

## REIGNITING THE PROMISE—Pastor's Blog / October 2017

This year marks the beginning of my 29<sup>th</sup> year of serving as Senior Pastor of Grove Church and, as that old saying goes, "*I wouldn't take nothing for my journey now.*" This year also marks the beginning of a new chapter for Grove Church and our community. It's been a long time coming, but we are ***reigniting the promise!***

In a few short months, Grove Church will celebrate the opening of our new Family Life Center and, as it nears completion, the lessons that I've learned along the way are priceless. They also serve as confirmation of God's blessings when you know Him, seek Him and are obedient to Him. You see, being blessed comes with its share of burdens. People don't always know the whole story; they only see the glory. The struggles and decisions that leaders must and should make—*oftentimes silently and alone*—come at a cost, but they also come with the blessings of serving God and serving God's people.

As the community witnesses the rise of a new facility in the heart of the Portsmouth community, I thank God for this blessing; not for myself or for acquiring more real estate, but for His vision, His guidance and His love. Back in 2008, the decision NOT to build a new sanctuary on 33-acres of land that Grove purchased was an unpopular decision among some Grove members.

If you will recall, 2008 was the year that our nation experienced an economic recession—banks closed, many individuals lost their jobs and eventually their homes went into foreclosure. Some individuals even stopped giving to the church—because they had little, reduced or no income and because of those changes, were less generous with their resources, as we faced an uncertain economic future. Churches across the nation—*some historic*—that had leveraged their churches and real estate, lost everything. On the other hand, Grove was blessed to survive this economic downturn. We didn't build a new sanctuary; instead, we were able to help others—*even some churches*—that didn't fare so well. We also paid off the 33-acres of land, cleared it and installed the required infrastructure. Today we own that land, outright!

As the leader and under shepherd of Grove, I seek God in all matters, especially those related to His Kingdom so, even in the face of unpopular decisions, my trust, peace and faith in God strengthens me. Like everyone, I sometimes waver or wonder, but my love and trust in God remains steadfast.

Our Family Life Center will provide vital services for youth and families throughout the community. Along this journey, God has stretched me and given me some lessons that I would like to share about listening to and obeying God. They can be applied to everyone—no matter what your station in life.

**God's 'no' is not a rejection, but rather a redirection.**

The things we call detours are sometimes God's strategic direction for our lives.

When God told me that 2008 was not the time to build a new facility, I may not have fully understood this, but I accepted it and waited, because I trust Him. As we seek God and get to know Him, we can better understand and accept that His ways are not our ways. We know that He loves us and wants the best for us, so when His answer is 'no,' we should not take it personally. We should not allow our doubt to make us question *God's ability*. Sometimes 'no' just means that He is redirecting us from harm, ourselves, or that He may even have something better for us. From Malachi to the gospels, God kept silent for 400 years.

### **God's 'no' gives us new opportunities.**

God's 'no' gives us an opportunity to see just how strong we are and a chance to watch how He works. When God said '*don't build a sanctuary,*' it became clear to me that He wanted us to wait. I am grateful that Grove Church has earned a reputation for meeting the needs of people. This new facility enables us to better focus on meeting and serving people in the community. We will provide a positive place for youth and families to gather, partner with others in the community, provide much needed programs and resources, and engage with people in a positive manner so that we have opportunities to SHOW them the love of Christ, and not just talk about it.

### **God wants us to put our trust in Him.**

I stood firm on the decision to hold off on building because God never gave me the release to move forward. From time to time, we all have doubts about God—mostly because we are looking at things through our human lens. However, we must not walk away from God because of doubt. God's timing is not like ours. Learning to trust God is a process. Just as with any other relationship, we must spend quality time with God, getting to know Him and His will for our lives. God desires for us to experience His best and, along the way, our trust in Him grows, as does our understanding of Him. He can multiply and maximize our steps if we trust Him and are obedient.

### **The world defines greatness differently than God.**

Grove is a great church—a beacon of hope in God's kingdom. It's great because it is part of God's kingdom, not because of how big it is or how much real estate we have acquired. Too many churches today are so focused on *how the church looks* or how many members it has, that they don't look at the *needs of the community* or serve the people of God who society considers to be the least, the lost and the marginalized. God wants us to love and serve people, not build walls around the church to keep people out. He desires for us to open paths that welcome others so we can show them the light and love of Christ.

### **Before you climb the ladder, make sure God is at the top.**

We must learn to be submissive to God, no matter what. God gave me a vision and showed me the needs of His people. It's critical to put ourselves and our personal agendas aside to make sure that Christ is first. Premature elevation can lead to destruction, arrogance and failure.

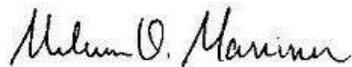
It's easy to get caught up in man's desires and dreams, but as Scripture reminds us in Psalm 127:1, "*Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain.*" (KJV)

**When God gives a blessing, there is space for growth**

Blessings don't come without burdens. God blesses our faith. He repositions whatever blessings He has for our future AHEAD of us. God has blessed and continues to bless Grove Church. No church is perfect, but as I enter into my 29<sup>th</sup> year of serving as leader of this church, I am so grateful for the blessings He has and continues to give.

These are just a few of the lessons that I can share with you. Over the years, I've been stretched, but I've been so blessed. I know that my work here on earth is not done and, as I continue on this journey, I know in my heart that as long as I am in God's will, doing His work, His way, He will continue to bless me, my family and those in His Kingdom. I stand on His promise and feel extraordinarily blessed to be able to ***reignite the promise!***

Peace and power,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melvin O. Marriner".

Dr. Melvin O. Marriner  
Senior Pastor Grove Church

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