VICTORY BAPTIST CHURCH

"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" **(1 Corinthians 15:57)**

CODEN, ALABAMA · PASTOR THOMAS IRVIN

PRAYER LETTER · MAY 2026

A Season of Unprecedented Transition

Unto the Churches of the saints which stand with us in the gospel of the grace of God: grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear Pastors and faithful Brethren,

I beg your patience with the length of what follows. The events of the past several weeks have moved with such rapidity that my head has scarcely ceased spinning, and I am unwilling to compress what the Lord has done into a paragraph for the sake of brevity. There is too much to tell, and too much of it is the Lord's own doing, to be hurried over. If you will bear with the length, you will have the full picture, and the Lord will have the glory He deserves for every line of it.

Thanksgiving That Reports

I begin where Paul began with the Thessalonians:

> *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father* (**1 Thessalonians 1:2-3**).

The labour of love named in that verse has been yours. Through standing support, through prayer, through letters and through encouragement, your Churches have borne up a small work in Lucedale over these past few years. Many of you have stood with us longer than that, since our time in Uganda, a faithfulness that humbles me every time I sit down to consider it.

What follows is not, in the end, the story of one pastor and a small remnant. It is the reality of what your faithfulness made possible. Whatever the Lord is doing now, He is doing because you stood with us in Lucedale through the years when the labour was hidden. I want to say so plainly, before I say anything else.

The Honest Assessment of the Soil

Before I tell you what the Lord did, I owe you the plain account of why a change was needed. The good news will read sweeter when you can see the ground it grew from.

Pastor Reed and Pastor Irvin at the pulpit of Victory Baptist Church, Coden, Alabama.

Permit me, then, to speak plainly about George County Baptist Church. The lack of movement had become deafening. We had taught the word of God. We had preached publicly and from house to house. We had mailed tracts and invitations. And yet the needle would not move. I was in much prayer about how to proceed.

A preacher friend, here to help with certain needs on the Church property, observed the situation firsthand. Over many conversations he, unbidden, laid out two realities I had carried quietly for some time but had not let shape my decisions. The Lord has a kind way of sending an outside voice to connect needful realities.

The first was the residue of the previous testimony. Prior leadership at what was then Go Forth Baptist Church had handled finances and property with open corruption. In a small town that memory does not fade quickly. I had believed faithful Bible teaching and steady ministry would eventually overcome it. After years of effort I had to confess that we had not. The damage done by an unfaithful man to a small Church in a small town outlasts the man himself, and outlasts even the well-meaning labour of those who come after him.

The second was the location. The property at George County was workable for a Church with an existing core. It was poorly suited to a Church rebuilding from the ground up. Foot traffic was scarce; visibility was thin. The building sat where someone already familiar knew to look for it, but remained somewhat hidden from those who did not yet know to look.

His counsel, weighed against the long silence, was to consider selling the building and relocating to a more central, more trafficked area. I took the counsel home, and then to the Church. The people recognized the same difficulty immediately. There was no controversy about it, only the quiet relief of finally being permitted to name the problem. We agreed to list the property and to watch, expectantly, for what the Lord would do.

What the Lord Did with the Building

What the Lord did was remarkable.

We listed on a Thursday evening in early April, bracing for a process of months, perhaps longer than a year. By Saturday morning we had a full cash offer. No negotiation. The investors were ready to move immediately.

What followed was a sprint. With my family and with Mrs. Pat and Mrs. Phillis, faithful sisters whose names ought to be in this letter, we cleared the building into storage across two evenings and a Saturday. The Lord greatly helped us.

The blessing extends past the speed. The sale covered the remaining Church debt in full. What the Church had promised, the Church completed. The testimony in Lucedale is sealed as a Church that paid what she owed. That is no small thing in a town with a long memory.

A principle for what comes next: debt will not be an option. The Lord settled this matter cleanly; we mean to keep it that way.

The Interim and the Call to Victory

The Irvin family, welcomed at Victory Baptist Church, Coden, Alabama.

With the building sold and the property cleared, we met in our home and prayed for direction. The Lord did not leave us idle long.

Through a notice from Victory Baptist Press, I made contact with Pastor Reed of Victory Baptist Church in Coden, Alabama. Medical infirmities had intensified for him over recent years, and he had informed his Church it was time to seek his successor. The timing aligned with a precision only the Lord arranges: our building sold and emptied in April; his retirement scheduled for May; May marking the **thirty-sixth anniversary** of the Church in Coden. None of us arranged that calendar, the Lord did.

From the very first telephone call Pastor Reed expressed a settled conviction that the Lord had me in view to follow him. I was not so quickly certain. My wife and I prayed and talked at length. I sought the Lord's will, at moments carefully, at others frantically. There were nights I went to bed convinced of one thing and woke convinced of another, and there were mornings when I sat with the Bible open and asked the Lord to keep me from running ahead of Him or lagging behind Him. He answered. The answer did not arrive in a single dramatic moment; it arrived in the steady accumulation of confirmations, until what had begun as a question matured into a settled peace.

We went and preached at Victory. The reception was warm and the response unmistakable. The Church is down from her former strength. At one time the assembly numbered as many as one

hundred and fifty, but a strong core of about twenty remains, many having been there twenty-five years or more. Men, ladies, families with children. A foundation to build upon, and a people the Lord has clearly preserved for the next chapter He intends to write.

Why Coden and the BSALT Continuity

You may recall that part of what brought us to George County in the first place was the BSALT.org website, a missiological tool that identifies counties across the United States by the depth of their spiritual need. George County's standing on that list was a major factor in our original decision to plant ourselves in Lucedale. The same conviction that brought us here has now guided where we go next.

Mobile County is in the top one hundred on the BSALT.org website. That is not a small detail for us. Coden lies in southern Mobile County. In moving to Victory we are not abandoning the framework that brought us to George County; we are extending it. We have stayed in the same region. The people of Lucedale travel to Mobile weekly, often more, and we have shifted our labour to a county that the same missiological criteria flags as a place of significant need.

The tool is the same. The standard is the same. The field is more urgent, and the two counties sit one beside the other, separated by a short drive and joined by the same need. If George County demanded the labour, Mobile County demands it all the more, and the Lord, in His mercy, has opened the door to a stronger entry point into the same kind of field that drew us to this region in the first place.

Honoring the Lucedale Remnant

Even with the field clear and the direction confirmed, one weight remained on my conscience. My greatest internal struggle through all of this concerned the people from George County Baptist Church.

I sought the Lord earnestly on whether to leave the area altogether, to another city, another state, another region. I do not believe the Lord has given me liberty to leave here. Our number, though small, is exceedingly important to us and far more important to the Lord. It was therefore essential to me that they be willing to move with us to Victory. I struggled to consider any path that left them stranded. Whatever door the Lord opened, it was my desire it be opened with them in mind, and I am glad to report they are staying with us.

Coden lies in South Mobile County, and the residents of Lucedale are regularly in Mobile. The travel may be more than desired, but it is not unreasonable. After discussion with the faithful ladies, the only practical hindrance was the cost of gas. We resolved at once to help them with that cost. Their faithfulness through these lean years is worth the help; we want to honor it tangibly, and not simply tell them to be *warmed and filled*.

With that settled, George County Baptist Church will merge with Victory Baptist Church. The people who attended in Lucedale will continue with us in Coden. The work moved, and the people of the work are moving with it.

On **Wednesday, May 13th**, after much discussion and many tearful seasons of prayer, Victory Baptist Church voted to call me as their pastor. I accepted with thanksgiving, and with a steady awareness that the Lord had been ordering this step long before any of us recognized it.

The Romans 16 Doxology

I want to draw your attention now to a providence too remarkable to pass over without comment.

For twenty-eight months and more than two hundred sermons I preached through the book of Romans. The closing text of that long series is **Romans 16:25-27**:

> *Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.*

Sunday, May 17th, was my first day as pastor of Victory Baptist Church, and in that morning service I completed the very work we had begun together in Lucedale. It was a sweet and wonderful day.

Pastor Irvin and Pastor Reed with the children on the first Lord's Day at Victory.

The Lord closed one chapter of our ministry with this doxology, and opened the next with the very same words. Same Bible. Same gospel. Same dispensation. New location. The continuity is not mine; it is the Lord's. He did not let the work in Romans end in Lucedale and begin afresh with something else in Coden. He carried the doxology over the line with us, so that the last word spoken in one place became the first word spoken in the next, and both honored the Lord.

I take this as a quiet but unmistakable confirmation. I have learned to be cautious about reading into providential happenstance; I have also learned to be cautious about ignoring it.

From there the work has gone forward. On Sunday nights we have begun a new series in the book of Jonah, and Wednesday the 20th, we open the book of Ephesians.

The Biblical Pattern of Ministry

The New Testament Church was a Church of moving men, placed and stationed as the Lord directed. Paul planted; Apollos watered. Paul placed Titus at Crete to set things in order, and stationed Timothy at Ephesus. Placing a faithful man into an existing field is a biblical pattern.

Pastor Reed planted and watered for thirty-six years; the Lord has now brought me to continue what he began. He is a faithful man. We have spent much time in candid fellowship, aligning on the philosophy of ministry, and that alignment will steady the transition. I intend to honor his long years of service and to carry on the work faithfully, taking heed to the charge of **Acts 20:28**, "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers...*"

The Path Forward On Finances

I owe you plainness on finances, perhaps even more plainness than on the rest.

I will continue working full-time in my secular vocation as a Cloud Security Engineer for the next few years at least. The Church at Victory intends to provide a small salary, for which I am thankful.

When that salary materializes, the practical conclusion is that we will no longer have need of ongoing personal support from our current supporting Churches.

If you would consider continuing our support for **three to six months** while we complete the transition, it would be a real help. Either way, the Lord has been good to us, and we are profoundly thankful for your faithfulness through these years.

Beyond the transition, work on the **Luganda Bible Project** continues, and the need there is real and growing. Any support beyond the transition period should be designated specifically for the Luganda Bible Project. Designated funds will be held and applied to either the support of translators or to the considerable printing that will be required once the translation is complete and the work moves from manuscript into the hands of the Luganda-speaking people. That day is closer than it has ever been, and what the Lord has begun there He fully intends to finish.

Specific Prayer Requests

I close with specific requests. Bring these before the Lord with us:

- **For the merging of the George County remnant into the Victory body:** that the Lord knit hearts together swiftly and gladly.
- **For the faithful ladies traveling weekly from Lucedale:** provision for travel and safety on the road.
- **For Pastor Reed:** health, comfort, and a God-honoring retirement after thirty-six years of service to the Church at Coden.
- **For tract distribution, public ministry, and door-to-door labour in Coden and across South Mobile:** that the Lord open hearts and add to the Church.
- **For the Luganda Bible Project:** completion of the translation and provision for the printing to come.
- **For wisdom in the many decisions yet to be made:** in the coming weeks and months.

The Lord helped us accomplish in Lucedale, with a tiny number of people, what we had no natural strength to accomplish. He has given us, in Coden, a stronger starting core in a county of urgent and documented need. There are tracts to distribute, sermons to preach, doctrine to teach, families to invest in, and a community that has not yet heard the gospel of the grace of God as clearly as it deserves to hear it. I am full of expectation for what the Lord will do. This is an exciting opportunity, and far more than that, it is the Lord's work.

I do not know every detail of the years before us. I know what the next several months will hold, and I know the doxology with which they have begun. The rest the Lord will write as He wills.

> *Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all* (**2 Thessalonians 3:16**).

Yours for the gospel of the grace of God,

Pastor Thomas Irvin
Victory Baptist Church
Coden, Alabama

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Gifts beyond the transition period are designated for the Luganda Bible Project.