



December 2018

Merry Christmas from the Lusks and Forest Hills Baptist Church! I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season with Christmas and New Years now behind us. December was quite an eventful month for both our church and our family with travel, a church planting conference, an opportunity to drop in on some of our church planters, some more travel, and a few ER visits and a doctor's visit that happened early this month, but I am going to include it because I don't want to provide you with a month-long cliff hanger wondering what happened. :)

Every year, City Baptist Church of Hoboken, New Jersey and Solid Rock Independent Baptist Church of Berlin, New Jersey host a Church Pioneering Conference around Newark, New Jersey, and because it is so close, every year myself and as many as I can convince to come with me from our church go up to participate. This year due to various reasons, most of those that planned to go had to back out leaving just myself and my 15-year-old son, Quinton, for most of the trip. One of our men joined us for the last portion of the conference later. I've always had a heart for church planting, and our church seems to as well. So, we usually participate in three conferences of this type throughout the year. This is one of my favorites, not just because the need in the northeast is so great, but also because of its close proximity to my favorite city to visit, New York City. Our church actually supports three church planters in the city. We have one in Brooklyn, one in the Bronx, and one in Staten Island. The conference is quite short. It begins on Friday night and ends Saturday morning, and most of the church planters that present are going to some region of the northeast. This year what we decided to do was head up a little early so that we could also get some time with a few of our church planters. It was great. We were able to be in services with the Newburgers in Brooklyn on Wednesday and the Hamiltons in the Bronx on Thursday. It was so encouraging getting to see firsthand what God is doing through families we have partnered with in areas we are burdened about.

For Christmas this year, my family and I traveled to Iowa to be with family. Our route took us through Arkansas to pick up our oldest son who is still living on and loving the farm. In total, it took us roughly 22 hours to get to our final destination. It is always great to get to see family and we had a wonderful Christmas together.

While we were there, however, we hit a bit of a snag. As some of you may remember, last year I ended up in the ER a few times for my blood pressure. I thought I was doing well. I hadn't had any issues all year long, but while we were in Iowa, I learned that my blood pressure is still an issue. It spiked (and the docs think it had likely been up all year) to around 190 something over 100+ something (I can't remember the exact number) and to the ER I went (that was the first time in a year that I had checked it, by the way). I had done pretty much everything the cardiologist last year recommended, but apparently it wasn't enough. That one ER visit turned into three more after we returned home a few days later. My numbers were all over the place. The good news is that I am now on medication and have accepted that I may need, due to genetics, to be on meds indefinitely. I am okay with that if that is what it takes. Also, through this, I now have a doctor. This is the first time since I was a kid that I have actually had my own primary care doctor. I just haven't ever really needed one (or so I thought). If I had been smart, this all could have likely been caught much earlier, and much of the events surrounding my blood pressure could have likely been avoided. The doc wants me to continue on my current meds (they were prescribed to me in the ER) for the next four weeks to make sure they've had time to take effect before making adjustments or changes. It was my first time to see him, and so once I explained that I have what can be a stressful job as both a church planting pastor and a real estate agent, his eyes got real big and he simply said, (seemingly a bit startled and unintentionally expressing agreement at the same time) "Oh!" My blood pressure was still high, but I really do think it was because I was so anxious about having it checked again. I just want it to be normal so badly. Pray that God helps me with that. I can be pretty high strung anyway about things, and I really need to trust God with this.

Anyway, the great news is that the church is doing incredible! I was gone the Sunday before Christmas, and intended to be back in the pulpit the following Sunday, but instead spent the day and the night before in the ER, and then, as I could not get in to see a primary care doctor until after the following Sunday, I determined to stay home that week and try to relax to get everything under control and allow the meds to work. God has been good in providing men in our church that are quite capable preachers. That Sunday, the first Sunday in January, we had 70 people! We were missing a few of our regular families, but we had two families and three single people visit that day. This is such a great indication for how I believe we can expect the rest of the year to go. In 2018, we went from averaging 35 to 40 to averaging 55 to 65. We have hit or broken 70 probably five times now in the last few months. Our second Sunday morning service is set to begin the first Sunday in April. Please pray as there is so much to be done between now and then. Please also continue to keep my job in your prayers as well.

Thank you so much for your support and prayers. I really do appreciate it so much. Ministry like this is because of people and churches like you.

In Christ,
JJ Lusk
1 Timothy 1:12

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