answering your prayers — And we have something exciting to share!

## Please Allow Me to Introduce You to Ocean Springs, Mississippi

Ocean Springs is a town on the coast of Mississippi that, due to friendships there, Stephanie and I have been visiting and spending time in regularly since at least 1992. Over the last twenty-nine years, we have stopped through on trips and vacations. We have taken our kids there. And I was there for some of the clean-up after Katrina.

And it is a town with an incredible, deep spiritual need and opportunity for the gospel. Ocean Springs is an eclectic town full of fishing boats, artists, musicians, and people “finding their way” through life. There is a restaurant district with a lively music scene, and on any given night, you can find musicians on the corners or in the pubs, and people walking up and down the streets from one bar or restaurant to the next. This ambiance, this “milieu,” also creates an incredible opportunity for sharing the gospel. Many people there are lost, and while they may not know what they are searching for, they are amazingly open to conversations, to sharing their stories, and to engaging with someone, anyone who



takes the time to ask and to demonstrate care. They are “like sheep without a shepherd,” and they are almost literally crying out for anyone who will listen to their stories. And the spiritual need there, the darkness that is in dire need for the light of the gospel, is unmistakable and tangible.

## But how does the Ocean Springs story intersect with our story?

You may see already where this is heading....but for the longest time, I did not. After Katrina, a new bridge was built over the bay between Ocean Springs and Biloxi. A 3 1/4 mile bridge that I run (poorly) every time I am down there. As I run, I pray. First, I'm praying, “Lord, don't let me die running this bridge!” But I am also praying, “Lord, would you reach the lost in Ocean Springs? Lord, would you send someone to share the gospel with them to save them and to heal the brokenness that is here?” I have been doing that since 2006. But in all of those years, I have never once said, “And Lord, send me.” After all... There was no PCA church in Ocean Springs, and I am a PCA pastor, not a church planter.



Then, while down there once last year, I called up a friend who pastors in Biloxi and asked him about what was going on in Ocean Springs. He told me about a pastor who had started a plant there, with an incredible vision for reaching the lost. But that planter had been diagnosed with cancer, he passed away, and the work came to a halt. I was sad to hear that, but at least I knew better how to pray for the gospel in Ocean Springs. And I thought that was the end of it.

But, over the last several months, as the Lord has expanded my own heart, and passion, and Stephanie and I believe, our calling to reach the lost... He has also brought us back around to conversations with the core group for the work in Ocean Springs. That connection has its own incredible story (going to PCA Assessment and being recommended by them, etc)....but it all leads to this: **Stephanie and I now know that God is calling us as missionary church planters to Ocean Springs** — with the vision and call to reach the lost, bring them into the Kingdom, and build a church around them... A church whose DNA from the beginning is built around being a gospel community for reaching more lost people!

## So, wow — This is something entirely new we hope you will join us in praying for!

Please pray for us as we enter into this new season. I announced my pending resignation to my present church this past Sunday. Thankfully, no one was doing cartwheels at the news! But amid the sadness of anticipated goodbyes, there was also a sense and a celebration of what God is doing here — and what we pray He is going to do in Ocean Springs!

- So please pray for the **ministry team of ruling and teaching elders** that I shared about in last month's prayer letter. They have embraced that I am being called elsewhere, and praise the Lord, they feel called to lean in more than ever and help with the work and the ministry here!
- And again, please pray for Stephanie and me as we enter a season of preparation for the move and new call to Ocean Springs. We are going to be full-time support raising this fall (No, this prayer letter is not a support raising letter.... I'll hit you up with that separately and soon!). But please pray for us as we start to visit churches and share the story of Ocean Springs, and as we invite people to be a part of that story!

## In closing, let me tell you about someone who is already part of that story

I was down in Biloxi (across the bay from Ocean Springs) two weeks ago to meet with the presbytery there and to receive the "official call" to come as a missionary / church planter. After that meeting, I went out with my friend, Tim, who pastors a church in Biloxi. We went to a restaurant to celebrate and to have some time to relax after an exhausting day of meetings.

Our waitress there was named **Alicia**. As we began to chat with her, she began to tell us the story behind some tattoos on her arms (asking someone about their tattoos is a great way to strike up conversations!). She told us how one tattoo was for her mother, whom she had lost. And another was for her daughter, whom she had also lost. And another was for her journey of recovery from addiction.

Then Alicia said something amazing. Something that could only be God's hand and Spirit saying, "Look what I am getting ready to do!" Through the beginning of some tears, Alicia looked at us and said, "It's been such a painful journey. And I haven't really had anyone to talk to about it. I have started to pray and to try to talk to God. But I live in Ocean Springs...and I don't have anyone there that I can talk to about this."

My friends, it was a "Macedonian Moment," and I was almost in tears myself as I said to her, "Alicia, thank you for sharing this with us. My wife and I are getting ready to move to Ocean Springs. And you don't know us yet, but we would love to get to know you, and listen to you, and hear more of your story." To which Alicia replied, "Oh yes, I would like that so much!"

Things like that, already being repeated over and over, are how Stephanie and I know God is in this. And that He is calling. Will you pray with us — against the darkness and for the lost?! And together, may we see what God is going to do!

### A closing encouragement:

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 "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14-15)