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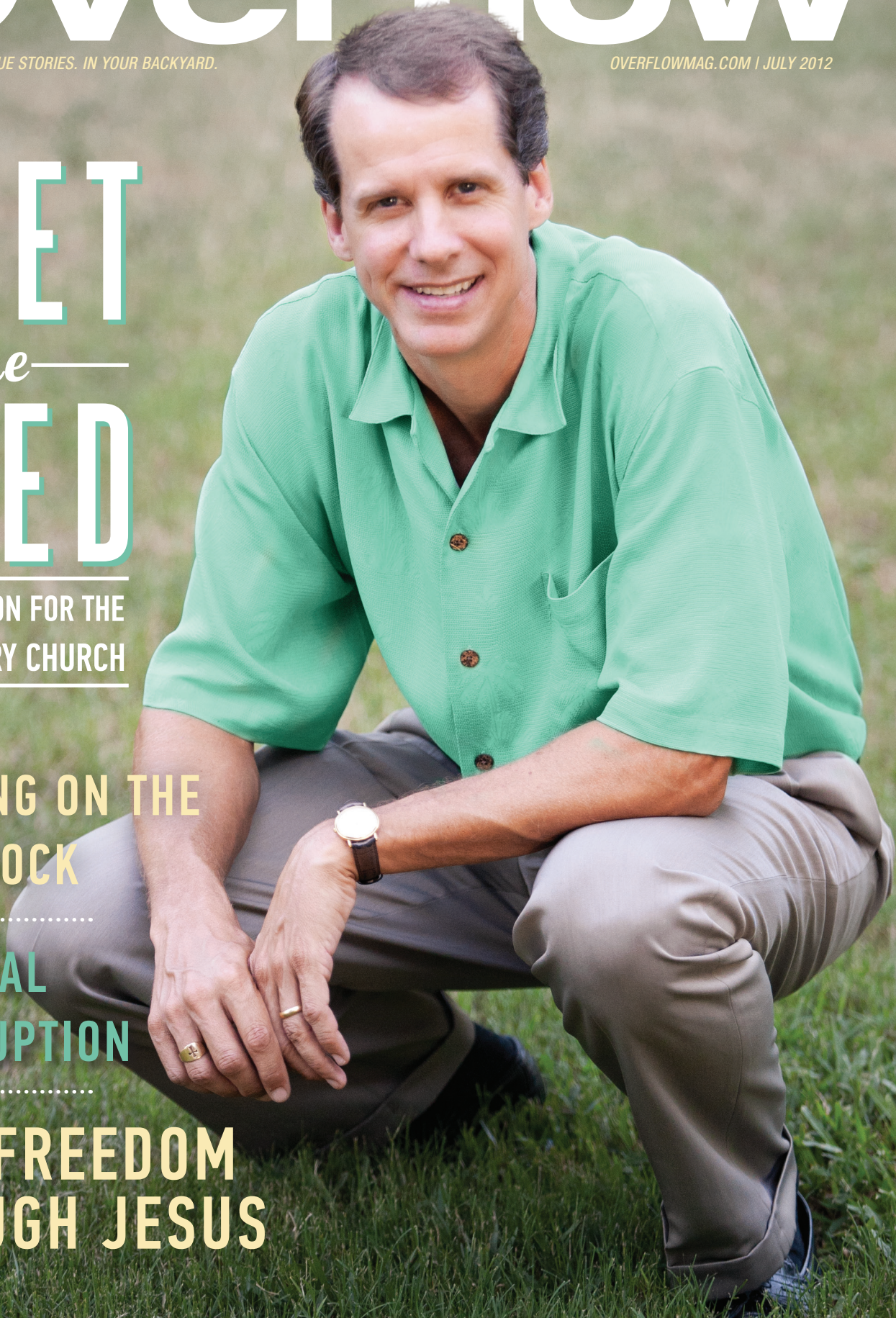
MEET —The— NEED

AN INNOVATION FOR THE
21st CENTURY CHURCH

STANDING ON THE
SOLID ROCK

SPIRITUAL
INTERRUPTION

TRUE FREEDOM
THROUGH JESUS



ENABLING THE HANDS AND FEET OF JESUS

*An Innovation for the
21st Century Church*

BY AMANDA WRIGHT

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This isn't just another story about a person using his God-given talents to glorify Christ. It's also an expedition through innovation that has changed the face of local missions in Tampa and beyond. It's a journey of faith, of discerning God's leadings, and of following the path that leads to Kingdom building. Jim Morgan's story brings to the forefront the age-old battle between this world and God's heavenly realm. It's the clash between the nature of human efforts to gain success in a money-driven world and the soul-harvesting, loving, and service-oriented nature of Christ.

Like all of us do at some point in our lives, Jim was faced with a choice that would impact his future forever. He had to choose between continuing on a lucrative path in the business world and traveling a different path towards starting a new ministry that the Church desperately needed. From a worldly perspective, the ministry direction would be fraught with uncertainties, while the business position could ensure a financially-secure future. However, from a spiritual perspective, the ministry could produce a content heart and a fulfillment of God's calling on his life.

Jim knew he had a ministry idea that would impact the world for Jesus in a huge way, and he knew that God had tasked him with carrying it out. The words of the Apostle Paul sum up the choice Jim made perfectly: "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24, NIV). He knew of a way to help the Church show the Gospel of God's grace by being the hands and feet of Christ.

Discovering the Disconnect

Jim Morgan, founder and executive director of Meet The Need, grew up believing that his life's purpose was to get a great education, obtain a great job, conquer the business world, and get ahead. This was his definition of success, and for many years, it was the course he ran. Jim received an M.B.A. from the University of Chicago and spent most of his young adulthood as an investment banker, a management

consultant to Fortune 500 companies, and an eBusiness strategist to Internet companies during the dot-com boom.

The beautiful thing about God is that (even though He gives us free will to make our own choices in life) He is always there guiding, directing, grooming, and teaching us, even when we don't know it. Then, when the time is right, He just might turn our world upside down. This was true for Jim. In his early thirties, he felt a void in his heart and thought, "There has to be more to life than just getting ahead, making money, and getting the world's accolades." Jim shared, "I was not content with that....It felt totally empty to me."

He found his way back to God and knew he wanted to serve the Lord. Jim approached his church and explained that he wanted to serve on the weekend. He told them what his skills were and asked how he could help. The response: in the church nursery, as an usher, or as a greeter. These are wonderful ways to serve the Lord, but it just wasn't where Jim's heart was. He pressed them further, "Well, I mean the community and the poor – outside the four walls." There were outreach events a few times a year, but they were planned for many months away. Jim said that he wanted to help now, but they replied, "I don't know what to tell you."

"It was a huge shock to me," Jim said. He realized there was a vast disconnect. "[The church] just didn't know the needs in the community." After further research, Jim found out that this situation was common among the Church as a whole. He made it clear that the problem wasn't that the Church didn't care or didn't want to do more, because they did. So how did this situation develop? Over the last few decades, Jim explained, "the Church gradually lost touch with the ministries in the community [and] it [became] more about occasional service events."

The Big Idea

As a business consultant, part of Jim's job was problem solving and strategizing. Where do you even start to solve the issue of disconnect between the needs of the community and the Church? Jim found that the real root of the problem was communication. "Ministries across the country inform churches [of] their needs through paperwork, e-mails, phone calls, and newsletters. How can churches be expected to take those e-mails, phone calls, and newsletters and tell the church members? The pulpit and the church bulletin are not very effective for sharing all those opportunities to serve in the community," Jim said.

Jim explained, "There has been no innovation [for communicating and meeting needs] in local missions in [the last] 40 years." In reality, how are the pastor and the church staff going to effectively run their church, go out and survey the city, learn the needs of the community and local ministries, communicate those needs to their church congregation, and then organize volunteers and outreach efforts? How can we put

JIM MORGAN WITH HIS WIFE, CLAUDINE, AND THEIR SON, JAMIE



this burden on the pastors and the church staffs alone? There has got to be a better way.

Jim made it his personal project to solve this problem and the bridge the gap. In 2000, during a drive home after a business trip, Jim recalled, "I was thinking about how to use the internet for more than just making money." He thought, "If you can shop online for what you want to buy, why can't you 'shop' for somebody who needs what you want to give away or what you can do?" That was it – the big idea to build the much needed bridge between believers and local missions.

The Pilot System

Two years later, Jim took the plan to the next level. He developed a computer-based system, initially called God Will, that would act as the connector between the Church, the community, and local ministries. The system was piloted at five different Tampa churches and the response was really good.

In 2003, the ministry was taking shape and Jim said, "I began to get more convicted about my life....I really didn't feel content in going on with the fast track [in the business world], just to live for money." He'd only been married three years and had vowed to be a good husband, but in his current position, he was out of town five to six days a week. The fast track just wasn't lining up with his heart. Jim felt the call of God on his life, and he knew he had to make a change. After much time in prayer, Jim decided to shift his priorities. He scaled back his consulting work considerably and only worked locally so he could pursue the ministry and spend more time with his wife.

The core focus of the ministry reflected Jim's compassion for others. He wanted to show the Church that they are the hands and feet of Christ, and he desired to

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simplify the process to allow the Church to become more involved. Jim explained it like this: "Let's actually go out and meet families to bless them, be with them, pray with them, and share the Gospel with them in a very powerful way by taking time out to meet their needs." With this vision, the ministry needed a name change, and in 2005 it became Meet The Need. "The initial concept of being family centric – meeting needs in the community and [church] members helping families – expanded as time went on," Jim said.

Reconnecting

Developing the Meet The Need system was a long, arduous, and costly process as the ministry continued testing the system's capabilities. Jim said, "We've evolved as time went on, and we heard feedback over the course of years of focus groups, design sessions, and beta tests. [It involved] years of building

something, putting it out there, learning from it, scrapping it, and starting over again...then more feedback, more focus groups, rebuild, and redesign."

In the beginning, Jim and his wife were the primary funders of the ministry. Then in 2008, God stepped in. Jim explained, "Individuals began getting involved in giving. Some have been very generous. God introduces you to the right people at the perfect time." The Lord made a way for Jim to quit consulting work all together, work for the ministry full time, and maintain his family's financial security.

The Meet The Need system went live in 2010, helping churches and ministries connect. Jim gave an example of a 12,000-member church that they helped. This large congregation did an outreach day within their own church. The pastor instructed all the members who were in need of something to go to the back of the church and write their need on an index card. Then, after the cards were organized, the pastor asked the remaining congregants to pick a card to fulfill a need of their brothers and sisters in Christ. It was a wonderful thing, "except they had 800 cards unclaimed and unmet," Jim said. Meet The Need was able to set up their system on the church's website so that they could communicate those 800 needs to their

congregants. "The point here is, even inside the church, we don't know what the needs are," Jim said.

Reaching Out For Christ

Last year, Meet The Need went live in five more cities to replicate what was done in Tampa. This year they began their national launch adding cities in 29 states and partnering with many of the largest ministries and churches in the country. The system has received wonderful responses from the marketplace, with organizations saying, "Where has this been?" Jim said, "We're the only people in the United States doing it. We've spent [a lot] in 10 years to figure out how to reconnect the Body of Christ in cities and get them outside the four walls. No one has [implemented] a technology solution to put all of [the needs] on the same platform to connect and mobilize communities."

Meet The Need has removed the communication barrier and created an organized, central place to rally the Church in loving acts of service. This ministry has been so important to Jim because it was an answer to his question: "What can I do?" He knew there were so many other people out there asking the same question. Jim reflected back on Scripture. "Jesus relied on helping people and serving people with compassion as the means to open the door to share the Gospel," Jim said. This ministry is about more than service—it's about showing Christ through our actions and displaying the loving nature of our Heavenly Father. Jim went on to say, "Jesus fulfilled needs first and then He said who He was. We've got to get back to a position where the Church is more integral in meeting people where they are."

That is the sentiment of many churches and ministries across the country, so Meet The Need is helping to unify the Church in a huge way. In Tampa alone, Jim explained that more than 50 percent of all the giving activities that took place during the 2011 Holiday Season happened through the Meet The Need system. This included meal packing events, holiday tents, toy drives, food drives, and volunteer activities, among other things. Metropolitan Ministries, Habitat for Humanity, Toys for Tots, Feed the Bay, The Crossing Church, Idlewild, and Van Dyke Church are just a handful of organizations that are already on board with the system.

Behind The Scenes

The system is so clever, but very user-friendly at the same time. One of the smartest things about this system (for the organizations that implement it) is the fact that it's behind the scenes. Jim said that it's a private-labeled connection system that takes the posted needs of a ministry and instantly communicates those needs to their partner churches, volunteers, or donors. Users run Meet The Need's search engine, software, and database through their own website – meaning the needs appear directly on the organization's website. Churches and ministries

can use the software to manage all ministry, missions, and benevolence activities with ease.

The best part is it's free! Meet The Need doesn't want to exchange money for the software system. If a church or ministry believes in what Meet The Need is trying to accomplish on a national level, then they are encouraged to donate to support the cause. God has taken care of Jim and his ministry staff for the last 10 years, and He will continue to do so. Consequently, there is no financial pressure placed on any organization that needs this tool to help them better serve their community or communicate their needs to others.

Each ministry or organization that implements Meet The Need with their own website has control over what needs are entered (from goods and services to volunteers), who has authorization to access the system, and what ministry partners they connect with. Jim said, "It becomes their own system – it's like a box of software, but really, it's easier than that." For instance, Jim explained that when a need is posted by Habitat for Humanity, thousands of people in Tampa receive e-mails through Meet The Need's system. The e-mail explains that Habitat has posted new needs and the e-mail looks as though it is coming directly from Habitat. A link in the e-mail directs the user to Habitat's website.

Get Involved

So what are the ways we can help further the mission of Meet The Need? First and foremost, tell your pastor, church staff, and the ministry or charity you donate to or volunteer for about Meet The Need. They can find out everything they need to know about the internet-based system at www.meettheneed.org, where there is plenty of information, videos, and webinars. Organizations can register, set up the system, train, and start using the service anytime.

Businesses can get involved, too. Jim explained, "Companies can't post needs, but they can plug in." The system can be used on a company's website to show their employees some opportunities in the community to go out and serve together. Another great way to help continue to bring this wonderful innovation across the country is to donate financially. Meet The Need is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and all donations are tax deductible. You can make a secure donation online at their website. For more information about Meet The Need, please visit their website, call 813-527-0222, or e-mail info@meettheneed.org.

As members of the Church, we are so thankful that Jim followed God's path and is showing the Church how we can stay connected with our community and other ministries in the 21st century. His journey is nothing short of amazing. Just look at what God can do when you say, "Yes," to His calling. Jim said, "I hope my story inspires somebody to think about what God is doing in their life and think about what role He has for them. He is equipping all of us individually in the world with skills and talents to be used for His glory!" Go and be the hands and feet of Christ wherever the Spirit leads you! **Glory! ■**



MEET THE NEED STAFF BY BIVENS PHOTOGRAPHY