

FLGM Vision 2010

We have bid farewell to 2009 and to the 2000's, I am glad they are behind us. We say goodbye to the old and welcome the new with great anticipation and excitement. We have so many questions and so much to look forward to, but we also need to look back, claim the lessons, let go of the pains, bury the dead and start with a fresh perspective utilizing the wisdom learned from our mistakes, the knowledge of our successes and the realization that we are in a new day. The old is gone and the new has come.

Full Life was birthed in late 1999 and our dedication service was held in March of 2000. We hosted a meeting with so many wonderful people and especially those who we held to be the elders of our church. During that weekend we were blessed by our elders who gave us their blessing and their instruction. What an anointing filled the house all weekend as the garage was packed to capacity. The message of our church was clear; we minister life and not death, love and not condemnation. The image I hold dearest is of our elders receiving the plaques honoring them as elders of our church. Bro. and Sister Speegle, Sister Ruth and Sister Summers all allowing us to honor them for their service to our Father. We were birthed and ready to follow the Lord.

We learned many things in the time we spent in the garage. We learned obedience to the Spirit; we learned that some things God teaches us may be different than what we had been told by others. We developed our own style and personality. We became Full Life not some other church and we also learned to deal with opposition. The time spent in the garage was wonderful, besides the dedication service, my favorite memory was of Bro. Lester Higgins coming into service and singing Wonderful City. The anointing of the Father was overwhelming; we were in awe of God's presence and power. We had so many visitors in those days, Grandpa Millar, Bennie Skinner, Harold Lovelace, Mac and DJ Harrell, Dave Garner, A.C. Smith, Big John Hanthorne, Des Walter, Bob Torango our home and our church was constantly filled. Our elders guided us, encouraged us, and supported our service for God.

In Early 2001, we purchased the building on Bankhead Hwy in Douglasville. It was an older building with a concrete floor, block walls, and an addition that had to have been built by church folks that did not know a level from a ruler. We made it our own. We really learned opposition in those days; from the very start things were so difficult, especially for Libby and Gary. Our first convention in May 2001 was awesome, we had so many people it was standing room only and the back room was full with the sound piped in so others could enjoy the service. On Sunday morning of that weekend I was interrupted with a request to step outside. I was greeted by an off duty Captain of the sheriff's department who informed me that three of our small children were standing in parking lot throwing rocks at cars including his. He insisted on a deputy coming to the church and filing a report. The three children and I wound up in the back of the patrol car and we all learned a valuable lesson that day. That was when I discovered from the Captain that our church was the former headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan for Douglas County. No wonder we were experiencing opposition! We began to deal the spiritual heaviness and pray over our building and property and God brought relief and victory.

During the time at Douglasville I spent many hours at the church during the week alone or with others praying, singing, meditating on the things of God. We had many visitors, passersby

who would drop in on me. I learned discernment and how I had to say no sometimes. I also learned to step out in faith, especially when a man offered to pave our parking lot at an incredible bargain. It so changed the appearance and curb appeal of our building but it was money we did not have, but God provided in our time of need. It was then I learned to walk on water!

In September of 2001 June and I went on our Walk to Emmaus. It was a spiritual awakening for both of us and for our church. Over the next 2 years a large part of our church made the walk. Everyone came back fired up and ready for whatever God threw at us, unfortunately it also drew an invisible line between those who went and those who did not. This was a hard lesson for all of us. We wanted so badly for those who had not experienced Emmaus to experience what we had and those who wanted no part of it wanted to be left alone about it. But the influence of so powerful a spiritual experience could not be denied. Our music, our teaching, our passion changed, Communion became an integral part of our services at special times. This was an especially difficult for some people who shared Bro. Swafford's view of Communion. It also taught me another level of dealing with opposition and the strength to overcome. Some of our longtime friends left because of it.

In 2004, there was a desire to move our church to Villa Rica; we made several attempts to purchase property before we bought our land on Hwy 101 in 2005. The land has been used for several functions since we purchased it. We tore down the old house and prepared to build on it. We ran into several blocks about building and put it on hold until we could grow enough in Villa Rica to have people to support a building program.

In 2006, New Jerusalem Church became part of Full Life. We sold the building in Dallas and paid down the debt on our property. This brought us to a sense of wholeness that our roots and our future were finally merged together.

In late 2007, we sold our Douglasville building and moved to Villa Rica in January 2008. I will never forget the day we all came in and joined hands in a circle and the anointing filled the house. It is an anointing we had not experienced since we were in the garage. There was a sense of unity and a knowing that something special was happening in our midst. We returned our name to Full Life Gospel Ministries and began an incredibly joyous journey making memories in Villa Rica. It has wonderful watching God bind us together teaching us to trust one another and to flow together in the spirit. We had two awesome vacation bible schools where our church was transformed in to Jerusalem and Rome. The youth of our church truly learned a lot about what it meant to worship God in ancient times, and came to appreciate the heritage that has been passed down through the ages. We came away with a sense of unity, the VBSs were group efforts of our church where everyone worked together so well, there was no sense of individuals being focused upon, it was all about God and everyone lifting Him up as one body. I was so proud of our church; there was a maturity that was developing in our church that brought us to a new level.

During the 2000's we lost so many precious saints who meant so much to our church. We lost Grandpa Bob Millar, a highly misunderstood man who I came to love the last few years of his life. He imparted to me a special blessing and wisdom, he passed away shortly after being in our convention. He made peace with several people here at our church before he passed away. Bro. T.H. Speegle passed away in September 2003. He and Sister Speegle had been such blessings to all of us. When we began Full Life in 1999 we made a trip to visit them and they gave us their blessings, a brick (on display in the entrance) and a seed for our church. Bro. Ira Thomas was such strength and a huge source of wisdom and guidance to me. He gave us his blessings and it seemed whenever I was facing a tough time he would call me and give me a word right into the situation. Sister Emma Summers passed and it seemed my heart broke and the loss was

tremendous. She was like a mother to me, she encouraged me, guided me, listened to me and we shared a love for God which was so special. Jane Swafford passed away and then J.B. Swafford slowly lost his right mind, before he passed away. We were able to make peace with them and in one of our last visits before his mind was completely gone, he told June and me that he knew we would carry on and he had confidence in us. It brought healing and compelled us to carry on with the legacy of New Jerusalem Church of God as part of Full Life Gospel Ministries. Others who passed were Sister Josephine Walters, Sister Nellie Gable, Bill and Carol Adams, Roy Griffith, Mildred Garner, Mary Myers, all contributed to the growth of our church. Pawpaw Leon Allen passed in 2007 just after Abigail Camp was born. He was one of our founders, a man we all loved and we see him in our church so often in J.J. or when A.J. plays his old guitar. Just before he passed Nan Nichols passed, she was a precious lady a part of our church for several years. As much as we miss all of these people they have helped to make us who and what we are as a church. The love they shared, their wisdom, their support and the participation in Full Life have given us more than I can put on paper, but it is an indelible part of the character of our church.

The last few months have been very powerful spiritually in our church. We have seen remarkable growth in our young people and the lines of communication are open between the generations. The original dramas being choreographed by our youth have been particularly inspiring to me. We will see more of this in 2010, we have Winterjam and Winterfest that our youth will participate in to inspire and challenge them to expand their horizons. I pray that each of our young people will grow and commit their hearts and minds to serving God in even greater ways. We are seeing our youth find their own identity and name FLY an anagram for Full Life Youth. As we introduce flags and banners into our worship we will see even more of a freedom of expression in our youth and adults. The sensitivity to the spirit is a gift that several of our youth are revealing very powerfully and will continue in even greater ways.

I am thankful for God moving so powerfully in our church the last few months. After some difficult struggles we broke through and a manifestation of the Spirit in our church is restoring the health of our church. I believe that for a season we had several unhealthy issues that needed to be dealt with. As we enter 2010 the health of our church is good, we found that we cannot grow when we are unhealthy. It is a lesson that has been difficult to learn, we attempted to fix problems by growing people. God revealed to me a while back that we cannot grow until we get healthy, we cannot sustain others unless we have the ability to give of ourselves at a level that requires unselfish service. When our body is sick, it requires that the resources we have go to ministering to the disease within the body much like the white blood cells and antibodies are depleted in our natural bodies by disease and injury, it leaves us vulnerable to more disease because our defenses are down. As we look at this spiritually, we minister strength to the weak and those with issues (emotional, spiritual, natural, doctrinal, etc.) if the core leadership of the church is not healthy the church will quickly fall apart at the seams. Scripture says that little foxes steal the grapes. Little differences and divisions rob the spiritual strength of the church. Jesus discovered in His ministry that his disciples were not fully grasping the message He needed them to learn. He fed five thousand with two fish and five loaves of bread, but the people missed the message because they wanted the food. Jesus (John 6) told them that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood to have life. The crowds left Him, He could now teach His disciples the lessons they needed to feed the world and give them His life. Sometimes we can get so caught up in the needs that we miss the lesson. A wise man once said if you give a man a fish you feed him a meal, but if you teach a man to fish you can feed him a lifetime. God called this church to birth sons and daughters of Christ; it is about relationship, life, truth much more than

providing a meal for someone. Please understand that I am not against providing meals for people, but you can only provide meals for the needy if you are healthy enough to have the resources to provide the meal. Jesus told His disciples to go away alone and rejuvenate themselves in the Father because they did not even have time to eat themselves. We came to this point in our church a few months ago, we exhausted our resources. I gave up my salary in July but this was not enough, we had to get ourselves spiritually aligned and unified. We have come a long way since July, but our work is not finished yet. A few weeks ago, the Holy Spirit moved in a very powerful way, as the Spirit came into our church a prophetic voice opened and a new dispensation of God's anointing was released in the body of Full Life. We could not go back we could only move forward.

Our Praise and Worship services are evolving; we will see even more spontaneous worship. Spontaneous worship is when the music plays and our lead worshippers begin to sing new words from the spirit in English or in tongues. The youth will be involved in the praise and worship in every service as a worship element not as entertainment. Our songs will be spirit inspired chosen by how spirit is moving, we will reach back into our heritage and traditions and grab hold of the songs that speak from deep within us and we will embrace the new in an even more passionate way. Diversity is essential to minister to the needs of our whole congregation, we will have an even broader mixture of live and recorded music, and also we will introduce video into the worship very soon. Dance, flags, banners will be more a part of the expression of our worshippers. Our lead worshippers will encourage us to get out of the box and find our own way of expressing our love for God, this is what worship is all about loving God abandon! I also believe our live music will sometimes get louder and harder, I may even have to get an electric guitar and learn some rock licks to help infuse it even more. Can you jump up and down and shout it out for the Lord?

The ministry of our church is evolving also. I took a full time job and gave up my salary from the church; it has taken a while to adapt. I gave up many outside ministry activities because I do not have the time any longer. In November, I gave up leadership in Breakfree Ministry at the YDC. I felt like a waiter who had allowed someone to load both arms with hot plates and standing at the table I did not have a hand free to begin serving the plates. I became frustrated, stressed, overwhelmed; I had to finally admit I cannot do everything. When I drove home after resigning I felt as though a thousand pound weight was off my shoulders. I have to spread different duties around to others within the church. I will be asking many of you to step up and accept new responsibilities with accountability to the church and to God. We are going to be more fluid in our services, able to change and get off the page and out of the box without stress or hesitation. One of the most frustrating things to me has been the hesitation to move in the spirit, prophetically, or otherwise. We are going to step out like never before. Many of you have never experienced a Holy Ghost, holy roller, hoe down, get ready to kick your shoes off and find the freedom of flowing in the Holy Ghost power. Sunday night services are going to be handled by some of our other ministers; we are so blessed with anointed preachers and ministers. They need to minister I need to listen, we need to allow others to express their gifts and help them to develop their ministry. We will continue the first Sunday 8am service and we will be open to other special services as needed. After teaching on the gifts of the spirit on Wednesdays we will go a different direction, I will be asking others to teach except on the first Wednesday of each month, which will be the time for us to have a chat together, our monthly "chat with the pastor." The purpose of these chats are to allow me to answer questions or discuss subjects that are

relevant to the needs of our congregation, we will also allow our youth to participate in these times.

Sunday school and children's church are areas of great concern. We must be flexible in both of these areas. Sunday school teachers need to be very aware of the spirit; our youth need stability and their teachers to be anointed to teach, not just in word but in action. Our actions outside the classroom must reflect the values and principles we teach in the classroom. Terry and Darlene Black are anointed as our youth leaders, their hearts are for the youth of our church, but we must also be aware that they need a break and need to be in adult services to be refreshed and fed spiritually. We need people to step up and offer their help to them. Vacation Bible school and other special programs are essential to growing our church; we will continue these programs going forward.

We own three acres on Hwy 101 just a couple of miles from where we are now. We bought the land expecting to build quickly, but things did not work out like we hoped. I believe God saved us from being under a huge debt when the recession hit. Our present place works very well for us right now, I hope we can stay here until we are able to build or find a better place. Wisdom has taught us that the building serves the church it is not the church. We will not grow because we build a building, we will build the building when the needs of the church demand it to serve our needs. In order to build we need: dedicated people willing to commit their time, money, financial stability and agree to remain part of the church and see things through to the end. It takes more than Gary, Libby, June and me to build a building and sign the note. It takes a group of people with good credit, stability in the community, steady jobs and income and willing to commit to signing on the dotted line with the world and others in the church to finance the project. My hopes are that we will be able to build and move into a new building in 2012. Are you committed enough to see it through?

Today, I am looking forward to a new year and a new decade. We need leaders who cooperate and trust one another. We need no egos, but a desire to see God move and His will be done. We will spend more time in prayer and may even delay important decisions until the Spirit speaks a word into the situation. I am more confident than ever before that God called me to pastor this church and called Gary Johnson to walk beside me. I desire people to be part of this church who share the vision, I desire leaders to walk with me who share and support the vision. We cannot succeed if we are divided, it is essential to our success and health as a church that we follow one core vision, not a mixture of different agendas. I love God and I love our church, the people who make up the church, the body of Christ. Are you ready to share in this vision? Will you follow me as I follow Christ? Will you help me to fulfill this vision? If your answer is yes then come join me on this journey and let us build Full Life for the glory of God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

I love you all,
God bless you,
Pastor Johnny Hightower
January 2010