



MINISTRIES

Preparing to leave for a funeral, I looked out the window across Samford at the snow covered chapel. I had been working on a huge final

project for a Jan-term class and received a call from home. I sat in the window for a short time soaking up the peaceful scene that resembled a postcard, the campus draped in white snow and the strong steeple piercing the white backdrop with a red and white symbol of the church I had been called to serve. My class was a very practical class that taught all about the duties of a pastor outside the pulpit. Little did I know that one of those funeral services I had written for an assignment would become a vivid picture of the need for pastoral leadership during times of difficulty. I cut my quiet time in the window short and made my way across campus to turn in my notebook for my final grade early so I could get on the road toward home.

This view is etched in my mind for some reason, right? I have returned to that moment many times in the years that have followed. Today, I sit and recall that scene as I look out a different window on a quiet backyard slightly dusted with snow from an overnight winter storm and ponder the coming work of ministry. Looking back has always been a way for me to be reminded of the strong arm of the Lord guiding my path. I especially need this reminder from time to time when the path forward is not so clear - like today! 2019 was the last time I walked with my brothers and sisters in the mission field of Guatemala. The time since that trip has been very unexpected and tough. I find myself, as many of you, looking ahead to the future with great uncertainty. So, we reflect on where we have come from. We pause and remember the work the Lord has done and how He has faithfully guided us through every situation and circumstance in the past. It is one of those moments we read about in the Old Testament where a prophet calls the people together to remember and build a pillar of stones to mark a moment in time when the strong arm of the Lord is remembered.

I reflect back to early days of ministry in my home town trying to figure out how to lead a youth group with teenagers almost my same age! I recall ministry among dear friends in the inner city of Chicago, way out of my comfort zone at the time and yet, comfortable to be used. I remember a summer of ministry in Huntsville with a Godly family taking me in as their own son and helping me navigate the waters of a transitioning

youth group with a summer of ministry, mission, and fun. I try to recall those Sunday afternoons sitting in a dorm room full of guys laughing about our mistakes in the pulpit that morning as we were asked to preach in churches across the state so we could learn how to be these men we've been called to be. I remember the amazing times of worship in various places and contexts that led to a deeper commitment to the call on my life. So many memories keep flooding my mind.

The Lord has been very good to me through the years. I have been blessed to serve under and alongside some of the most amazing men and women of faith. The Father has brought strong men into my life to fill the gaps lost when my dad passed away. The Lord continually provides the loving arms of affection through women who have acted like a mom to me and a wife who has kept me stable and steady. The Lord has guided me through some dry days and some stormy days with a best friend and partner in the journey. Sheryl has remained by my side and always looking ahead to what is to come with hope and faith! And today, she is doing the same thing as we look into the future with questions and wonder.

While I could go on and on about how good the Lord has been to me, I am reminded of one encounter with the Lord where a determined Jacob held on so tight that he walked away with a limp. I know the Lord has a blessing in the midst of the struggles we are facing. I know He is guiding me to walk by faith and not by sight. I am holding on to Him for the future and cling to His words for hope. So, I remember the past faithfulness of the Lord, and I press into a new year with hope and great anticipation of what He is going to do. One familiar song from years ago said,"

He did not teach us to swim, just to let us drown!" The learning how to swim is part of the future journey, so will you join me as we learn from the days we are in how to remain faithful. Can we together prepare for what is ahead even without specific marching orders? Will we seek His face with urgency even when we cannot see the next battle before us? Join me as we prepare for the day we return to the field to share with new urgency, passion and commitment the whole truth of the Gospel as we REACH this word and TEACH His Word!



***Zeke missed our snow in Alabama but enjoyed a ton of snow in DC with Madison!***



Happy New Year friends! I am praying that 2022 will be a year of renewal for you all.

Our God is a God of new beginnings. I, for one, am so grateful that we don't have to stay where we are. We wake every morning with the chance to do things over. He has given us 12 new months, 365 days, 8760 hours, 525,600 minutes....it is His gift to us. How will we spend it?

For the past two years, we have been forced to have change, but we have also gotten very comfortable in many other ways. We don't go out as much, we aren't ministering the way we used to, and many are not attending church as we once did. We get used to being comfortable, and change is hard for us.... Covid has shown how some people react to change! This new year, however, offers us an opportunity to step out on faith and get out of our comfort zones. Our future has seemed very uncertain with the many things that are going on in the world, but there is One who has always known our future.

In Joshua 3:1-17, we see Joshua and Caleb leading the Israelites. God knew their future, and He led them to the very place in the story, the Jordan River. They had followed God's direction for their lives, and He gladly rewarded them. We are challenged in very similar ways today as we begin the new year.

- We must be flexible, not afraid of change. Change is hard....but it can be good! Sometimes we get so comfortable that we resist it. God brought about change, and He still brings change to everything. We have stood at the banks of our own Jordan River this past year....Don't fear change.
- We must be focused. Keep our eyes on Christ as He will lead us to where we are to be. There will be so many things that will try to distract us, but if we are in His word and keep our eyes focused on Him, we will prevail!
- We must be faithful. This means keeping our minds pure, our motives in check, and our morals high. We are to set ourselves apart from the world, and be different, recommitting ourselves to Him. When God's people are right with Him, they are right with others.
- We must be futuristic. The Israelites had real hope, faith, and vision. They looked forward, not in the past. We must press forward also. God didn't get us this far for us to only look back in the past. We need to believe that God is going to do great things in the future!
- We must be fearless. A fearless leader is someone who walks closely with the Lord, someone you can trust. We must keep our eyes on Jesus and have no fear of where He is leading us. Be willing to serve Him, trust in Him, and go where He leads.

In verse 8, God said. "When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, stand in the river."

They obeyed, and it wasn't until they stood in the water that they saw God's miraculous promise being fulfilled. The waters did not part until they actually stepped into it. This was an act of stepping out by faith!

Are we willing to step out on faith or are we going to wait for the waters to part first before we step out?

Many blessings to you all!

Karen



*Speaking of looking forward, how about the fact that Jett Turner is a senior in high school and graduates in May?*

