

Duane Goodling Testimony

Ok, full disclosure here; this is more like my life story from my teens years up than it is my testimony and I admit that it is a little long but, while I may be slightly biased, I think it is a good read. It will let you in on why I am the way I am and how I got to where I got. Yes, I know that isn't proper grammar but I never was good at grammar. I implore you to read my story, even if it takes 2-3 sittings, then I'd love to hear what you think. Send me an e-mail, give me a call...I'd love to hear from you. My contact info is at the end.

I didn't grow up in church. I was probably like a lot of you. I was a good kid...well...mostly good. I didn't lie (much), I didn't steal (a lot) and I went to church occasionally (ok, not that much). If you asked me if I was a Christian, I would have said 'Yes!' without hesitation. Problem was, I really didn't know what it meant to be a Christian. I thought to be a Christian just meant that I had to be a good person (at least do more good than bad) and believe that there was a God. I was pretty good overall and I believed there was a God, who we should look up to and pray to when we needed something, and felt that was enough. I even went through the confirmation process to join our Methodist church at the suggestion of the pastor. I was 17 and most of the other kids were younger so he thought I would make a good role model for them. While on the surface that may have appeared to be true, my homelife didn't line up with my church life. I never took confirmation seriously and really didn't understand a lot of what I experienced in church. I never understood why they kept talking about blood and a lamb and why everything had to be covered in this lamb's blood. When the doxology was sung as the ushers carried the offering to the front, I always wondered why we sang "...all creatures here below", as if we were better than the animals. Maybe someone tried to explain these things to me but if they did, I either wasn't listening or miss class that day. Either way, I completed confirmation and moved on with life.

Next was the fall of 1989 and college life. I was in no way living a Christian lifestyle and this carried over into college. I lived a very worldly life; partying, cursing and sought out the approval of my friends and girls to try to build up my lacking self-confidence. I was only a student for two years, but I attended for four. By that I mean, I was officially only a paying student of the college for two years then dropped out however, I continued to visit my friends almost every weekend for another two years after that. Crashing in what ever room I could find after the evening party wound down. I was everyone's best friend because I was the only one with a fulltime job which meant the only one with money to buy the beer. During this time, I shared an apartment with a friend and never darkened the door of a church. Again however, if you asked me if I was a Christian, my answer would have been yes. I wasn't trying to lie or deceive anyone, I just really didn't understand. Are, or were, you like this? How would you answer if asked?

Fast forward to the summer of 1994. I was working year three of what I originally had called a summer job after I dropped out of college. One workday during lunch, one of the college summer employees and I were sitting across from each other eating when he looks up and says emphatically, "I know who you can date!" I imagine I rolled my eyes, before asking him who that

would be and he said, "My girlfriend's sister." I asked if he had any pictures and he showed me a picture of a girl with huge sunglasses on that covered 75% of her face (I may be exaggerating a little, but they were big) but it was enough for me to agree to let him ask if she would be willing to go on a blind date with me. She agreed and on July 3, 1994, Beth and I went on our first date, a blind date, to the Olive Garden.

I'm not a fashion icon by any stretch of the imagination so I showed up in shorts that were too short and a shirt that wasn't really in style however, I had flowers and at least had that going in my favor. Beth later told me that she was less than impressed when I showed up because she had immediately concocted a plan to call her dad from the restaurant, after we ate, for him to come rescue her and take her home. Well, I must be charming or something because after we ate, she stayed! In fact, we spent pretty much every day we could after that first date, together. But...we had some issues. One issue was that Beth grew up in church and gave her heart to the Lord as a child, and you know my story from above, so, we were on different wavelengths when it came to faith. I did the good boyfriend thing and occasionally went to church with her but it was not a priority. If I had something else to do, and I often did, I had no hesitation to skip. Another issue was music. Beth liked to listen to contemporary Christian 'church' music and I grew up with classic rock and heavy metal. I wasn't about to listen to 'church' music but again as a good boyfriend, I came up with a compromise. When we went somewhere in her car, we would listen to her music, when I drove my truck, we listened to mine. Well, apparently, I'm not that smart because we almost always took her car! Over time, I secretly began to realize that her 'church' music wasn't all that bad and in fact, started listening to it in my truck without her.

From almost the very beginning, Beth and I talked about marriage. While I won't necessarily recommend this to anyone else, I bought an engagement ring after only two months and asked her to marry me after only three months. Keep in mind that we met on a blind date so our entire history consisted of three months. As I get older, I tend to reflect back on my life and events that stand out. I can certainly see how God directed my path to meeting and marrying Beth. I was on a very worldly life trajectory and after meeting Beth, things changed. She was brought up in a very traditional family with a wonderful Christian heritage. My family was racked with divorce and disfunction. I love my family and they are good people, but very few were ever involved in church (thankfully that has changed through the years for quite a few).

Beth and I were married October 14, 1995 and moved into a townhouse that we purchased in the weeks leading up to our wedding. At that time, I was working for Jiffy Lube as an Asst., then Lead Manager at locations about 30-45 minutes from home. I was always tired and if I am completely honest, I was not the best husband the first year or two, as I was often quite grumpy and argumentative at home.

Around 1997, I moved into the Jiffy Lube district office as a training coordinator and then as a regional manager. This led to quite a bit of travel and time away from home; often for a day or two and occasionally longer. As regional manager, my district was 2-3 hours from our home; depending on what locations I was visiting. The idea at the time was that we would sell our townhome and move closer to where I was working. In the meantime, though, I was commuting

back and forth. It didn't take long until I was staying out near my district Monday through Saturday, then coming home Saturday and going back out on Monday. It was hard on a fairly new marriage but Beth had her friends and family so that helped.

As I mentioned, I started listening to Christian music myself on these long drives. I would listen to a Christian radio station (90.3 FM, WJTL, Lancaster, PA). I even bought my first Christian CD's to the shock of my wife!

One Monday morning as I was driving from home to my job, a commercial came on the radio. It was a little cheesy but two guys were talking about what it meant to be a Christian. One guy said he was a Christian and the other asked him how he knew. The first guy said that he was a good person and that he believed there was a God. The second guy said something like, "Well, Satan believes there is a God". I thought, that was me! I immediately knew that I wasn't a Christian!

After hearing that what was I to do? I didn't pull over, get on my hands and knees and pray right then and there however, for the first time I realized that just being a good person was not enough. Just believing there is a God wasn't enough. This began a shift in my attitude, and while I didn't immediately change, it started me down a path of change. Church became a little more important, the Bible became more than a book and Christian music became a bigger part of my changing life.

In late 1998 I was still doing the long drive for work when a church, led by my pastor's father-in-law, presented a drama called *Heaven's Gates, Hell's Flame's*. My wife and my pastor's wife gently encouraged me to go with the church. Ok, I'm going to call it for what it was...they nagged me. I had to get up early the next day and had a long drive and didn't want to stay out late. After much back and forth, I eventually gave in to their persistence, and agreed to go.

Sometimes, we need to thank God for the nagging of our spouses because it was that night, 11/15/1998, that I gave my life over to the Lord. On that night I said the sinner's prayer, *'Lord, I recognize that I am a sinner and that You came and You died on the cross to take away my sins. Please forgive me of all my sins and come into my heart and my life this moment. I realize You are the only way to heaven and I want You to take control of my life and destiny. In Jesus name, Amen!'*

After that night, my life did change. They gave me a small Gospel of John book to read. I read the book but then I didn't know what to do next so I did what I thought all Christian's did, I plopped my Bible down on the table and figured that I'd open it to exactly what God wanted me to read. He, of course, could lead someone like this but God would prefer that we read the entire Bible, not just pick and choose at random.

When I opened the Bible, it was to the book of Nehemiah and I started reading. It wasn't long before I was like, 'Ugh! This is so boring!' and I thought, 'Man, I can't even be a good Christian because I can't even get through the first book after reading John.' I felt very discouraged. I didn't have a mentor to encourage me and show me the way; to answer questions I had or ask

me questions about things I never thought to ask about. To be honest, I floundered with my newly found faith for about two years before things started to click and make sense.

I had to be intentional and persistent; to make the right choices. My hearts desires had changed which helped me. There were still sinful desires, but there was a will and strength to overcome them that wasn't there before. You see, when you give your heart over to the Lord, you are reborn, you are a new person. Christ will be there for you when you need Him; every step of the way. He will never fail you!

About two years after giving my heart to the Lord, Beth and I began attending church more. This helped in my Christian education tremendously, but another event led to me furthering my Christian walk. Beth and I moved. First, we moved to the Philadelphia region for a few months but then we went on to New Hampshire. It was there when I first felt like I was making good progress with my faith. We plugged into a good church and I began helping in some kid's ministry. It was there when the concept of mission's was first presented to me. The pastor at the time mentioned that they were in the initial planning stages for a mission trip to Russia. He had been a missionary there a few years earlier and wanted to take a group. This really caught my attention and when I went out to my car after the service, I thought I received a sign from God through a song that I should go. As a relatively new Christian, I thought everything was a sign from God. While this may or may not have been a true sign, it didn't matter, I wanted to join the mission's team. Even though the Russia trip never materialized, this sparked an interest in me for missions.

While in New Hampshire, I became very dissatisfied with my job and did what I would not recommend a Christian to do. I prayed to God, 'You get me out of this job and I will serve you!' Of course, as Christians, we should always be willing to serve the Lord in whatever capacity He calls us however, when we issue the kind of challenge as I did, you need to be prepared for the response. But the response had not come; at least not for a few years.

Beth and I moved back to Pennsylvania about a year after that prayer and while we were gone, our original home church had started taking missions trips to Mexico. This was mid-October 2001, just after the Sept. 11th terrorist attacks. Our (again) home church decided to do a mission trip in 2002 but to stay within the United States to avoid international travel. I joined the team and we went to Alaska...and I loved it! It was my first trip so I didn't know what to expect but I truly enjoyed working with, and helping the people. So much so that when we returned, I was ready to sign up for the next trip immediately. From that first trip in 2002, I've been on at least one mission trip every year except two; the trips after my kids were born. What I didn't know was what it would lead me to later.

After our move back to PA, I was trying to hold up my end of the bargain I made with God. I began chaperoning our youth group to district events, I helped with the boys and youth programs, served on the deacon board, helped in the sound room, went on mission's trips and helped with anything else that was needed around our church. I had been asking the Lord what specifically he wanted me to do for Him for quite some time but never received a response. However, it was at one of the youth events where another big step in my faith journey occurred.

Beth and I had two boys, Chase, then Nick, after we moved back to Pennsylvania and we settled in with raising them, working and living life. We continue to help at the church and basically go through the motions. It was a Friday afternoon in 2010, right before I was to leave for a youth retreat that I was chaperoning, when I said to Beth, 'I think we should think about selling the house and downsizing'. Bingo! Apparently, that was it and that was what God needed to hear from me because that weekend, at the age of 38, I was called into ministry, as an adult and at a youth retreat of all places. Of course, God knew all along what He wanted me to do, He was just waiting for me to be ready to hear it. When I heard God speak to my heart and that He wanted me in ministry, I was at a point where I was ready to receive it and I immediately said, "Yes!".

I was a little concerned with what Beth would think about this call since we had a relatively comfortable life and both of us assumed that life in ministry would mean less income but when I told her about the call, her response was, "I already knew that." Then she asked me, "Don't you remember a few years back when I asked if you felt called into ministry and you said, 'No'?" Honestly, I didn't remember that conversation at all but I should have figured that if God was calling me into ministry, He would have worked it out with my wife first.

I immediately started looking for a school that I could begin taking ministry classes and settled on Global University. Ok, shameless plug for Global U. Global has been wonderful for someone in my position; called to ministry a little later in life, working full-time and not a lot of cash on-hand. I registered and began right away but that first class, that was supposed to take up to six months, took me a full year. I struggled to find the right mix of time with the family, work and studying. It got better with the next classes and I started checking them off the list.

As I mentioned, this was 2010 and shortly after I began taking classes, our church joined Pat Summers and his mission's agency, Think Missions, for a trip to Cochabamba, Bolivia. Pat and my pastor were youth pastors in the 80's at neighboring churches and knew each other well. On that trip, we built a church from the ground up and the youth performed evangelism in the local neighborhood and schools. I *really* enjoyed Bolivia and the Bolivian people; so much so that in 2011 my home church decided to not do a mission's trip that year, because our pastor's mother-in-law was having health issues, and I called Pat Summers and said that I would like to join him in Bolivia again that summer. We again went to Cochabamba and again, I really enjoyed the trip. I met, Jeremiah and Marj Campbell, the new Missionary Associates in Cochabamba, that were working under the career Missionaries, Steve and Lori Potutschnig. I felt a strong connection to the Campbell's and by the end of the week, felt compelled to tell them that I wanted to support them monthly. It wasn't much but again; I believe that God used these stepping stones to lead me to where I am today.

That time spent with the Campbell's led me to inviting them to come speak at my home church when they returned to the United States in 2003 to itinerate. There ended up being a mix-up in plans which resulted in the Campbell's not being able to speak at our church however Beth and I invited them to come spend the day with us and relax. They had been driving across the country visiting churches and had a very young son with them so a free day was needed. I asked Jeremiah

if they had ever eaten hard shell blue crabs before (FYI...my favorite food of all time!) and he said they had not, so we planned to get some for them to try. On our way to pick up the crabs, Jeremiah said that he knew I was called to ministry, but asked what kind of ministry did I feel called to; pastorate, evangelism or missions? I said I was kind of embarrassed, but I never thought about it. I was called to ministry and I just assumed that meant pastoring a church. He said he asked because he and his wife thought that Beth and I would make good missionaries. We had been on many trips and loved working with kids. He explained the Assemblies of God Missionary Associate (MA) program allows people to go into the field to work under a career missionary for two years to see if that is truly their calling. I told him I would pray about it and let him know.

After talking and praying, Beth and I decided to apply to be MA's under the Campbell's. The process to be approved to be an MA is a long and tedious one; and for good reason. They want to make sure that those applying are truly called and able to handle the mental, spiritual and physical stress of living in another country for ministry. There were many forms for us to complete and questionnaires for our friends and family to complete.

I believe that to know if the Lord is truly speaking to you about something, you should put it through a three-point test. First, does it align with the Bible? Second, does it really feel like God is speaking to you and third, are you receiving confirmation from fellow believers? The first two I felt were a given; certainly, going into the mission's field aligns with the Word and I felt that it was God's call for us. It was the third point that was the issue. While no one came out and said, 'No' or 'You shouldn't be doing this', we never really received confirmation; from anyone. Even when we met with our district leadership about our application, I said to Beth as we were leaving that I felt like they were telling us we shouldn't be doing this.

Apparently, I have a pretty thick skull because even though we kept hitting road block after road block, I kept us plugging ahead and we continued to tell people we will be moving to Bolivia. Our two boys were telling their friends and we just assumed all would proceed. Then we received a letter from Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM). This letter informed us that there was no room in South America for us. Really, that's basically what the letter said. I was obviously very confused and upset. I mean, no room? That made no sense. We wanted to be missionaries and were basically being told no. Ok, my thick skull was not going to accept that so I responded to ask what they meant. I was told that we should not have received that particular letter and that it was a mistake however, during their mission's committee meeting, something came up on one of the questionnaire responses that led them to recommend that we wait one year then re-apply. While I was still confused, I agreed. I wondered what must have been on that questionnaire to make them want to delay us and still to this day do not know what it was or who may have written it however, I believe it was a gift from God.

A few years before we applied to be MA's, Beth and I went through a rough patch in our marriage. While I am sure a little blame could be placed on both sides, what resulted was purely my fault. I had gotten into a rut and was spending a lot time in the late evenings watching TV downstairs before going to bed while Beth slept upstairs. We drifted apart. I was wasting time on social media one day when I saw a post from an ex-girlfriend on my step-sisters account. This led to a

host of very poor decisions on my part and an inappropriate relationship. While the relationship thankfully never developed physically, it went on for quite a while and led to my wanting to leave Beth and the kids. Looking back, I can't even imagine how I could do or think what I did but I believe that Satan used the gap that formed between Beth and I and took advantage through lies and deception. Beth found out and that, of course, made things worse. I was torn between knowing God's plan is for marriage is to be for life and feeling like I missed out on something from my past that I wanted and thought I deserved. I kept telling myself that I wanted to leave, but I could not.

I am thankful beyond belief for the prayers and faithfulness of God's people. People like my pastor and my brother-in-law. They spoke truth even when I didn't want to hear it. It was one day, when I convinced myself that I was finally going to leave that night, that my brother-in-law asked me to go for a drive with him. During that drive, I don't remember most of what he said but one line hit me in the heart. He told me that even if I felt like I truly loved this other person, I don't have the right to leave because I made a commitment before God to my wife. For what ever reason, among all the other things that were said, that hit home. I think the biggest reason I didn't succumb to Satan's temptation all along was that I knew, even if it was subconscious at the time, that I could not break my commitment to God and my wife that was made in front of all the witnesses at our wedding but until I heard it vocalized by my brother-in-law, I don't think it crept into my conscious reality. Thank God it finally did.

As with most of my life events that I have described, it wasn't an overnight change, but it began my journey back. Back to my wife and family, and back to Christ. We began going to marriage counseling and while there was some stumbling along the way, the progression was definitely forward and after another short period of time, I recommitted myself to God, my wife and family and eventually my church. [NOTE: There is so much more to this story and loads of lessons learned that I would love to share with anyone interested or who may be struggling. Don't hesitate to contact me should you want to talk more. Quick advertisement...even if you think you have the best marriage ever, Christian marriage counseling is a wonderful investment. It allows you to open up about things that may have been buried that you didn't even realize you buried. It allows you to understand why your spouse is the way they are. It doesn't excuse behavior, it explains it. It makes you a better person and a better spouse. I highly recommend Christian counseling and I am very thankful for the gifts God gives his people to help others.]

I interjected the story about my unfaithfulness above because I am sure that this is why we were held back from proceeding with our MA application. I think that someone mentioned that we had recently had some marriage issues and though they knew we were moving past it, they probably felt it would be best for us to wait until we were back on solid footing in our marriage. Being on the mission's field can be very stressful for even the strongest marriage so this would have obviously been in our advantage to wait.

The area director I talked to about the letter we had received said that instead of one year, why don't we wait six months and then reach out to him about restarting the process. I agreed but ended up waiting seven months because I wanted it to be the right time. When I reached out to

the director, I was told that he was leaving for a trip however he would get back to me in about two weeks. I waited about a month; no response. I reached out again and was told that our file will be pulled and we will be contacted in about one week. Again, one month, again, no response. I was a bit frustrated so I tried to e-mail the Campbell's in Bolivia but as 'luck' would have it, I got his e-mail address wrong. Well, God certainly has a sense of humor because even though I got the address wrong, the person who actually received it knew the secretary for the area director I was working with and she forwarded it to her. What's the chances of that? Thankfully I was nice in the e-mail!

The secretary responded to the e-mail encouraging us to be patient; the area director was very busy and would be getting back to us soon. Again, nothing. Now, you may be thinking that this area director was doing a very poor job of following up but I firmly believe that God put a barrier between us, somehow preventing him from being able to reach out to us. I have absolutely no hard feelings against him and, in fact, am thankful for him for *not* getting back. Finally, I was starting to sense God telling us that He didn't want us in Bolivia. I don't believe that it would have been wrong for us to continue to push or for us to end up in Bolivia but I also believe that is was not His will. We would have still felt unfulfilled and may have ended up frustrated and confused. I believe that it was just my love for the Bolivian people and culture that drove me to think this was God's will for us. Remember my three-point test above to determine if God is speaking? I finally understood that this failed the test.

We re-evaluated our commitment and decided to withdraw our MA application. This was the humbling thing we have ever had to do. We had been telling everyone that we were moving to Bolivia to be missionaries. Our kids had been telling everyone they knew; teachers, friends, relatives. Now we had to explain that we were not going. Everywhere we went, people would ask when we were leaving and we had to explain that we wouldn't be going; trying not to get into details. It was not easy and now I was back to trying to figure out what I was called specifically to do. I figured I would just continue to take classes and continue to wait on God. What a novel idea!

One of the first things I did after withdrawing our application was to call Pat Summers to see when he was leading another trip to Bolivia because I really wanted to go back. He told me that I missed the cut-off for that year so I asked him when his next trip would be since I also missed my home church's trip for that year. He told me that he was leading a trip to Cuba in the fall. I said, 'Sign me up!'.

I ended up rooming with Pat for a week-long church planters training conference in Gibara, Cuba October 2015. I had gotten to know Pat through the years since I had met him on my first Bolivia trip in 2010; enough to know that he didn't seem himself. I asked him what was on his mind and he told me that his right-hand man and Mission Director, Fernando [DeCarvalho] was going to be leaving Think Missions at the end of the year, it was going to be just him again and there was so much to do. I asked him what a Mission Director does and how you find one? Like, you can't just advertise on Monster.com for a Mission Director, right? He agreed with me and said that's the

problem, it has to be a call for someone to do a job like this, at least for a small mission's agency like Think Missions. They would have to raise their salary and do it by faith in that call.

Pat continued by explaining what a mission director does and literally everything he mentioned aligned almost perfectly with what I had done up to that point in my business career. From the very beginning I sensed the Lord speaking to me about this need. Pat graciously allowed me to take part in some of his leadership duties during that week to allow me a look at what this ministry entailed. By the end of the week, I told Pat that I believe that I was being called to join him and fill the mission director role. Pat felt the same thing but gave me some wonderful advice. He said something to the effect of, "go home, pray about it for two weeks and if you still feel the same way, call me". I went home, talked to my wife and prayed.

When I returned to my secular job after that Cuba trip, I literally had people walk up to me and ask what happened to me there. They said I was acting differently. I couldn't explain it to them and certainly couldn't tell them that I was thinking about resigning and going into fulltime ministry. I had always been open with my employer that at some point my goal was to finish my Global University degree and go into fulltime ministry but I estimated that would be about 10-15 years down the road. I also told them that I would like an opportunity to run the company for a while first if it was in their plans. However, this was only about 5 years into my 10-15-year plan so I didn't know how it would be received.

After about a week and a half after returning from Cuba, I called Pat and said that I truly felt a call to join him and even if I couldn't do it now, I still wanted to help and asked what I could do. We made plans for me to travel out to Pittsburgh over my Christmas break from work to meet with him and Fernando to discuss a transition.

A word about Fernando. Fernando DeCarvalho is an awesome dude. He was wonderful in the transition and continues to be a great person. His personality fills the room and he is loved wherever he goes. He wasn't leaving Think Missions to avoid ministry, he was leaving to join another ministry, a larger one (Mission SOS) that holds huge crusades throughout Africa. It is a ministry fitting his giftings and, while it didn't make it easier, Pat knew that it was likely he would move on some day so it was not a surprise. [Fernando, if you ever read this, thank you for the ground work you laid to make my transition easy! May God always bless you and your family my friend!]

I truly believe that the reason God put so many roadblocks in our way toward becoming MA's to Bolivia was because working with Pat and Think Missions is what He really wanted for me and my family. I put it through the three-point test. Of course, it aligned with the Word, it most definitely felt like a call and this time, everyone I talked to about this move into ministry was in agreement. I mean everyone. I honestly don't recall anyone saying that we shouldn't pursue this. January 2016, I officially joined Think Missions as Mission Director. For that entire first year, I was considered a volunteer while I worked to raise my support. (Quick plug...did you know that I raise 100% of my salary? Well, if not, now you do. If you feel led to help provide some financial

support, please reach out to me and I can fill you in on the details. However, I covet your prayers regardless!)

Now I had to tell the company I was working at, that my 10-15-year plan just turned into a 5-year plan, and that I would be leaving. The problem was, I really had no idea when. I was a key employee at my company and filling my role would not be an easy one. That is not trying to make myself sound overly important, it is just that I was there over 19 years total, I was in leadership and filled many different roles. I debated with Pat as to the right timing to tell them. Pat was concerned that if I told them, they could immediately let me go but I didn't think that would happen. I looked for a good time to tell my boss (who was also a good friend so that didn't make it easier). I decided that on the way home from a customer visit would be the best time because we had over an hour drive and we would be away from the office. When I told him, he was at first shocked, and then almost immediately congratulated me. It was a real relief that he completely understood that my true calling was ministry and that he was completely supportive. In fact, the entire company up through ownership was supportive. The main issue was that I really didn't know when I was going to leave. This was good and bad. Good in that, though I didn't know exactly when it would be, I did know it would likely be over a year, bad in that we couldn't leave it open ended so we tentatively settled in on the end of the fiscal year in 2017 (March 31).

We began looking for someone to take my place. This would be a unique experience because my replacement would be able to spend quite a bit of time by my side learning what I did day to day. In fact, when we hired my replacement, we put his desk right in front of mine in my office. He got almost six months of direct training before I left which is almost unheard of. As we moved close to the end of 2016, I was called into my boss's office and he told me that ownership decided to make my last day December 31. At first, I was a bit taken back since I thought I would have the extra three months into 2017 but I understood. It was a business decision, and a good one. I had already been training my replacement for almost six months and they had been paying two salaries that whole time. It was about to get real!

My first day in full-time ministry was January 1, 2017. While it was exciting, it was also a bit nerve-racking because I no longer had a steady income and since this was all new, I didn't really know where to start. I had to figure out how to schedule my days. I definitely had plenty to do to keep me busy but I wanted to be sure I was doing what was priority and that can be a challenge at times. Jobs/ministries like these are what you make them. If you don't do the work, you likely won't be successful for long. Pat has been a great mentor and encourager since day one and I am thankful that God has allowed me to join him and this ministry.

When I made the announcement that I was going to leaving my secular job, I wrote an e-mail to send out to the hundreds of people in my e-mail contact list that had grown through the years. Some I knew well, some I never met however my message was the same to them all. I was leaving to follow my call and my passion; missions ministry. The number one response I got from people was that they wish they could follow their passion. I challenged them on why they felt they couldn't and most never responded. Those that did, did almost out of a sense of sadness. It is

my hope that maybe some who got my e-mail were inspired to follow their passion. But not just their passion in life, but also in Christ. You see, I was very open in my e-mail with what I was going to be doing and that it was a ministry. I encouraged people to check out the ministry that I was joining and to remain in contact with me through our e-mail newsletters. Some still do and I am thankful for each and every one.

Pat asked me one time how a service that I had just done had gone. I said that the only way I could describe it was 'joy'. I just felt joy as I sat there in the service. He said that is how you know you are in the will of God. You will be joyful doing it. It's a great feeling! Do you feel joy?

- What about you?
- What are you passionate about?
- Are you following your passion in life?
- How about in ministry? If not, why?
- Do you feel joy in life?
- Are you a follower of Christ?

I want to encourage you to not only pursue your life's passion but to evaluate your relationship with Christ. If you have never made the decision to accept Christ as your Lord and Savior, I want to encourage to do that now. If you are not ready or have questions, contact me; let's talk. If you are ready, you don't need to do anything formal. Just say this sinner's prayer,

'Lord, I recognize that I am a sinner and that You came and You died on the cross to take away my sins. Please forgive me of all my sins and come into my heart and my life this moment. I realize You are the only way to heaven and I want You to take control of my life and destiny. In Jesus name, Amen!'

I pray you make this life-changing decision today. You will never regret that you did! If you said the prayer, let me know! I want to pray with and for you and will do my best to answer any questions that you may have. If you don't have a church, I'll help direct you to one. We are in this together as children of God!

Lastly, I am eternally thankful for a wife that has stuck by me even when I was (and am) a bonehead. For kids that, though they frustrate us at times, are great kids that I can only hope to point to Christ as they grow and for friends and family that encourage and support us. And finally, for a God that never gives up on us. He loved us even while we are sinners and died for us (Romans 5:8). This is something we can never deserve or earn. It is His free gift to all of us. Will you accept it?

Blessings...Duane
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