

## **GROUNDWORKS MISSION**

The mission of **Groundworks Ministries** is to elevate the faith of people by leading them to a comprehensive knowledge of the entire Bible through promoting and supporting the "chapter-a-day" reading of God's Word.

## **IN THE BEGINNING**

**Groundworks Ministries** began in early January 2001 at the Cool Springs Starbucks in Franklin, Tennessee. Attendance for our first meeting consisted of just one person, yours truly, one Bible, and the Holy Spirit. Also in attendance was a yellow highlighter and a ballpoint pen. It was discipleship with humble beginnings. I doubt anyone hustling to get their coffee noticed anything monumental was happening over at the corner table that day.

## **ROCK & SOUL**

If you could turn back the clock one week to December 31, 2000, you would have seen a very different me. I was the lead singer for a Christian rock band called "Big Tent Revival". Our band had been invited by Greg Laurie, pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California, to perform at his church's New Year's Eve celebration. Big Tent had become friends with Pastor Greg through our involvement with his Harvest Crusade events around the country. I had even written songs for Greg that were tailor-fit for platform ministry moments, and some of those songs became hits on Christian radio.

Greg invited us out to his New Year's event for Big Tent's farewell performance. After 7 years, 5 albums, 10 #1 radio singles, and 5 Grammy award nominations, our band was "disbanding"; packing up "the tent", as it were. It involved an eight-month process of selling assets and transports, paying vendors, and playing contracted events. Of course, everyone on payroll had time to find something else to do.

The repetitive question from colleagues and fans became "Why would someone work so hard to build a successful career, which is difficult to do, then walk away from it?" Short answer: I was led by the Lord. Just like He led me into the music business, He led me out. I was married, with two children and baby number three was on the way. I was gone three to four days every week. That is no way to build a marriage and raise a family. When my oldest child entered kindergarten, I could no longer bring the family on tour. Other artists found a way to make that situation work, but I couldn't envision a winning scenario. So, we closed up shop.

## **HAPPY NEW YEAR**

New Year's Day, 2001, my wife Misti and I were on a plane ride home from Los Angeles to Nashville. Misti turned to me and asked, "So now what are you going to do for a career?" I said, "I don't know. I suppose I will just keep trusting the Lord and see where He leads." Probably not the reassuring answer she was looking for. I maybe should have answered with something more tangible, like "record executive" or "real estate broker".

The following day, I awoke to my new reality. I was 32 years old, quasi-retired, and had no solid plan for the future. So, I stuffed my Bible into my computer bag and headed out to get a coffee. During the months leading up to my band's farewell concert, I had a nagging thought: I had never read the Bible, cover-to-cover. Now was the time for me to set out on a fresh journey to read God's Word. All of it. Since that day, I have never stopped reading it. When I finish the Bible, I start over. And the Lord continues to reveal to me through his Word more of Who He is, every single day. Why would I ever stop reading it?

## **CHICAGO, CHICAGO**

Fast forward. My family and I moved to Chicago in 2004 to join the staff at Willow Creek Community Church, the first church to develop "multi-site church". I was the first full-time worship director for the multi-site venture and was planted at the "North Shore" campus. Chicago was very different from our previous home in Franklin, Tennessee. For instance, you need a snowblower in Chicago because somewhere around November it will start snowing, and it won't stop until early May! The only familiar constants in my life were my family and my daily appointment with the Holy Spirit in God's Word. Everything was foreign, but God felt closer than ever.

## **CALIFORNIA HERE WE COME**

In mid-2005, I was invited by pastor Greg Laurie to join the staff of his church, Harvest Christian Fellowship in Southern California. Greg was interested in launching multi-site campuses, and I was one of the few people in the nation who had experience in that kind of ministry. In August of 2005, my family and I arrived at the land of endless surf and summer.

At that time, Harvest had 10,000 to 12,000 in weekly church attendance, and they were operating over capacity for the size of their property. One of my tasks would involve locating musicians with professional-level playing abilities who we could dispatch to various locations in Riverside County. Those musicians needed to be between 18 to 30 years old and have their finger on the pulse of current contemporary worship music. That should not have been a problem to find in a "super-mega church" the size of Harvest, but I was having a difficult time.

## KIDS TODAY

Over the course of the next few months, I walked the length and breadth of Harvest. I noticed about 2,000 young people attending their Sunday evening youth event. However, there were less than 100 attending their college event. So, I began asking people who were around 18 to 25 years old if they attended the college group. If a person told me they did not attend, I invited them to my home for a series of meetings. The purpose was to ask them one question: Why don't you attend the college group? Here are a few of their answers. "I don't like the name of the group. I don't like the day they meet. I don't like the time they meet. I don't like the teaching. I don't like the music. I don't like the room. I don't like the people who go there." They were all "consumer" driven answers.

As we continued to meet, I noticed several consistencies. Not one person could name the Ten Commandments, nor had anyone fully read the New Testament, much less the entire Bible. I had in my living room a group of what I call "high-functioning Biblical illiterates". They were high functioning because they understood church culture and could operate within it. However, they did not know the Bible, so they were in a state of suspended spiritual adolescence with no hope of transitioning from being a "consumer of ministry" to becoming a "contributor to ministry".

Many of these young people expressed that they were about "done" with the church. They were either looking for another church that would better-suit their felt needs, or they were on the verge of quitting church altogether. I told them that not only were they not done with church, but they really had never even started it! Then I shared with them some Scripture that outlines how God wants believers to seek Him in His Word daily and how it's His design for perpetuating a community of Biblical values from generation to generation.

**Deuteronomy 6:6-7** "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. <sup>7</sup>You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

**Psalms 78:5-8** "For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know *them*, the children *who* would be born, *that* they may arise and declare *them* to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation *that* did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God."

## BIBLICAL REBOOT

My challenge to them was simple. Let's "do" church the way God designed it, beginning with reading the four Gospels, together, one chapter per day. There are 89 chapters in the Gospels, so that was a simple three-month commitment.

There is a saying in business, "Speed of the leader, speed of the team." Not only did I challenge these young adults to read the Bible, but I read it as well. I committed to the group that I would read each day's chapter and journal about something I learned. Then I would email my thoughts to the group. What I wrote was not an exhaustive commentary of the chapter but just a simple devotional thought.

## VALUE ADJUSTMENTS

This approach to Biblical intake conveys **3 IMPORTANT VALUES**:

- 1) **Christians read the Bible every day,**
- 2) **When you read the Bible, the Lord reveals relevant things to you** that He may not reveal otherwise.
- 3) **I (the leader) value you** so much that I would go to the effort every day to share God's Word with you, in hopes that it would enhance your life.

The results of this approach to daily Biblical pursuit are immediate and impactful. They set into motion **3 MAJOR PRINCIPLES** of Christian living:

- 1) **Elevated Biblical pursuit leads to Elevated Faith** - Romans 10:17 "So then faith *comes* by hearing and hearing by the word of God."
- 2) **Elevated Faith leads to Elevated Volunteering** - the faithful and helpful response to a need. *1 John 3:18 "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."*
- 3) **Elevated Volunteering leads to Elevated Kingdom Investment** - through our time, talents, and treasure. *Matthew 21:19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

## LIVINGROOM

In addition to reading the Bible together one chapter-a-day, our group developed a strong sense of community by meeting together on a regular basis. I chose Tuesday evenings mainly because no one had anything else to do on that night. We called our Bible study "**Living Room Study**" because my living room was where it all started. By the time our attendance reached 30

people, the living room in our little 1,500 sq. ft. house was beyond capacity. But people were still knocking on the front door and trying to squeeze in. Those were exciting times, but we needed more room.

## **COFFEE DEPOT**

At the turn of the century, between the 1800s to the 1900s, Riverside, California, was the wealthiest city, per capita, in the United States because it dominated fruit and citrus production. Thus, the Riverside train station was always busy. When modernization hit the nation in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a new train station was built and the old one fell into disrepair. Eventually, Florida and Texas got into the citrus hustle, and the Riverside trains lost their steam. The train depot was no longer used and was completely shut down.

In the early 2000s, an entrepreneur decided to turn that old train station into a large coffeehouse. They named the place The Coffee Depot., and the baggage room was converted to a performance space that would seat about 150.

I visited The Coffee Depot and noticed that on Tuesdays from 7 pm to 9 pm the place was virtually empty. Knowing our Bible study needed more space, I negotiated the free use of The Baggage Room, with the promise that I could bring in at least 50 paying customers every week. The Lord was faithful, and within a year, we hit 75 attendees and kept growing to well over 100 regular attendees. A special event could bring in over 150 people. So, we had to open the huge 12-foot side doors on the room to accommodate more people. The age range was mostly 18 to 35. By word of mouth, people heard that God was doing something new among their generation, in their town.

## **ANOTHER ROOM**

About the time we were running out of space at The Coffee Depot, a friend nudged me one Tuesday evening before Bible Study and said, "We need to get a bigger room!" I had already been considering that dilemma for weeks. But I knew if we got a bigger room, there is no doubt we would become a church. I worked for a church, and churches don't typically like it when one of their pastors takes their young people and starts another church down the street! But there was a greater issue at play.

I did some research and discovered there are around 50,000 coffeehouses in America. At a chapter-a-day, it takes 3.25 years to read the entire Bible, cover-to-cover. I figured if I could teach the Bible to 10 people in every coffeehouse in America, I could teach half a million people the entire Bible in a little over 3 years...with almost zero overhead costs!

In contrast, if I were to start a church and it became as big as Harvest Christian Fellowship, or even Rick Warren's Saddleback Church with 20,000+ members just down the highway, what is that compared to half a million?

We didn't need a bigger room. We needed **ANOTHER** room. So, that's is exactly what we got. We "franchised" by starting another Bible study at *Augie's* coffeehouse in Redlands. Then we started one in Orange County at the *Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf* in Fountain Valley. Eventually, I was teaching in *Starbucks*, *Kraemers's Coffee*, the *Teen Challenge Castle*, and *The Daily Brew* in Riverside. We also started Bible studies at *It's A Grind* in Laguna as well as *Border's Bookstore* in LA. In Irvine, I also began leading the members of *Shuvah Yisrael* Messianic Congregation through the Bible using my chapter-a-day method. All told, over 2,000 people were getting my daily devotional, reading God's Word chapter-by-chapter, and meeting together once a week. That's the size of a "**mega-church**" with people going deeper in God's Word in 3 years than most churches will take them in a lifetime.

## **SOFTWARE v/s HARDWARE**

You may be reading about this growth explosion & coffeehouse expansion and thinking, "I thought Steve Wiggins had a job and a family. Isn't that why he got out of the touring music business?!" You are correct, and it was not easy juggling everything! Oftentimes the Lord provides strength, counsel, and wisdom that we do not naturally possess in the form of other people whom He has equipped for such times. I am thankful for people like Jim West from the Orange County Barnabas Group, Alan Pace, Dean DelSesto, Steve Forse, Lenny Esposito, and my attorney Mark Ziebold. The purpose of community is to make your weaknesses ineffective. Those folks, and many others, helped to guide, assist, and encourage me in those early days.

Remember the "greater vision" of 500,000 people learning the Bible in 50,000 coffeehouses? Well, let's consider that idea as if it were "software". You can have the most advanced software, but what good is it if your "hardware" is not advanced enough to run the software?

Frankly, churches do not typically teach the Bible to their congregants. Sure, they teach *from* the Bible every week. But ask yourself if the church you presently attend has taught you the *entire* Bible? Does it even have a *plan* to teach you the entire Bible? Most do not. At best, pastors may mention a "Read the Bible in a Year" plan every January. Rarely does a church facilitate Biblical pursuit at the comprehensive level. That is the culture that has shepherded the decline of the church in our generation.

So, if church culture does not lead to comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the Bible, where can I find 50,000 Americans who could teach the entire Bible? Lifeway research from 2017 says that only 11% of Americans have ever read the Bible cover-to-cover. Only 9% have read it more than once. If I were going to deploy hundreds, or even thousands, of Bible teachers, I would have to train them myself! So, on Mondays, I began teaching groups of future

teachers. Teaching teachers to teach. All in my spare time, before I had to show up for work at the church! But that investment of spare time has paid-out great kingdom dividends.

One of the places I found teachers was at Calvary Chapel School of Ministry in Costa Mesa CA. The founder and dean Carl Westerlund would let me lecture and share the ministry concept to his pastor students every year. Several of his students joined the effort. Other teachers lived too far away to meet with me in person, so we spoke on the telephone or used Skype. I did what I had to do because revival is worth it!

## **GROUNDWORKS**

As we expanded our operations across Southern California, some of the venues required us to pay weekly rental fee for the room, especially when we began to pack the space to capacity. Our little “Living Room Study” then had to organize as a non-profit. I rebranded the ministry to something that no longer looked back, to my living room, but looked to the future. We had not met in my living room for years, so I chose the name **Groundworks Ministries**.

The word **Groundworks** has a multi-layered meaning. In one sense, our groups were meeting in coffeehouses, and coffee is the byproduct of ground-up coffee beans & hot water. But in a greater spiritual sense, reading the Bible every day is the *groundwork* of discipleship. Discipleship in its most atomic form is one person, one Bible and the Holy Spirit teaching.

**1 John 2:27** “*But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.*”

So, after applying for 501(c)3 non-profit status with the state of California, **Groundworks Ministries, Inc.** was approved in July 2014.

## **LONG DISTANCE INFORMATION, GIVE ME MEMPHIS TN**

Whenever I would launch a new Bible Study location, I would teach there for the first 2 weeks to firmly set the ministry vision. Then, I would hand-off the Bible study to the local teaching team. After that, I would send-out the daily emails to their group and communicate with the teacher every week to discuss each week’s chapter lesson.

In March of 2014, I launched our second Huntington Beach location in someone’s home. It was the second week I was teaching that group. I arrived in Orange County early, so I stopped at Portola coffeehouse to kill some time. As I sat there enjoying the aroma, I thought about how thin I was being stretched with full-time church ministry. Now that my discipleship ministry had

exploded, I was beginning to feel a little overwhelmed. So, I prayed, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" Within 5 minutes my phone rang. It was Dr. Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee.

Dr. Gaines's phone call came as a complete surprise to me. I had never spoken with or met him before. However, after Misti and I met with him and his wife Donna in Fort Worth a few weeks later, we all had a strong sense that the Lord was calling my family and me to Memphis. In July of 2014, we did a reverse "Beverly Hillbillies", left Southern California, and moved back to Memphis. I was hired by Bellevue Baptist Church to be the Contemporary Music Pastor and was placed on Dr. Gaines's Executive team. Soon after, the domicile of Groundworks Ministries was moved from California to Tennessee where it presently resides as a Tennessee non-profit.

Three months later, I was called into a meeting where Dr. Gaines announced that he wanted to email my 90-Day gospels devotionals to the Bellevue congregation. The January 2015 launch date was coordinated so the last devotional would be received the day before Easter. We called the campaign "The Bible Challenge" and over 4500 people signed-up for it. In April 2018 (3.25 years later), we finished reading the entire Bible together at a chapter per day! When we re-launched the Bible Challenge in September 2018, I was asked to teach every 7th chapter in a weekly Wednesday PM class at the church. Over 600 people signed up for that weekly class. It was a shocking and encouraging turnout!

## **ONLINE**

To accommodate the growth, I set-up a Facebook group called Steve Wiggins: Wednesday PM Chapter-A-Day. That group has now grown to over 2200 members who hail from around the United States and 12 different countries. I post daily devotionals to that Facebook group page and teach weekly via Facebook Live.

Also, I teach a similar Bible study that began in my home in September 2017 and moved to the Collierville, Tennessee "Bible Museum on The Square" in January 2018 (because we outgrew our home again!). In December 2020, we finished reading the Bible together at a chapter per day, and we relaunched this study in January 2021. After all, what do we do when we finish reading the Bible? We read it again!

## **FUTURE REVIVAL**

Astonishingly, while most churches have witnessed shrinking participation since the outbreak of Covid-19, Groundworks Ministries has seen a 70% growth, and the SKY is the limit! We personally minister daily to thousands of participants from around the globe!

Having read God's Word all these years, and leading others to do the same, I am convinced that revival will not come from a platform or a stage. It comes from a much humbler place. Revival will only come when the people of God get serious about pursuing the Word of God; when they **SEEK** it, **OBEY** it, and **SHARE** it with others in the form of The Gospel.

The only hope for our nation, our cities, and our families is for Christians to revere and read God's Word. You may ask, "How could revival come from something so simple as reading your Bible and obeying it?" Never underestimate the power of God blessing His children's obedience!

***Zechariah 4:10*** "For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth."

Take the challenge and join the mission with **Groundworks Ministries** today!