

STEP OF FAITH

Gearing Up For Fall Ministry Of 2019

Selected Texts

Written By

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What should be the core focus of every church and every Christian? The answer is showcased on the yellowed parchment of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians:

⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight— (2 Cor. 5).

God has given us minds to think and to reason; however, at some point thinking and reasoning bows before faith in an unseen God who is and who calls us to trust Him and follow Him despite what our eyes see, our ears hear, and our minds think.

Sight living says:

- I must have all my proverbial ducks in a row before I launch out.
- I will only move forward or make a radical change when I have calculated all the assets and liabilities of said opportunity.
- I definitely will not do anything outside of my predictable and safe comfort zone.
- I will not do anything I think is highly illogical or does not seem to make consistent sense.
- I will not . . . I'm sure you can fill in a few more blanks, can't you?

I'm sure.

Faith living says:

- I will move through doors as God opens them, even if they are challenging.
- I will do the illogical if I perceive God is moving in this direction.
- I will step out of my comfort zone so I can achieve what God puts before me.
- I will trust God when times are tough because I know He has my best interests at heart.
- I will sacrifice things near and dear to me so others can realize net gain.
- I do believe that, occasionally, God knocks the supports out of our lives to motivate us to step forward in faith.
- I do know the Devil does not have a big enough army to thwart even one person in faith in the living God.
- I do know that faith is the link which binds my finitude with God's infinitude . . . and power.

I think you can readily see there is a vast difference between sight living and faith living. Sight living pulls back, while faith living pushes forward, trusting God to do spectacular things to mature us, cause others to see His greatness, and to advance the impact of His kingdom of light.

If anyone learned about the high value of taking a step of faith in their pursuit of following God to greater blessing, it was Israel at the time of their entrance into Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Who can forget the historical setting? Some two million Israelites huddled on the east side of the Jordan River, waiting for directions regarding what God wanted them to do in order to finally head into the land of promise. I'm sure everyone wondered, "Why has God positioned us on the bank of the Jordan at the height of flood stage because of snow melt on Mount Hermon in the north? There is no way for us to ford this fast-moving, treacherous river with our families and our herds. No way. Perhaps God will have us walk down the southern edge of the Dead Sea and enter the land of promise from the south. That's probably God's next logical move."

They could not have been more wrong if that's what they thought. The divine writer gives us what happened next in graphic, jaw-dropping detail:

⁹ Then Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God."¹⁰ Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Hivite, the Perizzite, the Girgashite, the Amorite, and the Jebusite."¹¹ "Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over ahead of you into the Jordan."¹² "Now then, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man for each tribe."¹³ "It shall come about when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off, *and* the waters which are flowing down from above will stand in one heap" (Joshua 3).

God had purposefully placed Israel in this seemingly insurmountable problematic situation in order to do one thing: *To use a miracle to deepen their faith in Him for the road ahead.* We know that main motif because it is showcased in verse 10.

How would Israel go about seeing a miracle second only to the parting of the Red Sea? They would have to defy logic and take a literal step of faith into the swirling, crashing green waters of the Jordan. Imagine, just for a moment, if you were one of those priests responsible for carrying the sacred Ark of the Covenant, the gold covered box which held the Ten

Commandments, Aaron's rod which had budded, and some manna, and you were just told by God to trust Him by stepping into the category five waters as you held your part of the wooden rod, which, in turn, supported the holy Ark. You would be tempted to walk by sight. Sight says . . .

- Uh, God, waters do not part, especially rapidly moving waters.
- Uh, God, rushing waters tend to sweep things away downstream, rapidly.
- Uh, God, you told us not to ever drop the Ark, let alone submerge it.
- Uh, God, even if the waters part, mud does not dry instantly.
- Uh, God, it would be easier to cross when the river isn't at flood tide.
- Uh, God, if you part the waters they will build up and spill over and drown us.
- Uh, God, it would be more logical to just walk around the southern tip of the Dead Sea and just by-pass this raging river altogether.

Not one of those priests thought or articulated any of these reasonable responses. All of them, as we see in the following narrative, took a big step of faith.

The divine author picks up what happened next:

¹⁴ So when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), ¹⁶ the waters which were flowing down from above stood *and* rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

What an amazing story. It certainly warrants a few observations.

- The priests, who were, according to Joshua 3:4, some 3,000 feet in front of the people, led the way of faith. Translated, they were way out in front so the people could see their bold and brave walk of faith. Ostensibly, this means, we, as your priestly leaders, must never fear to follow God into the raging waters of a challenging situation. We must be leaders of resolute, unbending faith.
- The waters did not part until the feet of all the priests were in the water. Talk about a test of faith. Had the waters parted when the first two priests stepped in, that is one thing. But to part the waters only when they were all wet is another test of faith altogether.
- Divine power held the waters back at a little village called Adam, some 17 miles upstream. The rest of the waters flowed rapidly downhill to the Dead Sea which is more than 1,300 feet below sea level, and immediately the muddy river bottom became dry as a bone. All of this attested to the power of God to accomplish the unthinkable.

- The priests stood, by faith, in the middle of the dry river bed, with waters piled up high to their right. When logic would cause you to run, they stood for hours as 2 million Israelites crossed into the land of promise. Again, this tells me that we, as priestly leaders, must lead the way in living lives of faith in what God can do in challenging times.

By the end of the day, I'm sure, there was not one Israelite who did not believe that their God was, in fact, the living God. He had, through this jaw-dropping, mind-numbing miracle, displayed His power and provision. He also taught the saints then, and the saints now, one timeless truth:

When You Step Out (in faith), You Gotta Watch Out

Some concepts are definitely worth repeating. This one is no exception. Say it with me: When you step out in faith, you gotta (sorry for the incorrect grammar, but it serves a purpose) watch out! What do you need to watch out for? The profound movement of God. What's the negative side of this premise? If you don't step out, He (God) won't step up (and act). Why? If He moved in an situation where you had no faith, your faith would not be developed and matured. Hence, it God calls us to walk by faith and not by sight in trying times in order to show His glory, and to also take us to a whole new spiritual level in our maturation.

Like ancient Israel, God calls us corporately to step out in faith and to, then, watch out for His provision. What areas does He call us to take courageous, unflinching steps of faith as we look at the challenges providentially set before us this fall of 2020, and as new people arrive and everyone starts coming back from their summer journeys? Five come to mind.

Step Out In Our Staffing

Talk about a river at flood level. Talk about a formidable situation which needs a miraculous movement of God.

God has, as we all know, sent us wonderful numerical and spiritual growth over the years. And to properly shepherd the growth from 500 to 1,500 adults, coupled with a commensurate amount of growth in the children and youth areas, has moved us to grow the pastoral and support staff. Yet in light of new hires we need to make to keep up with the growth, coupled with hires we were not intending to make because God providentially moved staff either to retirement or other positions within the larger body of Christ, we now need to hire five full-time staff, who will function either as pastors or directors, depending on their experience, education, and gifting. Here are those areas:

- Worship Pastor
- Executive Pastor
- Life Groups Pastor/Director
- 5th-8th Grade Pastor/Director
- Media & Communications Pastor/Director

Can you hear the raging waters of the Jordan? I can.
What does logic say?

- You cannot quickly hire this many full-time staff.

- How can you get this many people to move to the D.C. area? It's too expensive and the weather is, well, not always optimal.
- You all don't have the bandwidth to sort through all the resumes to make this many hires.
- Nobody in seminary wants to be a 5th-8th grade pastor or director anymore.

Blah, blah, and blah goes the statements of the logical naysayers.

What does faith say? Faith says . . . *Step out by faith and watch out as God provides in a spectacular fashion.* Faith walking says . . .

- Since God replaced the talented Moses with the likes of Joshua, God will replace all these leaders with other talented leaders who will, like Joshua, take the people of God to new heights of following hard after God.
- God purposefully places us in tough and trying times in order to show His awesomeness and to grow and deepen our faith when He does miraculously move in relation to our belief in His presence and providential provision.

I don't know about you, but we, as your leaders are putting our sandals in the Jordan on this one and trusting that the living God is going to work in a spectacular, never-to-be-forgotten manner. In fact, when we look back on this Jordan River experience years from now, we, like ancient Israel will have our own stones erected in our hearts and minds to cause us to remember and to challenge our children to understand the perfect timing of His provision.

Sure, our way seems obscure.

Sure, the work load is quite demanding on the much smaller team.

Sure, we wonder how these staffing need will be met without the ministry being unduly taxed in the meantime.

But we don't and won't flinch in our faith. No, not for minute. Why? Because God has brought us to this river bank at this time in history and we know exactly what He wants from us as we stand here watching the waters crashing over and smashing into the rocks: *Each of us is called to step in and watch out!* So, instead of being freaked out, we should be pumped up. We are going to live to see God powerfully and miraculously provide for His local church in a way you'll be talking about the rest of your life.

So, come with us. It's time to get our sandals in the free-flowing waters.

Secondly, God is calling us this fall to . . .

Step Out In Our Service

As I've said many times before, but it's worth repeating. A core value at BCC is service because our Lord set the example for us. We can't forget His timeless words to us:

²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20).

"The Son of Man" is just an ancient code word for Jesus. He left the glory and grandeur of heaven and the magnificence of His celestial throne to be a servant of servants, as Isaiah prophesied eight hundred years before His birth (Isa. 42:1ff; 44:21ff; 52:13-53:11). Yes, He became a humble servant who served others in practical ways, and He became a humble servant who bore our sin on

Calvary's rugged tree. Paul reminds us of these rich, educational truths in his letter to the Philippian church:

³ Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, ⁴ each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others. ⁵ Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. ⁷ Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, ⁸ he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2).

Because our Lord was a servant, we, too, must be servants who, as Paul says, don't live for ourselves but for others, whom we deem as more important than ourselves. Shocking words for our life-is-all-about-me, selfie-oriented world. I watched a man, a full-fledged Baby Boomer, at a Dobbie Brothers concert this week at the Jiffy Lube stadium stand, dance in front of his seat, and film himself with his I-Phone. Folks, this is not an illustration of what it means to follow Christ, although some Christians act like it is.

We, like our Lord, must be willing to do the hard thing, to serve in multiple areas, to step forward and serve for the first time so others don't have to wear multiple ministry hats, to do things no one might not ever notice, to be unknown so others can be known, to do seemingly insignificant things so needs are met, to sacrifice time, treasure, and talents so the kingdom of God advances, the church is properly equipped for ministry, and lives are touched. Put more pointedly, *if you are not servin', you are slouchin'.* *It's time to stop slouchin' and start crouchin' at the river bank,* of course.

In case you need a little personal motivation, here is a word of testimony from one servant who knows what service is all about. [Show video clip]

Years ago, a white-haired, highly wrinkled, and be speckled retired missionary to Latin America agreed to serve in a local church as a third grade Sunday School teacher. Her name? Mrs. Kristofersen. During class she couldn't help but notice a brown-haired little boy who struggled with reading his Bible out loud when called upon. What did this selfless servant do? She stayed after class to help the boy learn how to read better. Who was the little, educationally challenged boy? Me. I'll never forget her. Because she served me, I was properly equipped to serve you. So, I can't help but ask you a highly personal question, Who among us will the next Mrs. Kristofersen?

Right after this worship service, our Children's Ministry will be out in the foyer to sign you up for service. So, don't walk briskly by them. They need you. And they are not alone, either. Servants are needed with our youth, on our worship team, on our shuttle team, on our coffee team, and so forth. If you feel the Spirit of God tugging at your heart, then make sure you don't miss our Ministry Fair next Sunday. You will have the opportunity between services to check out various areas where you can be the hands and feet of Christ to others. Believe me, there is no better quest in life.

Our ministry needs are like a mighty Jordan River at flood level, but that is nothin' to saints who step out in faith. So, step out and watch out as God moves out.

Third, maturing saints need to . . .

Step Out In Our Marriages

God's original purpose for marriage is oneness, a oneness which is reflected in the essence of the trinity. I know this is true because of what God said after He created Eve, gave her to Adam, and thereby instituted marriage:

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body (Gen. 2).

When unity exists at the center of a marriage relationship by means of placing God at the center of the marriage, not only do people see the unity of God, they discover peace, joy, and wisdom for living. Marriage, then, becomes something the couple enjoys for a lifetime. Sure, there might be, and will, be storms and trials; however, when the couple functions as one under the leadership of God, they weather the bad weather as a team and eventually head into safe harbors where life is lived to the fullest.

Unfortunately, too many marriages resemble verbal and emotional cage fights. Too many marriages have never known oneness, only aloneness. Too many marriages thrive on dysfunction, not function. Too many marriages are like complex chess matches as the people awkwardly seek to relate to each other. Too many marriages are as emotionally unpredictable as the weather in northern Virginia. Too many marriages are as quiet as a library while everyone either sits and stares at their electronic devices, watches shows on their I-Pads with their head phones on, or sits transfixed and zombie-like in front of endless reality TV shows. Too many marriages are built on fear and intimidation where the partners feel like they are constantly walking around on proverbial eggshells. Too many Christian marriages have partners lining the banks of the Jordan River at flood tide thinking there is absolutely no way to the other side where there is real life and blessing.

Trust me, we have a number of those types of marriages in our body. I know this is true because of all the counseling we, as pastors, offer, the most time is taken attempting to help some of you move from health to wholeness, from dysfunction to function, and from a place of no hope to great hope.

While it is not my purpose in this study to give you a mini marriage seminar, I do want to challenge you this fall. If you feel like you are standing, as a couple, before the raging waters of the Jordan in your marriage, please realize God wants to part the waters for you but you must first step out in faith. Listen to me. Pride says, "Stay put. Don't do anything because you might have to be authentic and transparent with others." Pride says, "Don't show any leakage. Appearance is everything. Don't let on your marriage looks outwardly fine but is inwardly compromised." Humility and meekness, which are the traits of a great, godly, growing person (Matt. 5), says, "I've got a real problem in front of me and it can only be fixed as I step out in faith so I can then watch out as God works a miracle."

What steps of faith should you make?

- Get real with your mate and tell them, "Honey, I know exactly what the name of our Jordan River is and we're going to do something about it." Confession is, as they say, good for the soul. It's good for the relationship too.
- Talk to a pastor, and I mean, talk to a pastor. No playing games. No being clever in hiding your issues. No placing blame on your mate. Get real to get right.

- Waste no time (and money) watching the river part as you lay out your marriage before a skilled marriage counselor. Again, be open and honest with them, come clean with the darkness which eats away at the joy and oneness of your marriage, listen to their counsel and then take collective action to start walking across the river bed to Canaan.
- Tap into a marriage seminar for free through *Right Now Media*. We pay for the prescription so you can access the wealth of studies provided here for free. Dr. Henry Cloud, a skilled Christian thinker and counselor, has a video series you could, and should, commit to watch together as a couple, or commit to watching it with other couple who needs to cross their own Jordan. Accountability is a wonderful thing. [Show media clip]
- Attend *A Weekend to Remember* marriage seminar. I've been several times with Liz and they are insightful, humorous, and quite helpful. There is one in Pittsburgh (Cranberry Township) on November 1-3 at the Pittsburgh Marriott North. There's also one in Cambridge (Chesapeake Bay) on November 22-24 at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay. The cost of \$175.00 will be the best money you've ever spent on your marriage.

You and your mate might be standing on the bank of a raging river called marital trouble, but I think you need to stop and realize one truth: God specializes in parting raging rivers. It all starts when you step out. Step out and then watch out . . . God is going to move on your marriage in a profound fashion.

Fourth,

Step Out In Our Giving

As a church, we have financially accomplished much in the last eleven years.

- We became debt free a few years after I arrived as we paid off our existing 2 million dollar loan for the Student Aud building.
- We paid cash for two building programs to expand and enhance our worship, office, and educational environment.
- We've raised our budget from \$2 million when I arrived to \$5 million today to keep pace with the growth and needs of the body.
- We have had many years where giving has outpaced our budget needs, thereby positioning us to do more for God's kingdom.
- We've said we needed at least \$9 million to function comfortably with a new worship/educational/office facility, and to date we've received a little over \$11 million from our church body. That leaves us with a building loan deficit of \$7 million instead of \$9 million. Amazing.

How has all of this been possible? The answer is simple. Many in our body looked at the river called massive financial needs and said, "We are people who step out in sacrificial faith and watch God work." And work He has in and through our finances so we can build a ministry which impacts thousands of lives, both here in our city, in our country, and literally around the world.

For many of those who have stepped into the raging waters of finances, there are many verses which motivated you then, and still motivate you today:

⁶ Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9).

¹⁷ Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed (2 Tim. 6).

In a word, you learned how to step forward in faith by being generous. For some that meant giving over-and-above the base level of giving 10% of your tithes to God. Some moved out to the 15% and 25% level. Others gave much more, while everyone sacrificed by giving point in time large freewill offerings to the work of God. Believe me, it is an honor to serve, shepherd, and lead people who see obstacles to God's work and collectively decide to step out in faith where their finances are concerned. I am thankful for you because through your continued faith-based generosity we are able to move across the dry river bed toward the ministry destination God has planned for us.

For those who are new among us, I pause to challenge you. Blessing from God awaits those who understand what it means to sow bountifully toward Christ's church. Blessing awaits those who step out in faith and say, "Lord, I'm going to take my giving to a whole new level because you call me to give generously." For some, this might mean taking your annual giving from 8% of your earnings, to 11%. For others, it might mean giving 3% of your net earnings to God's work for the first time in your life. Regardless of where you are on the giving grid, if you step out in greater faith, you need to step back and watch God work miraculously in your life and in the life of this Bible-teaching church.

Fifth, I challenge you to . . .

Step Out In Our Fellowship

I'm sure you realize at this point how God has wired us for community. We are, after all, a mere reflection of the ultimate small group called the Holy Trinity (Gen. 1:26; Deut. 6:4). We are our strongest and healthiest when we are in a close community together and striving for oneness . . . just as our Lord prayed in His High Priestly Prayer (John 17). We are spiritually weak and anemic when we are cut off from fellowship with each other. Far wiser, and far better to stay in close contact with other saints who fear God (Prov. 1:1-6), love Christ, and apply His Word to their lives.

In any size church, and especially in a mega-church, being in a small community, or a Life Group as we call it, is utterly all-important. Let me count the reasons.

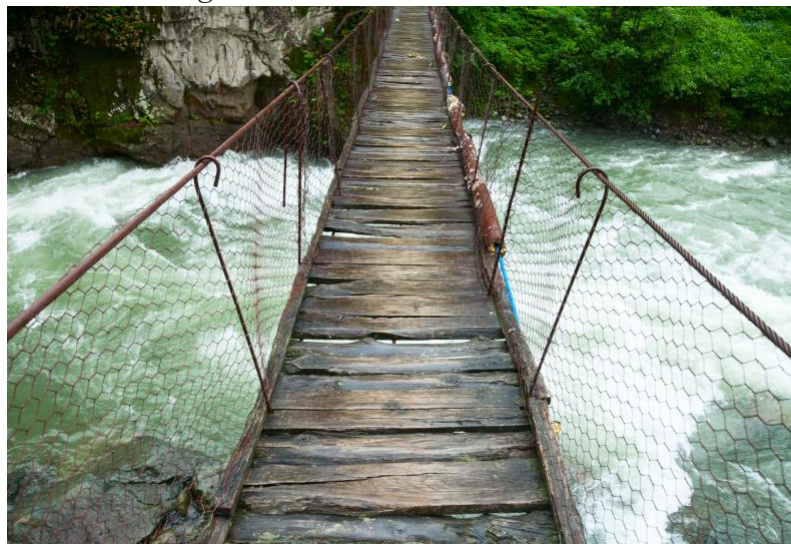
- *Accountability*: are you living for Christ and putting away sin (Jam. 1:23-25)?
- *Authenticity*: are you opening up so others know you and help you with your burdens and life issues?
- *Friendship*: everyone needs iron which sharpens their iron (Prov. 27:17).
- *Care and compassion*: who doesn't need someone to help when life becomes hard (Ecc. 4:9-10)?

- *Wisdom*: who doesn't need a sounding board when, not if, you face tough, trying, and complex decisions (Prov. 15:22).
- *Acceptance*: What more wonderful thing can you do than join a group who will love you unconditionally, who won't freeze up when you share about the trials and troubles of your life?
- *Prayer*: admit it. There is nothing like having others pray for you before God's throne.
- *Mentors*: admit it. Who doesn't need something farther along the spiritual path who can lovingly help you mature and grow up in Christ? I've had many mentors over the years, and a great place to find them is in a small group setting.
- *Service*: what greater place to build friendships focused on strategically planning to be the hands and feet of Christ in the community?
- *Bible study*: there is nothing like being in a small group where you can ask honest questions about the Word of God so you can grow in your knowledge and wisdom of God.
- *Food*: who doesn't like to eat? If you put a few Christians in a living room, I guarantee you you'll eventually find something great to eat. Faith and food seem to just go together.

Right now we have over 700 people in Life Groups. That's 700+ people who have stepped out in faith and have watched God work, sometimes miraculously, in their lives as they've grown in the faith.

Right now you might be new, you might not know anybody, you might be lonely, you might be wounded, you might be drifting spiritually, or you might be hungry, as many Millennials and Generation Zers are for a real, authentic, caring Christian community. Don't continue to stand at the river's edge wondering what you should do. Step out in faith by getting plugged into a Life Group. And, then, watch out because God is going to work a wonder in your life.

Years ago, Liz and I drove to visit her brother David on the Klamath River in northern



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California. We went out to find him one day as he and a buddy mined the river for gold. Located on the other side of massive, deep canyon, we could see David sucking dirt from the river bottom with a large black rubber hose. The debris then headed up the black vacume hose to a floating "barge" where rotating paddles helped his friend find the coveted gold.

For us, the challenge was getting to David. To get to the other side of the gorge, we had to cross a rickety rope and wire bridge, which looked like it had been constructed in the mid-

1800s. Believe me, it was swinging in the wind, and cracking and popping. With each step of faith in that old bridge we eventually made it to our intended destination. Had we given in to fear we would have never made it to David, but because we stepped out in faith we reached the other side.

Similarly, God is calling you . . . and us . . . as a church to step out and watch out. When we do this this fall there is no telling what He's going to do, but He is going to do some great things so let's start this new ministry season by praising Him.