

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION; STATEMENT OF FAITH,
FAITH JOURNEY

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MY FAMILY

These are the most important people in my life:

My Boys:

Jay (21), who is Senior Theology, Christian Studies and Pre-Med major currently studying in Oxford England.

Jackson (12), who video games, band, singing in musicals and watching football.

Jacob (6), who loves Minecraft, soccer and being busy and active.

And:

Merideth, my bride of 25 years, my high school sweetheart and the most awesome attorney, wife and mother I have ever known.

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Brief Biographical Statement

I was born in November, 1968 in Colorado Springs, Colorado—the state where my father was born and raised. Both my parents were devout Christians. Shortly after I was born, my father answered what he believed was God’s call for him to engage in full-time Christian ministry as a Christian school teacher. The first five years of my life were spent in Greenville, South Carolina—where my father attended college— in the midst of my mother’s very large, Southern family. My maternal grandmother made a lasting impression on me, and it was largely due to her influence that I remained connected to my Southern roots long after I left the Deep South. After my father graduated, he accepted a teaching job in Colorado where we lived until I was thirteen years old. One of my most profound relationships during this time was the one I shared with my paternal grandfather, who died when I was ten.

During the summer before my freshman year of high school we moved to Central Florida where I met perhaps the single most important person in my life—my future wife, Merideth. I attended the same Christian school for all four years of high school, and for the first time in my life I actually began to feel as though I had roots. I dated my future wife for the majority of my high school career and for my first year of junior college. I ended our relationship at that point, intent on exploring all the things I had been sheltered from as a youth. During this time of my life, I completely left the church, and began to doubt my faith in God. Eventually, like the Prodigal Son, I began a very long journey home. God in God’s mercy came out to meet me on the road. In what I truly believe to be the greatest miracle of my life, my high school sweetheart and I found each other again. After a short courtship, we were married in January of 1992. I had begun working at Walt Disney World in Orlando in 1984, and continued to do so all through the 1980s and early 90’s. In 1989 I was accepted as the youngest person to ever go through Walt Disney World’s renowned management training program. I also coordinated training for two departments, and developed many of the management skills that would serve me later in life.

In 1993 my wife was accepted to law school in South Florida, where we lived until 1997. While she completed law school, I worked and attended junior college. I finished my sophomore year of college during this time, and began working for the Best Buy Co. as a manager, and eventually a district marketing manager. The

next huge influence on my life came in 1995 when my first son was born. In late 1997 our little band of three found ourselves heading to Tallahassee, FL where my wife had been offered a job as a clerk on the Supreme Court of Florida. I was accepted at Florida State University and began working as a part time youth director of the small church we attended. It was during this time that I came to realize God's calling for my life did not include my pursuit of a PhD in History.

After a year of working on a Master's Degree, I left Florida State to begin a journey that would eventually bring me and my family to Chicago and McCormick Theological Seminary. While I attended McCormick I also worked as both the junior high youth director and eventually the Director of Youth Ministries at the First Presbyterian Church of Evanston. My wife, son and I welcomed our son Jackson into the family in 2004 and by the summer of 2005 the four of us were called back "home" to Central Florida to serve the South Lake Presbyterian Church. I served as the Associate Pastor of Youth and Families there for a year and a half. When the senior pastor left to accept another call, I was offered the opportunity to serve as the Interim Pastor/Head of Staff, which I did for another year and a half. I received Interim Pastor training by attending both Weeks 1 & 2 of the Interim Pastor Training provided by the PC (USA).

In 2008 I was called to serve as the Senior Pastor/Head of Staff of the First Presbyterian Church of Eustis where I have been serving since. The church is thriving and growing. Ministries are being added, outreach is underway, giving is increasing, worship attendance is higher than it has been in over twenty years, and people are being drawn closer to Christ. My wife and I welcomed Jacob, into our lives in September 2010. My oldest boy, Jay, was the quarterback and captain for his high school football team until he was injured his senior year. This turned out to be a complete "God thing" because he received a full academic scholarship to Anderson University in SC where he is majoring in Theology and Christian Studies. Jackson, our 10 year-old is a fifth-grader and plays, football, basketball and soccer when he isn't building something with Legos, drawing or developing his singing skills. Our youngest boy, Jacob, is four and is busy learning and exploring the world. My wife runs a successful law practice and serves on various foundations and boards in the community in addition to leading Bible studies at our church, serving as the chair of the Deacons, among other things.

In June of 2014 I was awarded a Doctor of Ministry degree from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. My dissertation was entitled “From Network Manager to Transformational Leader” a study developed from research conducted with pastors and churches in my presbytery to determine the skills, practices and characteristics that are evident in pastors of growing churches. I am still developing my research into a book and additional resources for further and wider use, particularly by pastor search committees.

Since receiving my doctorate, I have been asked to be a part of helping develop church leaders through the Vital Church Institutes Barnabas program (mentoring for pastors) and through Group Publishing’s “Embracing Change” workshop facilitation team.

Despite our deep ties to our community and our happiness with our current church our whole family is open to the leading of God’s Spirit to go where God is leading us. We have been called into ministry as a family, and we know that God has guided us and will continue to do so.

Statement of Faith

The Trinity

There is one God, the Father, the Almighty, the Alpha and Omega, the Creator and Sustainer of all Creation. The same God who created the universe was incarnate into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word of God. God's presence is still made known to us through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Renewer, the Comforter and the very breath of God. The mystery of the Triune God is revealed to us by the fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—God's diversity in community, the very reflection of God's self-disclosure.

God

God created the world and called it good. God created all races of people in God's own image—both male and female together. As God's children we are called to live in community, to act with justice and mercy, and to love, worship and enjoy God with all of our heart, mind and strength. However, humankind continues to rebel against God, ignoring God's commandments, breaking its covenant with God, acting unjustly and refusing to show mercy toward one another and God's good creation. As sinful people we deserve God's judgment for our rebellion rather than God's love. However, in sovereign love, and throughout history, God continues to reconcile all of Creation, extending undeserved grace and forgiveness in order to redeem.

Jesus Christ

In an act of infinite grace and mercy, the eternal Word of God became flesh and entered History in the person of Jesus Christ, a first century Palestinian Jew. Jesus' mother Mary was a virgin, who conceived her son through a miracle of God's Holy Spirit. Jesus proclaimed the redeeming grace of God, available to all and attainable for any who choose to follow him. He heralded the coming Kingdom of God through his life and ministry—healing the sick, restoring the outcast, giving hope to the downtrodden. His ministry frightened the religious and political authorities of his day and he was arrested, tried and executed. Three days after he was buried, Jesus rose from the dead and was seen by many witnesses before ascending into heaven. Jesus promised that he would one day return. Jesus came so that God's glory would be revealed through his birth. Jesus came so that

all of humankind would be redeemed through his death. Jesus came so that sin and evil would be defeated through his resurrection. Jesus came so that through him alone we are made heirs of the covenant between God and God's people, released from the bondage of sin, and filled with the hope of eternal life and of Christ's eventual triumphant return.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God's abiding presence in Creation. The Holy Spirit of God was present and at work when God created the world. The Holy Spirit of God spoke through the prophets and apostles. The Holy Spirit of God is our Counselor, our Inspiration and the One who guides us into all truth. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are inspired to live lives of faith in God revealed through Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are comforted and encouraged in the midst of a suffering world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are called together to serve one another within the life and ministry of the Church, the body of Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are convicted of sin, moved to repentance, persuaded to embrace a faith in Jesus Christ, and called to live in community.

The Church

There is one holy, apostolic and catholic Church, the Body of Christ. When we are reconciled to God we are sent as the Church into the world to bear the message of God's reconciling love through Jesus Christ. The Church is both visible and invisible. The invisible Church, the communion of the saints—believers in all places and times—obtains its identity from God alone. The visible Church—the Church as we know it—is God's way of providing us with a sign and symbol of the community within which God wills us to live. The Church is anointed by the Holy Spirit to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the world, to minister to the poor, and to bring hope to all those who are oppressed by the power of sin. Christ alone is Lord of the Church, ordering it and ruling it through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the authority of God's written word in Scripture.

Sacraments

The church receives from our Lord Jesus Christ two sacraments that serve as signs and symbols of the promise of the gospel and the kingdom of God. Baptism

with water (as an element of the worship life of the covenant community) is a public acknowledgement that the one being baptized has become part of the Body of Christ and is cleansed of sin by God's reconciling work through Christ Jesus. The practice of baptizing infants serves as a sign to the covenant community that God reaches out to us and claims us as God's own even before we are able to respond to God in faith. Holy Communion is the sign and seal of our communion with the Living Christ—his life, ministry, death, burial, resurrection and Lordship over all of Creation. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the common elements of wine and bread that the covenant community shares when it celebrates the Lord's Supper in worship are used to convey the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and the grace of God, which is ours through His atoning work.

Scripture

The Scriptures of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and New Testament are God's self-revelation, the written Word of God that bears witness to Jesus Christ, the Word of God in person. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Scripture speaks to us, continually bearing witness to Jesus Christ. For the Church, the Bible is the first and final authority in all areas of doctrine, theology, mission and order. While it is true that God may also choose to be revealed to the Church through other means, Scripture is the primary voice to which the Church must listen and then obey.

Salvation by Grace through Faith

By God's grace and through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, humankind is offered the gift of salvation from sin and death. God in infinite love extends God's grace as a gift that is received by faith. Faith in Christ alone is the instrument through which we receive this wondrous gift—a gift that offers us reconciliation to God and justification in God's eyes, despite our unrighteousness and frailty. This grace, this salvation is not cause for triumphalism, though many Christians choose that route over humility. The mystery of God's saving grace through Christ is beyond our understanding and beyond our capability. It is God who saves and not us. We are saved to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world, sharing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, walking humbly, doing justice and acting with mercy.

Faith Journey

I was raised in a conservative Christian environment for most of my formative years. My father was a Christian schoolteacher and a strict Baptist, who came to faith as a young adult. My mother had been raised as a lifelong Baptist, and took her faith very seriously and very personally. The language of the Christian faith and the importance of the Bible as the Word of God were all part of my upbringing. I attended Christian schools from kindergarten through the twelfth grade, and attended Sunday school, church and youth group meetings regularly. Despite all of this, I did not feel that the faith I was being urged to claim was my own. After graduating from high school, I moved away from home and determined that I was going to experience all the things that had been denied to me in my sheltered youth. I also decided that I was going to take a break from attending church—a “break” that lasted nearly five years. By the time my “break” was nearly over, I discovered that I had developed some self-destructive habits, and I had nothing to show for my experimentation except a series of failed relationships and irresponsible behavior.

It was at this point in my life that I was reunited with my high school sweetheart. We had broken up years earlier, but we quickly found that we both still loved one another deeply. In a matter of months we were married, and have remained happily so for over sixteen years. My wife was adamant that we begin attending church, and she convinced me to attend a small Presbyterian church located near our apartment. Almost immediately my jaded heart began to break, and I truly felt like God was speaking to me, and calling to me in ways that I had never experienced.

Not long after my wife graduated from law school, we moved to Tallahassee, Florida where I began pursuing what I thought was my calling in life—to be a history professor. I received a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and English Literature and began working on a Master’s Degree in History. During this time we began attending a small Presbyterian church that desperately needed a youth director. I felt so strongly that I was supposed to pursue the open position. To my surprise, I was eagerly offered the position of Youth Director, which I held for several years. It was during this period of my life that I finally began to realize that God had been calling me into ministry for a very long time—I had just been afraid to listen.

My mentor throughout my tenure as a youth director during those first few years of ministry was my pastor and friend, Rev. Breck Castleman. Rev. Castleman helped me to identify God's call for my life and he imparted a great deal of wisdom to me that I have cherished to this day. With his encouragement I applied and was accepted into the ordination process of the Presbyterian Church (USA) under care of the Presbytery of Florida. I also applied and was accepted to attend McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, where I spent three years, attending seminary and serving as both the director of junior high ministries and the director of youth ministries at the 1st Presbyterian Church of Evanston. I could spend pages explaining how dramatically God intervened in my life to bring me to Chicago and to McCormick. It was nothing short of a miracle. God has continued to reveal God's will to me and my family in mighty ways—not the least of which is the incredible way in which we were called to South Lake Presbyterian Church where I served as the Associate Pastor and then as the Interim Senior Pastor, Moderator of Session and Head of staff.

In 2007 I was asked to lead South Lake Presbyterian Church through a time of transition after the senior pastor of the church accepted another call. Throughout that interim process, I was challenged to fully rely on God. God once again proved to be more than faithful during that entire time. I am always amazed and humbled at the way I have been able to take part in what God is doing in and around the special places I have been called to serve.

When I was called to be the 21st pastor in the 130-plus year history of the First Presbyterian Church of Eustis, I was humbled more than I could say. During my nearly eight year tenure at First Church I have seen some unbelievable transformation. Our church had experienced 35 years of steady decline prior to my arrival. By the admission of many of our members, our church was on life support due to the various traumas and divisive issues it had endured. When I arrived I could still feel the hurt that the congregation had experienced. Great healing has taken place, however, and, while we are no where near to being perfect, we are once again a thriving community of faith. We have grown from a church that was focused on self-preservation to one that is ready to give itself way for the sake of the kingdom of God. My faith has been tested more than once these past eight years, but I can see the hand of God in all of it. I can't wait to see what happens next.