

The Living Hope Dream

When you are blessed to have great people working with you it only makes sense to listen to their advice. This year has offered new challenges as we strive to grow this work. New opportunities are opening every day, but with each new opportunity comes added costs. So how do we continue to grow this work financially? Linda suggested that we use this newsletter to allow the people we have ministered with to tell you the effect Living Hope Ministry has been able to have in their individual lives and ministries. This is what you call "a great idea."

People often ask just what it is that I do in Living Hope Ministry. The answer I often give is not original with me, but it means more to me than you might ever know. I simply tell people, "I am an apprentice to a Jewish carpenter." This wonderful answer has opened more doors than I could ever dream. Our Lord and Savior is allowing Living Hope Ministry to reach out in ways beyond our most creative imagination.

In this letter you will read four testimonies from individuals we have had the privilege of sharing with in the work of Christ. Their words are a source of pride for all of us at Living Hope Ministry, but this is not a vain pride. All we ever want to do is

Greg Rupley, Minister

Living Hope Indeed!

My name is Greg Rupley and I'm a minister of the Gospel of Christ.

About 17 years ago, when I was a senior in high school I found Jesus. Actually, I'm sure it was the other way around, He found me. I was in a pit of selfishness, searching, and sin of my own making. But the instant I came up out of those baptismal waters, everything changed. Peace, forgiveness, meaning, and the promise of life everlasting were mine through the blood of Jesus. And one thing more: a calling into full time ministry.

A pair of Masters Degrees from Cincinnati and a pair of successful ministries later, I was on top of the world. The sky was the limit! In the fall of 2007 I received a call I believed was the ministry opportunity of a lifetime: a chance to be the senior minister of a church of over three hundred per Sunday not two miles from where I grew up.

Full of the confidence an unbroken track record brings a man of thirty-three, I packed my family up and headed back to my hometown. The church assured me that "I wouldn't find a better group of elders to work with in our entire brotherhood."

I was soon to learn the meaning of the phrase, "Oil and water don't mix." My vision to simplify and to reach the local community by focusing primarily on the Sunday service, small groups, and local evangelism resonated strongly with 90% of the congregation. However, that vision failed to impress the elders. Though we grew that first year and tripled the number in small groups, the smoldering resentment of several of the elders soon burned into an open flame.

Sixteen months later I sat in front of those "best in the brotherhood elders" and was dismissed from my position in a meeting that lasted less than five minutes. I was never told any details, only that "we don't find any moral failings but it is obvious we have very different ministry philosophies."

I was devastated, to say the least. My wife, being seven months pregnant at the time, took it even worse.

We retreated that first week to the home of my wife's parents

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give our Great God in Heaven the glory for all He is allowing us to do. As you read this letter it is our prayer you will catch the vision for the work of Living Hope Ministry. We desperately covet your prayers as we work each day with servants of Christ across this country. If you were wondering if your investment in Living Hope Ministry is worth the effort, it is our prayer this letter will help you see just how important this work is, has been in the past, and will continue to be in the future.

"Thank you," in advance for your constant and faithful support of Living Hope Ministry. Linda, thank you for a great idea!

in another state. I struggled to make sense of what looked like a shattered life. What would I do differently if I could do it all over again? Why would God allow this to happen? Was I ever supposed to be a minister again?

In the middle of the worst of this faith crisis, I got a call on my cell phone. The caller identified himself as Phil LaMaster from Living Hope Ministry. He said, "My name is Phil, and if you'll let me, I can help."

At first I thought I was getting scammed. Why would anyone else care what my family and I were going through? But over time, Phil's strong and steady encouragement helped me gain perspective. He listened. He prayed. He called me to remember God's Word. He even let me come down to Southern Indiana, and we hiked up and down those hills for many hours. I didn't talk much, I just listened as Phil fed my soul.

I still remember one day in particular. I was feeling a little too sorry for myself when he gave me some tough love: "Don't forget what happened to the apostle Paul. You haven't been whipped forty lashes yet. You haven't been beaten or stoned. You haven't been shipwrecked at sea or out on the open water yet. Have you? Nobody ever promised us a comfortable life preaching the Gospel, in fact, Jesus promised just the opposite. I reckon you're doing pretty good."

And that was the turning point for me. I stopped looking in and started looking back up. I started to realize that life wasn't hopeless, it was very hopeful, because the same Jesus who called me to ministry was still guiding me every step of the way.

Six weeks later I got a call from one of the largest churches in our brotherhood. To this day I have no idea why they wanted a small church preacher like me to head up one of their most dynamic and exciting ministries. Instead of leading hundreds, I'm about to begin leading a ministry of thousands. Who knew? God did all along. I think Phil did too.

Thanks in part to Phil and his Living Hope Ministry, my name is Greg Rupley, and I'm still a minister of the Gospel of Christ.

Mike Napier, Minister, Choatesville Christian Church

Words can't even begin to express what your friendship means to me...but today, I especially want to thank you for what Living Hope Ministry is doing in my life and the lives of so many others!

First of all, (and I apologize if much of this seems directed towards you...it's impossible to separate you from Living Hope!) your heart for ministry and for ministers is absolutely without parallel! I don't know how many times I've been discouraged or uncertain about something and seemingly out of nowhere, the phone would ring and there you'd be on the other end...just checking on me...just when I needed it most!! I know that I am not just speaking for me when I say you are always there....always listening....always supportingalways encouraging....and always willing to offer sincere, practical and wise counsel....always willing not only to carry your share of the load, but to help me with mine as well.

You're not afraid to cry...not afraid to laugh...not

afraid to look a brother in the eye and tell him what he NEEDS to hear and not just what he wants to hear....!

I so much appreciate the fact that you are constantly looking for new and better ways to utilize and communicate the wisdom that you have accumulated over the years.

As a guy who came into full time ministry a bit later in life, the teaching, the materials, the planning helps and encouragement that I have received from the Ministry to Ministers gatherings have proven especially invaluable! I love the intimacy of the settings and the quality of the material and the facilitators as well.

I couldn't tell you how many times I have gone back and reviewed notes and material from these conferences and have put them to use in teaching, preaching and counseling situations.

Mike Napier, Minister Choatesville Christian Church

Don Conley, Minister, Ringgold Church of Christ

Many times we are guilty of not taking a moment to say thank you. As a pastor, I am thankful for the ministry of Living Hope. Phil has been there for me to be encourager and a support. Phil came to Ringgold and was a breath of fresh air and Godly insight in the midst of the storm.

There are so many things that we are thankful for; like the timely messages that you shared with us. The encouragement that you gave to us to draw closer to God, to give our utmost for the One Who gave All, and to face our own weaknesses with truth, love and forgiveness. There are also the myriad times that you have called to say that you were praying for us; to touch base to see how things were going. Thank you for calling and saying that you genuinely cared.

There are so many things that happen in ministry that many will never know except for you and God. At Ringgold, we wanted to take this moment to say we

appreciate this ministry. In the future, you will stand with many pastors and ministries as they go through trying times. You may weep over our sorrows with us, and you will hold our hands when we don't know where to turn. You will pray for us that God will give us solace, even as you summon up courage to speak truth in love to our lives and ministries.

For now, because we may forget later, we offer this prayer up on your behalf: Our Heavenly Father, Thank you for our brother Phil. He is a pastor to pastors. You sent him to shepherd us and to mentor us, to teach us and at times to correct us, to remind us of the path You have called us to walk.

Lord, bless, keep, and protect this wonderful ministry -- always in Jesus' name. Amen.

Don Conley, Minister
Ringgold Church of Christ
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Larry Bayer, Elder, Ringgold Church of Christ

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July 13, 2009

Board of Directors
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Dear Sirs;

As an elder and member of Ringgold Church of Christ, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Phil LaMaster for the love and support he has shown our congregation, leadership and ministry staff over the past year and half.

As you may know, we had a minister leave in February, 2008. Unfortunately, the circumstances of his leaving caused a great deal of pain and mistrust throughout the church. As a result, our senior minister, youth minister and a number of the elders suffered personal attacks. Only by the grace of our Lord, did we not suffer a major division of the congregation.

When things were at the worst, God showed his Grace by bringing Phil to us. For most of the late winter and spring of 2008, he made daily telephone calls to our senior minister; talking with him, encouraging him, praying with him and loving him. Without Phil's intervention, a very powerful, energetic and successful ministry may very well have come to an end.

The men of our eldership were suffering during this time, also. Phil's compassion for us was extremely comforting. Hearing about the struggles he had in his church ministry and how God brought him through helped us to begin to heal. It's obvious that God has given Phil a very special gift. His loving involvement with Ringgold has truly been a blessing!

I can't adequately express my personal gratitude to Phil for the love he showed toward us during our time of need. If there is ever anything I can do to aid your ministry, please let me know.

In His name,

Larry Bayer