

Emmaus Baptist Church — State of the Church Address
Wednesday, December 4, 2019

1. The Crossroads

For the past couple of years, I've started with some quotes from long-time researcher and author, Thom Rainer. Rainer wrote a popular article about pastoral tenure.

In that article, he said, "Beyond the first year, the church begins seeing the imperfections in the pastor's ministry (and are less afraid to point these out to him), and the pastor finds out that promises from the congregation--especially promises of being open and receptive to change--were unfulfilled. It's impossible to meet everyone's expectations; and during the second and third year, both the members and pastor easily become disillusioned and dissatisfied."

Rainer goes on to note, "During the second and third year, the church gains a number of new members who arrived under the present pastor's tenure. It's not uncommon for longer-term members, especially those in positions of influence or volunteer roles, to feel threatened or frustrated by the changes as new people move into the core of the church. After a long-term pastorate, the next pastor often doesn't last long because, just as it's difficult for new members to break into an established situation, it's equally hard for a new pastor to break into well-established networks."

Then, Rainer goes on to call Years 4 and 5 'The Crossroads, Part 1.' He says, "This period is one of the most critical in the relationship. If the [previous] conflict was severe, the pastor will likely leave or be forced out. Indeed, these years, four and five, are the most common years when a pastor leaves a church. On the other hand, if the pastor and the church manage their relationship well, they can often look forward to some of the best years ahead." In fact, Rainer names Years 6-10 the 'Fruit and Harvest' period.

I just finished Year 4 at Emmaus. Year 4! That's hard to imagine. It's gone by so quickly...at least for me. We're in that critical period — The Crossroads, Part 1 — and I feel both the weight and the hope. I sense this is a critical time for our church, but I don't feel compelled to run away from the challenges or stop pushing ahead. In fact, I feel like we're just getting started. I have a lot to learn — and even more room to grow — but I hope to stay in the game through this Crossroads, praying for the Fruit and Harvest ahead, whether it's Year 6 or 10 or even beyond.

The question is - how do we get there?

Well, first off, we get there by not missing what God has already done and is doing right now. Plus, in assessing the past and present, we need to make sure we have a realistic picture of where we are, so we can talk about steps moving ahead.

So, tonight, we're going to celebrate the past; assess the present; and prepare for the future.

2. Celebrating Year Four

One of my favorite things at Emmaus is hearing the testimonies of people being baptized — whether it's a college girl recognizing her need for the Lord after years of doubt, a new husband setting the course for his family through faith and baptism, or even a young man being baptized in an undisclosed location around the world because of ministry partnerships we support. I pray God will overflow our church with these stories in the years to come.

Other people trusted in Christ this past year and are planning to be baptized soon. Just recently, a few of our members were going door-to-door in a local neighborhood; at one house, a young lady was standing on her porch and her husband came out as our guys approached. After exchanging names, the lady said, "What do I need to do to be baptized?" She said she had accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior but was looking for a church to join and a place to be baptized. Carl has done a great job encouraging us to reach out to people with the Gospel; it will be fun to see where this leads.

A few months ago, we sent a mission team to the Middle East to host a Vacation Bible School for missionary kids whose parents had come together for training. Our team didn't just baby-sit; they told stories, built relationships, and shared the Gospel. In the process, a few of the little kids were saved. The parents and grandparents of these kids are leaders within the International Mission Board and have already connected with Jim about other mission opportunities for Emmaus in the future.

Here's a story from Courtney about salvation in the kids' ministry: "We were just a few weeks out from kids camp this summer and out of spots. A family inquired about two kids attending and at the time we had to put them on a waiting list until we could confirm additional beds. We were able to open up the two extra spots for the girls to go; but both girls ended up with illness and injury within the first few days, one resulting in a trip to the ER for evaluation. All results came back clear and she was able to return to camp. What we didn't realize at the time, this was actually God's way of giving this child an opportunity to ask lots of questions about God to two of our sponsors in that van ride to the ER. Later that week, this child prayed and asked Jesus to become her Savior. God knew how much she needed to be there at camp and He made a way for her to be there! I'm grateful for the leaders who invest in these kids at camp, but also throughout the entire year. When we're faithful to share the Gospel, the Holy Spirit is faithful to do His work in changing lives."

This next story isn't about baptism, but it's another way God is moving among our students. Jeron told me about one of our girls who sustained an injury in volleyball that was supposed to be fairly minor, but turned into something that looked like it could stop her from playing ever again. The lingering effects of the injury impacted her education and made it hard to do normal daily functions. This season of hardship gave her time to begin focusing more on God and His Word. Her small group and adult encouragers rallied around her, and this young lady shared how she learned not to take things for granted. She told Jeron, "Everyday we take God's grace for granted. He doesn't have to love us and offer us salvation, but He does. We can't take that for granted."

We are driven by these types of stories. Even as we talk about our current situation — and mention some potential challenges and weaknesses — know that I'm speaking from a place of celebration and excitement about God's work. All of us, but me more than anyone, can be guilty of focusing on the negative and missing the positives. But the positives are everywhere, and we thank God for this.

3. Assessing the Situation

So, where are we now, warts and all? To answer this question, we're going to look at some numbers, but we also want to look behind the numbers and think about some deeper issues related to spiritual health and future direction.

3.1 Objective Assessment

When it comes to numbers, let's start with the positives. We continue to have impressive turnout for Vacation Bible School, Fall Fest, Kids Camp, Youth United Weekend, and Youth Falls Creek. VBS and Fall Fest attract many families not connected to Emmaus (including several families who list no church affiliation). Also, student events such as Falls Creek and United Weekend draw many students from the area. (As a side note, among 5 key priorities released last month by the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, one of those was a focus on increasing baptisms among 13-19 years old. Apparently, churches across the nation have seen a sharp decline in teenage baptisms over the past few years. Needless to say, we don't want to draw back in sharing the Gospel with kids, teenagers, and their families.)

As a whole, Emmaus has had 13 people baptized so far this year, and we've added 44 new members; both of these numbers are down from last year, but not significantly so. We have averaged 536 people in the Sunday 10:30am Worship Gathering (compared to 550 last year) and a 602 total average on Sunday morning including kids (617 last year) — again, slight but not significant decreases. Through 11 months, we had 296 guests on Sunday morning. That number is important, because church analysts suggest that a growing church should have as many guests in a year as they have regular attenders. In other words, with an average total of 602 people each Sunday, we'd like to see 602 guests over the course of the year to spur growth.

In church, we need a balanced view of numbers. Numbers can be a dangerous mark for church success, especially when numbers are pursued in a way that is unbiblical or spiritually unhealthy. I don't want to seem overly discouraged about decreased numbers and fail to celebrate 13 baptisms and 44 new members. It's quite possible that the slight decline over the past year and a half or so has actually made us stronger and healthier for the long-term. Plus, church growth — like personal spiritual growth — is not usually up-and-to-the-right. It's often more like a chaotic loop, with drops and rises, that we hope will ultimately move upward over time. And, on top of that, theologically, we realize that while we might plant and water, it's ultimately God who gives the growth.

At the same time, we don't want to hide our head in the sand, because numbers mean people — people who need to become and then grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Theologically, we must remember that faith in God does not mean we are passive; biblical faithfulness should create urgency and action to see more and more people follow Jesus (just think of the multiple times in Acts where the growth of the church is mentioned as God's Spirit moves and the church grows spiritually and numerically).

3.2 Subjective Assessment

So, those are some numbers, but what about things that are harder to count? Where are we as a church when it comes to spiritual health and internal dynamics? There are so many things to be proud of — physical care for one another and people in the community, our relationship with other churches and with the local school systems, consistent attendance and giving, a solid staff, growing welcome team, new mission partnerships — the list could go on.

But, just like the numbers, there are things we need to pay attention to. I'm going to mention four. Before I do, two quick things about this list. First, these factors could still be in place if our numbers were up; so, they're not directly connected to numbers, but these factors can certainly impact numbers. Also, there's a good chance you might list different things than me, and I'd love to hear those as well. But as I've prayed for our church and stayed up late working on this document, these are what stand out to me.

3.2.1 Staff Effectiveness / Feeling Responsible

When I think about where we are, I need to begin by looking at myself. "God, let me check my own heart and own life first." And, we have to do this same thing as a staff.

We have an amazing staff! But, part of being an amazing staff is that we realize if things aren't going the way we want, we refuse to shift the blame. Instead, we look inside. We ask the hard questions; we have candid conversations; we take responsibility; and then we find ways to move ahead together. A healthy, wise, hard-working staff should position a church for both internal and external growth.

As a staff, we want to be good models of sharing the Gospel, inviting people, and living a life of Gospel urgency. We can't ask you to do things we're not willing to do ourselves. And, we commit to lead with open hands. None of us wants to protect a program, event, or ministry that isn't helping our church do what God has called us to do.

So, when we assess our situation, know that your pastors and staff leaders want to begin with ourselves. Are we doing the work of equipping the saints for works of ministry; of coaching, training and facilitating; of keeping watch over the souls of our people; of building up others and not trying to do everything ourselves? This is an imperfect process, but we want to get better and make sure we're focused on things that make the most Kingdom impact.

3.2.2 Individualism / Not Feeling Connected

I hear from people — both newcomers and long-timers — that they sometimes have a hard time feeling connected at Emmaus. Granted, getting connected is a two-way street. We could offer multiple avenues, yet a guest or member must still take personal responsibility to jump in and get involved. But, I hear about this struggle with connection enough that it has my attention. Connection can mean a lot of things, but it usually has to do with forming relationships and finding a place to serve. Craig Groeschel, Pastor at Life.Church, says this well when he says, “People want to be KNOWN AND NEEDED.”

When it comes to connections, we have to ask the hard questions. “Why do people struggle connecting at Emmaus? What prevents people from plugging in? Why don’t people feel needed or known?” These questions may take years to untangle, but we want to focus on them in the days ahead. When we think about Emmaus, do we think about several talented individuals, or a group of people working together, always looking out for one another and resisting the pull of isolation and individualism?

3.2.3 Busyness / Feeling Overwhelmed

I get the sense that a lot of people are busy and feel overwhelmed, not only with life, but also with church. Again, there is an element of personal responsibility here. Each person must be willing to say “no” at the right time, so they don’t become overwhelmed. But, we don’t want to create a church culture in which people feel so overwhelmed with information, options, and requests that they become frustrated or disconnected.

Most of us, in everyday life, are bombarded with too much information and too many requests. Pretty soon, all this information just becomes white noise that we filter out. Plus, we get distracted from what is most important. We have more options than ever, yet often feel paralyzed or worthless. And, we have more contact with people than ever — especially online — yet feel lonely and disconnected. Our hope is that the church would not contribute to these feelings, but give you a way to battle and overcome them.

We’re going to work hard at our calendar and communications this next year to help you feel focused, not overwhelmed. Among several strategies, we’re counting on the full development of our Worship Center Lobby and Missions Center to be a huge step forward. Construction delays have pushed this back by a few months; but when finished, the Missions Center and Lobby should provide clear ways to know what is going on and how to get involved.

3.2.4 Earthly Perspective / Apathy / Consumerism

It’s hard to know how to term this final factor; but I sense it at times in my own life, and it’s something we need to fight against regularly as a church. If we’re not careful, each of us can lose sight of eternity and become apathetic about spiritual things. Or, without meaning to, we even lapse into a consumer view of church, where our first question is, “What’s in it for me?”

The only way to battle against this is with prayer and personal spiritual renewal. We have to battle against the spiritual apathy that can set up shop in our hearts and minds. We want to fight complacency and bitterness, or even a sense that nothing matters, no one cares about me, and what I do doesn't really matter.

Instead, we are called to be the Body, the Bride, the Temple, the Family, the Church of God, reminding each other that what we see now is only part of the story. We want to build a church where people care deeply about God's glory and the eternal, spiritual health of others. When we think and live this way, we'll lay down our preferences, lay down our pride, and do whatever it takes to see others know and follow Jesus.

4. Moving Ahead: Back to the Basics

Okay, so that's an assessment of where we are now — exciting stories, slight decline in attendance, a few under-the-surface dynamics that require attention, but overall solid.

Now, the big question: how do we move forward? First, to move forward, we need to refocus on the basics — the fundamentals, the blocking-and-tackling, the chord charts, the blueprints. Second, we need to consider some hard decisions and changes that might propel us forward (once again acknowledging that forward movement comes only from God's Spirit according to His perfect will).

4.1 We exist to Proclaim and Display Jesus — Up, In, and Out

I know you might get tired of hearing it, but don't miss the basic purpose of this phrase.

We exist = Church isn't "I" but "We." We are in this together. We live out the one another's of Scripture. We are connected to all believers everywhere, yet the New Testament emphasizes the importance of gathering with a local church. We don't attend church; we are the church.

Proclaim = What we do with our words. We speak about Jesus. He is the hope of the world. One way we gauge success at Emmaus is how much people talk about Jesus.

Display = What we do with our actions. Our words and actions need to match. We want to live in a way that shows we are followers of Jesus, and Scripture says people will know this by our love. Our lives should glorify God and point people to Jesus, not draw attention to self.

2 Corinthians 4:5 = This mentality is based on our church verse — "What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." Or, as we often say, "We have nothing to prove, no one to impress, only Jesus to serve."

UP, IN, OUT = My hope is that these terms — UP, IN, and OUT — will provide guidance for your Christian life and for our church. If you ever think, "What should I be doing with my time?" or "What should I be involved in at church?" these terms are your guide.

-UP = Passionate Worship - Are you regularly gathering for worship with the church, from a heart already overflowing with worship on a daily basis?

-IN = Transformational Discipleship - Are you getting God's Word into your life, getting involved in the lives of other believers, and finding ways to use your gifts to serve in the Church to make us stronger?

-OUT = Evangelistic Mission - Are you supporting the mission efforts of the church and personally sharing the Gospel with others through your words and actions?

4.1.1 UP (Worship)

Worship is our response to the revelation of God, to who God is and what He has done. Worship is only partially related to music. Music is one way that we respond to God; but at its core, worship is a continual response to God in every area of life. So, when we gather on Sundays, we gather as worshippers. We gather as those who have worshipped throughout the week. But we also gather as those who are weak, who struggle, who are hurting and distracted. Ideally, when we gather, our corporate worship is an overflow of what's been happening during the week on a personal and family level. But, just as often, the worship gathering is our chance to refocus and be reminded of how great God is and how good the Gospel of Jesus really is.

What should be the basics of gathered worship at Emmaus?

- We refuse simply to show up to listen or consume. Instead, we seek to be fully devoted followers of Jesus, who sing not only to God, but also with and to one another.
- We not only pray silently and privately; we look for chances to pray with others or call out with them in praise to God.
- We're constantly looking for those who are new or disconnected. When we walk into the Worship Center, our first glance isn't our seat, but who is new and sitting alone.
- What happens before and after the worship gathering is just as much an act of worship as any song we sing or money we give.
- We are dedicated to prayer and praise; the Word and the ordinances.

This is what UP means as we gather; and when this is true, it will inevitably shape us and impact how we live during the week.

4.1.2 IN (Discipleship)

IN is about how God transforms our lives from the inside out. We refuse to practice a form of religion that looks good on the outside but fails to impact our hearts and minds.

*IN the Word - We want to get God's Word in our lives, so that it takes root and shapes us. We do this individually during the week as we read and listen to Scripture. But, we also want to do this when we gather for corporate worship and meet together in groups.

*IN a Group - We grow spiritually when we are in relationship with others. Often, this begins with a Sunday School class. These Sunday morning groups are good connection points, allowing us to connect with God's Word and with friends.

Many times, though, we get a feeling that Sunday School doesn't have enough time or isn't set up to do everything we'd like to do in a group. So, we join with others in smaller groups for accountability, confession, prayer, and encouragement. These groups might be several families meeting in a home; a few people together in a coffee shop; or friends gathered for prayer and a meal. At the end of the day, we just want to make sure every member at Emmaus is connected to other believers whom you can call at 2am, who love you enough to speak the truth in love, and who want the best for you.

*IN Use - As God transforms us, He provides spiritual gifts that allow us to serve and build up the church. When people serve, they inevitably build relationships. So, we want to make sure every member has a place — on Sunday morning, in their group, during the week, it doesn't matter when or where — just a place to make an impact for God's glory, the good of others, and their own joy.

So, the IN basics are:

- Am I consuming and studying God's Word?
- Am I in a group that helps me grow and mature — whether that's a Sunday School class, small group, or other study?
- Am I using my gifts and talents to strengthen other believers and serve the church?

4.1.3 OUT (Missions)

What God does in us, He also wants to do through us. We are transformed on the inside, so that the love and truth of Jesus will come out in our words and actions. We do this both in our neighborhoods and among the nations. We do it where we live, learn, work, and play. This involves spiritual conversations, acts of service, praying with people who are hurting, hospitality in your home, a Bible study or prayer time in the morning at your workplace, or any other avenue to proclaim and display the Gospel.

As we go in our neighborhoods, God is taking us to places of brokenness. This looks like hunger, homelessness, adoption and foster care, prisons and jails, medical care and mental health services, education, senior adult care, immigrants and English as a second language groups, hard marriage and parenting situations. Whatever the hurt and brokenness, we are able to show how the Good News of Jesus leads us back to God's design for our lives and for the world.

When you come to a church gathering or event, try not to come alone. Invite someone to come with you who isn't a Christian — or is a very new Christian — then invest in that person's life. When you go out on a church service project, try not to go alone. Someone who is not a Christian might love to participate in the service or mission project, and in the process you can share why you do what you do.

5. Moving Ahead: Beyond the Crossroads

With those basics in place, let's think about some decisions and plans for the next year — or more likely, the next 3-5 years. Doug Melton, the great pastor at Southern Hills Baptist Church up the road, gave me four words he uses for planning: *personnel, programs, property, and people groups*. Those are helpful words tonight...plus they all start with P. So, blame Doug for the alliteration, because he's a popular pastor who probably prefers purple pleated pants when he passionately preaches.

5.1 Personnel

Our primary goal in 2020 for personnel is to solidify the music leadership position so we no longer need to operate in limbo. (Solidify might not even be the right word, because it makes it sound like we're trying to set something in stone and never change it. We know church and life don't work that way.)

We sometimes joke that David must be close to setting a record for longest Music Director interim at a church. If you don't know, David Hillis has served as the interim music leader for 8 years, plus 2 years before that as the Music Associate at Emmaus. There are numerous reasons why this period has lasted so long, but suffice it to say, David has ministered consistently and excellently. We owe it to him and his family — and to Emmaus as a whole — to seek God's direction and make decisions about the future. And, as we've talked with David about this plan, his response was exactly what you'd expect — supportive, wise, and kind.

To be clear, the discussion over the next few months will not be, "Should we keep David or not?" No one benefits from that conversation; and it misses the point of what we're seeking to do. Our prayers and conversations will focus on developing a plan for musical worship in our church and identifying who (maybe 1 person; maybe multiple) should lead this plan. For now, we've put together a basic profile for music leadership, but the details remain undetermined. Because of this, I'd ask for your trust when I say there are no hidden agendas related to what I've presented. We don't know where God will lead us, but we believe now is the time to take the next step and move out of this long-term interim season.

Frankly, making decisions about musical leadership, programming, and style are scary. Emotions run deep when we talk about music, and we know these discussions can be difficult for a church and impact both members and guests. However, as I said earlier, we don't feel it's fair for David or for our church if we further delay this process. So, the goal in 2020 is very simply that when 2021 rolls around, we're not having these same type of conversations (though, inevitably, other conversations will rise up to take their place!). As we go along, we'll keep you updated; for now, though, we just want to commit together to worship in spirit and truth each week as we sing, pray, fellowship, study Scripture, and respond to God's grace.

5.2 Programs

Our key decision for programming in 2020 isn't about one specific program, but it impacts all programming because we need to decide whether or not to remain in only one Sunday morning worship service. You might say, "Owen, did you not listen to the beginning of your presentation? We are putting 540 people in a room that seats almost 1,100. That sounds crazy to go to two services at a time like this."

Let me explain why we're considering this. When you track the attendance numbers at Emmaus, they show a steady upward trend from the mid-1990s through the mid-2000s, peaking around 2008/2009. Attendance then began to turn downward in 2009. The downward trend in 2009 could've been for several reasons, but it coincides exactly with when we left multiple services and moved into the new, bigger building. While the hope was that one service in a larger building would bring unity, we often find ourselves spread out in the building with minimal interaction in the worship center. Guests are often found sitting alone; and while the stadium seating might be preferable for some people, it's easy to become disconnected and distracted up there (plus, to the people on stage, you feel like you're a million miles away).

Multiple services are complicated, I know, but they allow more people a chance to serve and more opportunities for people to engage. The trend in churches today is sharply toward smaller buildings and more services. God's work in a church is often counter-intuitive, and it may well be that we need to divide in order to multiply. In recent meetings with two older pastors, both told me that a consistent key to their church growth was starting new services and groups.

Before moving on, let me be clear again — a move to two worship services is *far* from certain. In just a few weeks, our staff will get away for an annual planning retreat. One of our main topics will be whether or not to pursue this change. There are obviously reasons for and against; pray that we will use both faith and wisdom in this decision.

5.3 Property

Our key property goal for 2020 is the establishment of a campus master plan, with particular attention to locating and building a new preschool/children's building. Again, you might say, "You're even crazier now, Owen. First, you're trying to move us to two services; now you want to build!" As with two services, this decision is *miles* from being finalized, but let's talk through some of the pros and cons.

As I understand it, when decisions were being made 12-15 years ago for a new building at Emmaus, there was some debate about whether a children's building or a worship center was needed first. The worship building was built first; and say what we want about that decision, this building allowed our church to host elementary schools after the tornados and has given us a connection with the community we probably wouldn't have had otherwise.

However, we're now 10+ years down the road and debt free, but there's no children's building in sight. A key reason that First Baptist planted Emmaus in the 1980s was to reach the neighborhoods they hoped would grow up around this area. In many ways, their vision has come to fruition, and we want to make sure we don't miss out on a chance to minister effectively to families in our area.

It's true that our staff and volunteers have done a great job accommodating families and their kids in the current building. But we shouldn't miss that when families visit, we have to take their kids to the oldest building on campus; and the nursery is quite far from the main building which is not ideal for new moms. Plus, the older building has multiple access points and narrow hallways, neither of which is good for security. Add to this that the weekday Compass Preschool has taken off in a big way and shows no signs of slowing.

The obvious con to building right now would be the cost required at a time when overall attendance is slightly down and our finances are healthy, but not extravagant. I acknowledge this challenge — and we don't want to rush into something foolishly — but when I ask myself if we can afford to build right now, another question comes to mind: "Can we afford *not* to build?" If not now, when? If not soon, why not?

Please pray with us fervently this year as we establish a master plan and seek God's direction about whether or not we should pursue a giving campaign and a building. It scares me to say that, but I know we can't kick the can too far down the road on a key decision like this.

5.4 People Groups

What we mean by people groups is simply those people with whom God has given us favor and connections. It's another way of saying — where should we invest missions money and ministry teams both here and around the world? A key goal in 2020 is that we're working toward a Missions Celebration in the Fall, where we would bring in missionaries that we support and use them to train us to make an impact in our neighborhoods and the nations. We also want to continue paying attention to points of brokenness in our community and how God might call us to shine the light and hope of Jesus into those areas. These opportunities are open-ended for sure, and we want to become just as wise at saying "no" as we are at saying "yes."

People groups in our neighborhoods include those who don't speak English as a first language; and we have many people from an Asian background in our area. God has given us some connections with families who have special needs. We also have a wonderful relationship with our local schools, teachers, and administration. All these — and many more — are people groups God has put around us. As we move ahead, we will simply seek God's direction about where to serve. Plus, most ministry in the area doesn't even need to come from a full church program; it will happen as God gives you, your family, and your friends connections that result in sharing the Gospel.

Conclusion

I know we've covered a lot of information tonight, but I'm going to send this document tomorrow as an email attachment so you can look through it if desired, it will be available on our website, and if you don't have email, I'd be glad to give you a hardcopy. For now, though, let me end in this way.

When good things come, do you ever get worried, dreading that something bad is around the corner? When bad things come, do you feel like you're being paid back for something or fear that things will only get worse? I know I've felt these things at times. But, I want to point us in a different direction, to see our thinking transformed by Christ.

Followers of Jesus Christ should be the most hopeful people in the entire world. We don't fear that bad will follow good, because we believe every good and perfect gift comes from God. And, we don't fear when the bad comes — including the tests and trials — because we know God is in charge of these things and will ultimately use them to shape us for His glory. Plus, we know evil, sin, and death have ultimately been defeated on the Cross and through the Resurrection.

As followers of Jesus, we don't live with panic or dread. God is Sovereign and is not panicking; Jesus is still building His Church; the Holy Spirit is still at work; the Word of God is still living and active. In a time like this, urgency is a Godly response; fear and despair are not.

When I think about Emmaus, I have incredible hope. Not because of me, that's for sure. But because God is at work and we are built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. So, here's my plea: let's choose to see our current situation as a God-given opportunity to display His Glory to the world. Let's come together with hope and peace, joyfully anticipating what God is going to do in and through us. Let's commit to Gospel urgency, fervent prayer, and personal spiritual renewal. Let's not despair; and let's definitely not draw back in fear; instead, let's advance the Gospel together with greater faith and resolve than ever before.

Proverbs 21:31 - "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord."

Ephesians 3:20-21 - "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."



Dr. Owen Nease
owen@emmausokc.org