



Life is Like a Puzzle
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Dear friends welcome to 2021 and a New Year of opportunities and blessings! 2020 certainly brought us great opportunities along with many challenges, however I have my eyes, heart, and mind fixed on a brighter and healthier year! There were certainly lessons I learned throughout my journey last year that I hope to utilize in the new year.

Over the past year we learned to be creative in areas of our ministry and family where we were stretched perhaps more than ever before. We embraced new ways of going about our everyday lives as we were trying to reimagine just about everything.

Life began to feel like a massive puzzle at times where some pieces fell into place easily, some we tried to force but wouldn't fit, and perhaps for some we are still searching for that missing piece. One activity that became very popular during days of lockdown was working jigsaw puzzles. I was amazed at the beautiful scenes and complexity that people had chosen! It made my heart so happy to see parents spending time with their children completing extraordinary masterpieces. For our grandchildren they are beautifully framed as a reminder of special moments spent together with their parents.

Maybe you received a puzzle for Christmas, and you are ready to get started or have already completed!

If you would just imagine a massive puzzle, as in a 9,000-piece puzzle being emptied out onto the table, for me it looks like chaos as the pieces are sorted through. If you are not a puzzle enthusiast, it could cause one to feel defeated before beginning.

However, I feel there's much to learn about puzzles and applying it to leadership. Each piece looks different with their unique interlocking shape yet each one equally significant when they interlock. In leadership sometimes you get to be the border pieces, the pieces that are fun and easy to do with clear outcomes and almost immediate results. Sometimes you get to be the last piece of the puzzle that completes the project as in seeing a young

person disciplined and come to know Jesus and grow in their walk with confidence or a long awaited grant or project finally coming into fruition. There's a great feeling of accomplishment and often a sigh of relief. That piece often comes with praise and celebration! But sometimes you're the center pieces, you get to do the work that no one else wants to do, that's not always fun or glamorous. It's the work that others left to the side and didn't seem to pick up the pieces but in our heart, we know are necessary to the puzzle.

Throughout my years of officership I believe I have had many more middle pieces than the easy border pieces and certainly fewer moments of being able to place that final piece of the puzzle. I can name seasons that were hard where we have picked up different pieces hoping they would fit in easily but didn't.

As I reflect back in my own ministry, I believe it's the middle pieces I remember the most. Yes, they were hard days, long hours, seemingly unappreciated, staff and financial challenges, disappointments, loneliness, and even compassion fatigue that left me feeling emotionally and physically drained.

However, it's when I stop and remember that though those pieces or seasons were hard they were the most lifechanging and perhaps most significant lessons learned that added value to my calling. I don't really remember the intensity of the challenges that I faced at that time but what I do remember now was how good God was through the journey. His faithfulness never wavered, and his grace and strength brought us through. I remember how he helped us complete the part of the puzzle that we had been tasked with, especially when it was the hard pieces to place in the middle.

I think the most significant moment is where we can reflect back and see how we've grown and that one season in life helped prepare us for the next. That those middle pieces, as hard as they were or perhaps are today had a greater impact on our ministry. We needed stretching and development even though the process wasn't easy at the time but today we can see the value.

Yes, sometimes we are the corner edges, sometimes even the last piece of the puzzle but more often we have the opportunity to be the center pieces trusting that God with whatever opportunity is before us.

“And we know all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28

May 2021 be a year of courage where you take your place at the table facing the opportunities before you. Ask God to give you vision, and strength, and then piece by piece you and I can trust him to use us according to His will and plans for our lives and for others that we have been called to serve. We are all a part of His beautiful master plan!