
WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

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

“We hear you are starting a church in Ocean Springs”

In assembling a pioneering group of believers to join in with the vision for a gospel community in Ocean Springs, the Lord has led us to people in a variety of ways. Some of our new core group were part of the original group the Sealy's started about four years ago. Some have recently moved to the coast. And some have been recommended to us through connections with churches that are part of our support team. But one family...well, they sought out and found us!

Such was the story of Tyler and Carmel (names are changed, and stories are used by permission). My phone rang one day, and it was Tyler on the other end saying that they were new to town and were looking for a gospel-centered, evangelistic church, and someone had told them about us — So he was calling me up to find out more about the new core group. Tyler and Carmel have a fantastic story: She is from Toronto, and only recently emigrated to the United States. He is from a Jewish family and was raised in Manhattan. They met and married (there's a whole great story behind that) — and most importantly, as adults, the Lord led them both to saving faith in Jesus Christ (there's an even greater story behind that)!

So now, they have moved to and are living in Ocean Springs, and are quickly becoming a key part of our new core group. Carmel loves coffee, so we have deputized her as our official coffee czar for our new Bible studies, Stephanie and I have spent time with them as couples, and Tyler and I have been having frequent lunches together to talk through life, faith, and evangelism. And through it all, there is a beautiful picture of how God draws His people together, from different stories, different cultures, and different backgrounds — and makes them one body, one faith, and one family in Jesus Christ.



That is a key part of the story and the church God is building here

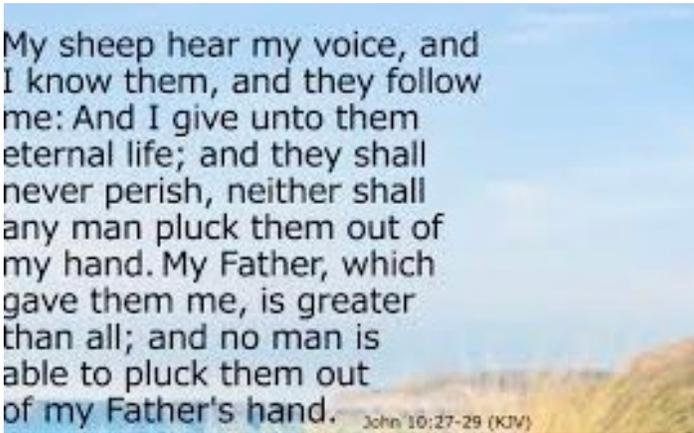
In these newsletters, I get to celebrate what God is doing and the stories He is telling in reaching lost people in my “Government Street Parish” with the gospel of the grace of Jesus. But even that evangelism...is not the ultimate goal. Seeing a broken culture impacted and won for Jesus...is not the ultimate goal. Starting a new Bible study and core group...is not the ultimate goal. Those are all wonderful, and are evidences of how God is already working so powerfully on the coast. But the ultimate goal, above all, is to have a **healthy, gospel church** made up of believers who are worshipping Jesus Christ.



While I was pastoring for eight years in Birmingham, I had the privilege to work with, study under, and learn from two men whom I hold to be giants in the world of pastoring, church planting, and church revitalization: Harry Reeder, pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian, and Lynn Downing, who was an immeasurable help and assistance to me in my former pastorate. And one thing I consistently learned and heard from them is that the one goal of all ministry needs to be the development of healthy, gospel churches. Because: When that happens, things like evangelism, missions, and cultural transformation will then flow out from churches who are being filled up more and more with Christ's Spirit, Christ's word, and Christ's own vision for His bride, the church. So, yes, in this incredible missions field of Ocean Springs, where 85% (or more) of the population does not claim Christianity, we will talk often of - and work hard for - a two-prong strategy for this new ministry. First, one of evangelism and missions into the greater parish of Ocean Springs, and the focused parish of Government Street. And we will simultaneously work to gather, disciple, and grow a church from this beginning core group God is leading us to, a group made up of couples like Tyler and Carmel. But evangelism into our parish, discipleship of believers, growth of the church...those are all (desired) results and consequences. In the Lord, the goal and the objective of our ministry here must always be seeing a healthy gospel church established that is worshipping, loving, and following Jesus well — Knowing Him....and then making Him known!

And doing that will actually help us reach the lost

There is an aspect to Tyler and Carmel's story that I left out at the beginning: I mentioned that they are (relatively) recent converts and that Tyler grew up Jewish. Well, they did not move here alone. They brought with them their beloved Uncle Bob, who has an incredible back-story of his own — and who is still Jewish. But, although Bob still holds his Jewish faith, by being part of a family that is now part of our core group — Bob is now sitting in with us in the Sunday night Bible studies that we have started at our home. He has sat on my couch, bible open and in his lap, while I preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ. And just two Sundays ago, I had the privilege of sitting next to Uncle Bob and following along with him, while another pastor, a friend here on the coast, preached the gospel of Jesus Christ straight out of Exodus' account of the first passover given to the Jews in Egypt - when the blood of a pure lamb was placed over the home of each Jewish family so that God's judgment would pass over them and they would be saved. And I got to sit there, praying for him, while Bob took in and processed every word of the gospel that was being preached! Wow! Will you pray with me now that God will use what He is doing here on the coast to establish His church to save Uncle Bob and many others like him unto the gospel of Jesus Christ forever?!!



My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. John 10:27-29 (KJV)

So, please pray with us for God's unfolding story

- Pray for the new community of believers that is now meeting in our house twice a month for Bible study. We are studying Jesus's letters to the churches in Rev. 1-3, seven letters that, when taken together, describe the kind of loving, radiant bride Jesus wants His church to be. Pray that this study will lead to a community founded with healthy DNA from Jesus' own heart for the church.
- God is doing amazing, profound things from my "fishing trips" into my Government Street parish. The lost there are trusting me, and they are sharing their lives with me. They are starting to look for my times there. Pray for that trust and that sharing to lead to relationships and open doors for the gospel.
- February and March are missions conference season among many PCA churches, and I have the privilege and the invitation to preach to and visit several of our partnering churches in the coming weeks. Pray for those times to lead to a vision of long-term missions, evangelism, and discipleship — Toward the establishment of a healthy church living and sharing the gospel in Ocean Springs.

My friends, God is on the move here. There is so much more that I could share - but that will have to wait for future issues. For now, we invite you to join us as supporters of the gospel in Ocean Springs

Stephanie and I rejoice and thank God for each of you who are interested in and who are praying for the story of what God is doing here on the coast. Thank you so much! Would you consider making a financial investment in the story God in this new ministry? Be it 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)
- And finally, more information for all of this and updates on our Ocean Springs journey can be found at our website:
www.PlantHopeOS.org!



A closing encouragement:

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"Heaven have mercy on us all, presbyterians and pagans alike, for we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the head, and sadly need mending."
— Herman Melville