

## Let Me Sum Up...

I've prayed and thought about what to say in these final four messages. I know some of you parents have a teenager about to graduate high school and head off to college or into the work force and you are thinking, "Have I given them enough tools to make it? Do they know how to change a flat or will they pay attention when the check engine light comes on?" There are a host of questions in your mind, lessons that perhaps you forgot to teach them. I feel a little bit like that. Did I cover enough? Did I teach the right lessons over the years? Will anyone even remember anything I said? If not, will they at least remember something of how I lived my life? I hope that's the case. If you forget most of what I said, please remember how I lived my life, my values, doing my best to keep Jesus the main thing, to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and his prompting, to value the whole counsel of God, to be quick to show mercy, to rest in and rely on his grace. I hope I've taught you how to keep your spiritual motor running and how to change your spiritual tire if there is a blow-out. I hope I've been faithful to my calling.

Some of you will recognize this from one of my favorite movies, *The Princess Bride*. Inigo Montoya and Fezzik the giant are on the wall with Wesley, also known as the Dread Pirate Roberts who has been mostly dead all day. Miracle Max has given him a chocolate coated pill to revive him but when he wakes up, he is confused about what's going on. Fezzik says, "You've been mostly dead all day." Wesley asks Inigo "Who are you, how did I get on this wall, where's Buttercup?" Inigo replies, "**Let me e'splain**" **No, it's too much. Let me sum up.** Humperdink is marrying Buttercup in little less than half an hour." That's me after 47 years here. What are the things I still need to say? Let me explain. No, it's too much, **let me sum up.**

I've tried to preach expository messages all these years, staying focused on the Scripture rather than preaching topical sermons, but this is one of those pastoral words that I felt I needed to share with the church so indulge me. I want to go back to the first sermon of 2023. I said then the Lord had dropped four words into my spirit concerning 2023 and that each of those four words would require a yes from us. If you remember the four words were Challenge, Change, Calling and Commitment. I preached that message on January 1, knowing the announcement I was going to make on February 19<sup>th</sup> concerning my retirement. I knew what was coming, the four other pastors knew as did the board, so I'm sure they heard that message differently than the rest of you. I want to go back and comment on those four words in light of the transition that is coming.

**Accept the challenge.** Quoting from that message I said, “I know the last three years have been nothing but a challenge and I hate to be the one to tell you on the first day of the new year, but life in 2023 will not go unchallenged or unopposed. I’m not suggesting it’s going to be a bad year. I believe there is a new season of blessing coming, but that season and that blessing won’t come to us unchallenged. Challenges can come from many directions and 2023 will be no different, but let me tell you something you need to remember: Challenge is a means and mechanism to growth.”

Here we are four months later and you as a congregation are facing a challenge in terms of this pastoral transition. Don’t forget we faced a tornado and rebuilt the church debt free – we’ve had pastors retire before, in 90 years we’ve faced challenges and each time we came out stronger and better than before.

Some of you may recall a prayer meeting we had in the rotunda at VBI after the tornado. Billy Joe Daugherty had suggested to me that perhaps we should consider selling the property here and moving a bit south, finding 40 acres on US75 and building a new facility. I called for a prayer meeting and asked that we seek the Lord’s will, to ask if the Lord wanted us to stay in this location, in the Carbondale neighborhood or was it time to move, or even time to disband as a church. We prayed and I asked what people felt in their spirit and everyone said, “We believe the Lord wants us to stay here. He isn’t finished with this church and he isn’t finished with us in this community.” I believe that in our seeking the Lord, he had opportunity and cause to clarify and renew our vision, to even expand our vision. Billy Joe and Ken Hagin Jr. both spoke prophetically about the Lord wanting a significant work in Southwest Tulsa and he would use us. Accepting that challenge and praying for the Lord’s direction helped to clarify our calling and was a means and mechanism to growth for our church.

There is value in the challenge, in the process that we are in right now. Here’s what I mean. This challenge of pastoral transition, just like the tornado, provides us with a season and opportunity to seek the Lord, to reflect on his purpose and hear from him. That’s why we called for this time of prayer, so the church would seek the Lord. There is benefit in the challenge, in praying and drawing close to the Lord and allowing Him once again to define and clarify his vision for our church and to renew our mission and calling in a new season.

As I was praying here in the sanctuary one morning, I asked, “Lord, why don’t you just tell me the rest of your plans for the church and the staff in this transition? What do you want?”

I felt the Lord whisper to my heart, “I am keeping this close to my heart so you will move close to me and to my heart.” The challenge is to seek his heart. The question is not “who do I want to be the next pastor?” The question is “Lord, who do you want to be the next pastor?” Ask him “What’s in your heart for Carbondale? What do you want to accomplish through your church, our church in this next season?” The challenge is finding the will of God and the way to do that is to get close to his heart and stay there. We all know there can be stress and strife in pastoral changes, everyone has an opinion, but if we stay close to the heart of God, we will be all right.

Daniel was seeking the Lord for an answer, the meaning of the king’s dream. After the Lord revealed it to him, Daniel said, **“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness...I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers...you have made known to me what we asked of you...” Daniel 2:20-23** The answer is found in seeking the Lord. He’s going to direct you but you must pray and seek him! Get close to the heart of God!

**Embrace the change.** Solomon said, **“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot...a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance...” Ecclesiastes 3:1** We served our time, our season and now it’s time for change. Change is not a bad thing, it’s just...change. Change comes with life. Change can be exciting. It’s new possibilities and opportunities. We grow, mature, learn, leave, age, we change. Styles change, methods change. I said a few weeks ago, regardless of who the next pastor is, you’ve probably seen your last suit and tie up in here. You’re going to have a younger pastor. At least I sure hope so because it would be silly to get an older one (we only do that with politicians. Let’s see if we can find some really old guys to run for president.) A younger pastor will attract younger people and younger families. Younger people will facilitate other changes. There will be fresh vision, younger ideas. If you are my age or older, don’t worry about being forgotten or overlooked. This staff loves you. You’re going to be fine, but rejoice that the next generation is finding Jesus and is being empowered in leadership so Carbondale will remain healthy and continue making an impact for another 90 years!

Don't be afraid to embrace the change. You aren't being disloyal to the past or to me or any other pastor for that matter when you embrace and love your next pastor. Embrace and support the changes that will come. Don't respond with "well, that's not how we did it when Phil was pastor." The correct answer is, "The Lord gave us a new pastor for a new season, let's give this a try." Don't get nostalgic about the good old days. They weren't all that good. Because you did it that way then doesn't mean you should do it that way now. We used to have the windows open and fan ourselves with funeral fans during service but thank the Lord that's not how we do it now! Thank God for change. The Lord said through the prophet, **"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."** **Isaiah 43:18-19** We are going to celebrate the past for these next three Sundays and I appreciate that. There have been wonderful times, but God is ready to do a new thing. Don't miss it!

Whoever the next pastor is, I'm going to support the changes because I know the heavy responsibility borne by the pastor. That person will be anointed to lead this church, not me, and with the Holy Spirit's help I believe there will be greater things accomplished in the next season. Don't let the devil divide you or distract you from the Lord's purposes in a new season. I said in the sermon in January, "God help us and don't allow us as a church to fear change so much that we will wither and die. Instead, keep us moving forward into all you have for us and if God answers that prayer it will mean change. But it will also mean blessing and new opportunities to grow and reach our community and our world." Listen, Moses is dead (I'm not dead yet) but Joshua and the next generation of leaders will take you into the promised land. Hallelujah! Go do it like it should have been done. Make the changes that need to be made.

**Step into your calling.** With the changes that will come there will be new opportunities for ministry, new opportunities for serving the Lord and for serving your church. Typically anytime there is a pastoral change some people leave and others begin attending. It's just how it works. It simply comes with the change but I've often had people tell me, "I believe the Lord called me to Carbondale. He directed me to this church, to these people." Good! He called you here and that doesn't change because Pastor Phil isn't pastor. He called you to the church, to each other. I encourage you to seek the Lord and ask him "Lord you called me here, perhaps for such a time as this, in a time of transition and change, so what are you calling me to, Lord? How can I best serve and help with the gifts and time and talent I have?" None of this is taking God

by surprise. From my perspective, he initiated it. I believe I've responded in obedience to what he asked of me and that means there is room for you to step up and answer his call to serve this church, to serve the next pastor, to serve the Lord and his kingdom in this next season.

The final word: **Deepen your commitment.** Quoting from the original sermon, "Whatever the challenges, whatever the changes that may come in 2023, whatever the calling and wherever the calling takes us in our obedience, the bottom line is we must face it all and embrace it all with commitment to Jesus." I believe it. I don't know what the new season looks like, for Carbondale or for us, I just know in my heart the Lord said there was a new season for the church and for us and I'm excited to see how it all turns out because I know God loves us, he loves this church, his church. Jesus said he would build his church and not even the gates of hell could prevail against it. Let's commit ourselves to Jesus and to his church. Carbondale will need you. The next pastor will need the mature saints to support and pray and encourage and mentor. The next pastor will need young leaders and young families to give life and energy and passion to impacting this community and this world! Would you deepen your commitment to the Lord and to his church in this time of transition? Continue to support the church with your attendance, with your giving. Continue to show up, to serve, to pray for the staff and the board. Your presence each Sunday is going to be vitally important to the future of the church during this season of transition. Continue to seek the Lord and get close to his heart. Deepen your commitment to one another. If there is a problem, get it right. Commit to loving one another.

We are receiving new members this morning. It seems a little strange because in one sense I'm welcoming you into the unknown. Welcome to Carbondale but I don't know who your lead pastor will be. At the same time, I am welcoming you into what is perfectly known, a body of believers that love Jesus and love each other, a church family with a great history, a great legacy of 90 years of serving Jesus, ministering to this community, reaching the world through missions giving and by sending out ministers and missionaries from here to places around the globe. I am welcoming you into a place of healing, hope, laughter and peace, a place with a great pastoral staff and a great deacon board, poised to do something amazing for the King and His kingdom. I hope all of you will remain committed to Jesus and to this church and to each other. That's what it's all about.

I hope you've heard my heart this morning. I felt I needed to share these thoughts with you because I love you and I love this church. This has been my church essentially for 56 years. I

want God's will and his blessing for this church. I pray there is greater anointing and growth for Carbondale than ever before. I pray the next pastor will far exceed anything I ever accomplished here. O Lord, let it be. Amen! (Prayer)

As I call your name if you will come to the front and face the congregation.

We are pleased to welcome you to the family of Carbondale Assembly of God. This is your church now. We need you and your gifts and calling, your talent and ability and you need us whether you know it or not. Together we can accomplish so much more and be so much more than we can by ourselves. We are blessed to have you as part of our church and I believe you will be blessed by being a part of this body as well.

I've read this statement to new members for many years now, paraphrased from something Jerry Cook wrote in his book, *Love Acceptance and Forgiveness*. This is our pledge to you: I want you to know that we are committed to you. You'll never knowingly suffer at our hands. We will never say or do anything, knowingly, to hurt you. We will always in every circumstance seek to help you and support you. If you're down and we can lift you up, we'll do that. Anything we have that you need, we'll share with you and if need be, we'll give it to you. No matter what we find out about you and no matter what happens in the future, either good or bad, our commitment to you will never change. And there's nothing you can do about it. You don't have to respond. We love you and that's what it means. Let's pray.

On behalf of the members of Carbondale Assembly of God, we welcome you into our fellowship. This is your church. We love you and we are here for you. I'm going to ask you to stay right here and allow us to come by and welcome you. Make a point to meet these new members. Let's show our love and acceptance of them and welcome them by a round of applause.

May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.