

Let Me Sum Up Part 4

Quite A Vision

It's hard to believe this is my last Sunday as the pastor of Carbondale Assembly of God. I knew the day would come. I set the date but it's still surreal that the day has come. There are so many people deserving of thanks. Thanks to Pastor Pieratt who saw something in me as a teenager and gave me opportunity to serve and to preach. Thanks to Dave and Brenda Kelly who as our youth pastors loved and supported Paula and myself and again gave me opportunities to minister. Thanks to Pastor J. L. McQueen and Sis McQueen who just about 4 months after they were elected as our pastors, invited us to join their staff as youth pastors. They mentored us and loved us and taught us so much about being shepherds and how best to pastor God's church. Sis. McQueen we love you dearly and are so thankful for you.

Thank you to the board members who, 38 years and one month ago, took a chance on a 29 year old associate pastor and presented us to the church. Thank you to all the folks who voted for us then and have kept on voting for us through the years. Thank you for giving us the opportunity and the honor to serve this great church. You have provided for us and our children. You have cared for and loved us and we are so thankful. Thank you to all of the board members, past and present who have served this church along side us. In 38 years I think we might have had two votes that weren't unanimous. We have been able to find the wisdom and will of the Lord and I'm so thankful for all these years of peace we have enjoyed. Blessings to all of the deacons who have served so faithfully.

Thank you to the associate pastors, past and present who have worked so hard and so well, helping to carry the load all these years. You are world changers, all of you. You never said no, never refused a request that I can recall. Regardless of the hours, the price, the sacrifice, you all said yes to the call of God and yes to serve this church and to serve me as your pastor. I am humbled by your loyalty and support and so very thankful for the extraordinary way you have worked and served the Lord.

To the staff that works so hard, supporting the pastors and serving the church body, thank you and God bless each of you. Your efforts make all the difference. The current staff, Paula Taylor, Phyllis Yandell, Sandy Casey, Gaby Bravo, Karen Graham, Metzli Bravo, Diego Bravo, Lori Swisher, P.J. Muilenberg, Michael Hudson, Oxanna McCombs, Valeri and Justin

Billingsley, Dusty Hutchinson, and to all of the incredible volunteers that serve each and every week to make Carbondale the exceptional place it is. Thank You! We love you all.

Phyllis Yandell has been my administrative assistant, personal assistant, I don't know what we've called her but she has been such a dear friend to me and my family and has been there to help me with just about every thing and anything I could think of, often before I could even ask. Thank you! And thank you for the retirement celebration!

To my family, there are no words to say how proud and thankful I am that we have been able to serve one church, as a family, for all of these years. Rebekah, I am so thankful for you and the many gifts you bring to the church. We've joked that Rebekah should be the volunteer of the year. You think you'll miss me but you would really miss Rebekah. You see her singing on the worship team on Sunday, but she also teaches youth Sunday School, helps lead and teach the youth Life Group, cooks for the life group, is a youth sponsor, volunteers in the nursery on Sundays, in addition to using her gifting and skill as a counselor to help keep her Dad sane and on track. I love you so much Bek. Thank you.

Sarah, I'm so thankful for the almost 10 years you've been here, serving the Lord, the church, and your dad. I have to tell you if Sarah hadn't come home to assume this role as senior associate, basically the executive pastor, I would have been gone ten years ago. I was in a dark place emotionally at that time and she came home from serving in missions in Europe to help me finish strong. Sarah I can't begin to tell you what a blessing you've been. You have led well. You've protected me, taken the blame for me, helped me, spoken for me, you have lead our great staff with purpose and loved this church, this community, with passion and care. Thank you! I love you!

To Paula my bride of almost 48 years. We married May 31st 1975 and by the end of the year we were youth pastors here and for the next 47+ years, you shared me, my time and attention with the church and did it without ever complaining or criticizing. You faithfully supported me, cared for and stood by me, protected me and our daughters, prayed for our family and for our church family and quietly loved this church, this congregation. Thank you for not complaining about vacations cut short by a death in the church, meals interrupted by phone calls, middle of the night emergencies. Thank you for walking with me on this journey and for being willing to walk into the next season with me as well. It's been quite a journey for sure. I love you.

The bible says, **“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Proverbs 29:18** You know I love Westerns. One of my favorite Western movies is Lonesome Dove. If you’ve seen it, you know there are so many great lines in the movie. “I hate rudeness in a man. I won’t tolerate it.” “You know what we say Jake, you ride with an outlaw, you die with an outlaw. I’m sorry you crossed the line.” “I didn’t see no line, Gus, there wasn’t no line.”

At the end of the movie, Woodrow has made it all the way back to Lonesome Dove where a young reporter approaches him. “You’re Capt. Call aren’t you? Captain Woodrow Call? They say you were a Texas Ranger, that you ran off the bandits. They say you led the first cattle drive all the way up to the North Country, that you brought your friend back a thousand miles to bury him. They say you are a man of vision.” Captain Call says, “A man of vision you say. Yeah, (and I’ll clean it up a bit) quite the vision.” And then you see all of these scenes from the movie begin to replay, as if we are seeing into his mind as he remembers the past.

Where there is no vision, the people perish. Well, as I bring this season to an close, if you were to ask me if I’m a man of vision, like Capt. Call I would say, yes sir, quite a vision. My vision will reach all the way back to my teenaged years. I can see the youth group sitting over here on the Eastside.

I can see the Sunday after Jimmy Bingham was murdered when we opened up the dividers in the fellowship hall and the junior high and high school students all cried and prayed for each other and our youth group realized life could be shorter than we thought and they were no guarantees of tomorrow at any age.

I can see Dorothy Bingham telling Bro. Pieratt, “Let’s pray for the man that shot Jimmy, he needs the Lord.”

I can see Paula and I as teenagers, sitting over there with my arm around her on the back of the pew, and I can see me sitting in Bro. Pieratt’s office and him cautioning me about pda and getting too serious.

I can see a group of teenagers right down here on Monday nights, gathering for prayer meeting. The piano was over here and we worshiped and we prayed. Just us. It was just teenagers with maybe an adult sponsor who joined us in the days before Dave and Brenda came as youth pastors. So many hearts turned toward the Lord, passionate about serving Him.

I can see a Sunday morning when Erville Doke suddenly collapsed over here. The firemen in the church got to her and laid her on the pew and said they couldn’t get a pulse. Bro.

Pieratt told us all to pray and by the time the ambulance arrived, Erville got up and walked to the ambulance.

I've got quite the vision. I can see the Spirit of God meeting people around these altars. I can see teenagers standing in a circle back in what was then the prayer room behind the stage, praying, first being used in the gifts of the Spirit.

I can see William Caldwell praying for people, hitting Ken Woods in the stomach and the hernia he had being healed, and him praying for Benita Harper and the next morning the plantar warts she had had fallen off and were laying in her bed. Miracles and blessings.

I can see Paula and I standing here, exchanging vows and promising to love each other as long as we both shall live.

I can see us standing here on this platform, first with Sarah and then with Rebekah as Bro. McQueen dedicated our girls to the Lord.

I can see myself kneeling right down here, battling the darkness and despair of depression, telling the Lord if he wasn't going to heal me, could he just let me die right there at the altar? And I can see myself standing here with a group of people around me, praying for me, believing for the depression to go.

I can see myself standing behind the pulpit as Bro. and Sis. McQueen and the board prayed over us and installed us as pastors.

I can see times of visitation from the Lord. A Sunday morning when the presence of God was so overwhelming, at the end of the service I laid down on the platform, behind the pulpit, people streamed to the altar and I felt the weight of God's glory so strong I thought I would be crushed under his presence.

Young men and women see visions the prophet said. I can see a Saturday night praying meeting. We stood here at the front and I saw angels encircling the sanctuary. I physically walked down the aisle and I could see them following me. In the vision I walked out of the sanctuary and they followed me outside into a war zone. We prayed for a young lady that night and as we moved to her, I saw angels quickly surround her.

I can see another vision I had, here at the altar, watching the journey of my life, the moment when I saw what I thought was my death and I realized Oh no, this isn't death, this is life! Eternal life!

I can see a vision God gave me of the word of God going forth from the pulpit like a sword that broke the chains of people that were bound to the beams of this sanctuary.

I can see hundreds of funerals over the years, saying good bye to so many dear saints with hearts full of thankfulness for their lives well lived and for the hope of the resurrection.

I can see wonderful people, wonderful times, wonderful services, wonderful memories that I treasure.

I can see the Monday night of the tornado in 99. Darryl and I in the parking lot, realizing the whole second story was gone, bending over like someone had just punched us in the stomach. And I can see us praying and moving forward to rebuild and to do it without debt, growing and meeting the challenges of that season in the life of our church. The congregation responding with sacrificial giving of over 1 million dollars over and above their tithes. Triumph out of disaster.

I see young people called to ministry, called to missions, serving the Lord today, at home and around the world. Another one graduated yesterday and headed to ministry. Yes sir, quite a vision.

But it's not just vision for looking back but looking forward. I have a vision of what can be, of what I believe will be. I have a vision of a multi generational, multi ethnic church where Jesus is exalted and talked about, where he is the focus of every message and outreach.

I have a vision of a missions giving, missions sending, Jesus loving, Spirit filled, gospel preaching, Christ honoring, sinner loving and sinner saving church that brings hope and transformation to Southwest Tulsa. I think that's what we've been and that's what I'm believing will continue in even greater measure. A place of healing, hope, laughter and peace.

I have a vision of a church that isn't afraid to live for Jesus, to let our light shine in an increasingly darker world. A church that will keep our eyes on Jesus and on eternal things rather than the things of earth. A church that will make full use of that spiritual dna we talked about last Sunday, who will courageously Be Carbondale Assembly of God!

I can't see exactly what's next, but you don't have to be afraid, just trust God and seek the Lord and his direction. He is going to lead you and guide you. Trust the process. You've got good and gifted pastors here, ready to lead and serve. Sarah and Brian and Jeff and Brittany have a fresh vision of what can happen here at Carbondale and how to empower the next generation of leaders. Keep praying for them and for the board and keep seeking the Lord and his direction for the church. I have a vision of great things ahead. I believe the Lord wants to bless this church

and once again expand your borders and boundaries. Don't shrink back from what God is calling you to do.

I've got another vision. With eyes of faith I can see beyond today, beyond the blessings that are coming to the church in your next season, and all the way to a day when all of us will be together, our robes washed in the blood of Calvary's Lamb, clean and whole, standing before the throne of God and of the Lamb, and in one mighty voice we will declare, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise...[and]To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever."

Can you see it with eyes of faith? I want you to see it because I don't want you to miss it. I don't want you to miss heaven. I don't want you to miss that glorious gathering of the saints. I don't want you to miss eternity with Jesus, the one who gave his life for you to redeem you from your sins. I'm grieved to think anyone who attended this church, who sat through hundreds of Sundays listening to my sermons would miss heaven, would fail to give your heart and life to Jesus when you had time and opportunity. I've tried my best to point you to Jesus, to encourage you to follow him, to live for him, to serve him and surrender your life to him. If you've not done that, you have another chance this morning, while there is still time, to give your heart to Jesus, repent of your sins and make him the Savior and Lord of your life. Just look with eyes of faith to him today! If you need Jesus and you want to ask him to forgive your sins and give you eternal life, while no one is looking around, would you just slip your hand up so I can know where you are. I want to pray for you.

Hold To God's Unchanging Hand

Ask Paula and girls to come up

Darryl to pray for us.

Pray for the church – Grant us vision, clear vision!

Pronounce last benediction and blessing

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. Amen!

With apologies to Russell Claude Bridges, aka Leon Russell, but I wanted to sing this song to Paula. For almost 48 years she has stood beside me as we pastored and loved and worked and sacrificed for the Lord and his church. This may or may not be good news to her, but I'm going to sing it anyway.

I've been so many places in my life and time
I've sung a lot of songs, I've made some bad rhymes
I've sung and preached on stages with hundreds of people watching
But we're alone now, guess I'll have to sing and preach to you.

I know your image of me, is what I used to be
I used to be the pastor, but darling can't you see
There's no one left besides you, It's just you and me, just us two
And we're alone now, guess I'll sing and preach to you.

You taught me precious secrets of the truth withholding nothing
You stood beside me when I was crying
And now I'm so much better so if these words don't come together
Listen to the melody cause my love is in there hiding.

I love you in a place where there's no space or time
I love you for my life, you are a friend of mine
And when this day is over, remember we'll still be together
We'll be alone and I'll be singing and preaching to you.
Yes we'll be alone, and I'll be singing, yes I'll be singing this song to you.