

**Emmaus Baptist Church — State of the Church Address**  
**Wednesday, December 6, 2017**

I want to begin tonight the same way we started this address last year, because our mission doesn't change.

We exist to proclaim and display Jesus. Everything we say and do—every word and every action—must be about making known the hope and victory of Jesus.

We do this Up, In, and Out.

We live “Up” through Worship, realizing everything we have is *from* God and everything we have is *for* God. We worship Him individually in every moment throughout the week, and we gather corporately to worship Him as a church.

We live “In” through Discipleship as followers of Jesus. We grow in our relationship with God and our relationships with others, as God changes us from the inside out through His Word, His Spirit, and His Church.

We live “Out” through Missions. What God does in us—individually and corporately—should spill out to those around us. We give, go, pray, and serve so others will know the Good News of Jesus Christ. We do these things *here*—where we live, learn, work, and play—and we do them *far*—where people have never heard the name of Jesus.

Prayerfully, this approach reflects God's character—one God, three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One church; three facets—Worship to the Glory of God, Discipleship in the Image of God, and Missions by the Power of God. These are not separate pieces we pick and choose; they are 3 inter-locking realities of our mission.

The statement that we exist to proclaim and display Jesus, and the references to Up, In, and Out, are purposefully general. Different churches present these concepts in different language. We're simply trying to summarize and set before you the mission that God has given His people throughout Scripture.

In addition, don't miss that our Up, In, and Out language should bring simplicity and freedom to your life, your family, and our church. The words are a filter through which we run our programming, balance our schedules, and assess our growth. For your life, and for your family, all we want you to do is take a look and say, “Am I doing these things?” And, “Do they fit together into a holistic picture of spiritual growth and impact?”

- UP- Am I worshipping during the week and gathering for worship regularly and passionately?
- IN- Am I growing in faith through spiritual disciplines—prayer, Bible study, serving through my spiritual gifts, rest, etc.—and in my relationships with other Christians through a small group/Sunday School class?

- OUT- Am I giving financially, praying for missionaries, and actively going so others will know about Jesus?

### **Quick Review**

As we look back this year, we celebrate powerful times of worship and baptism, the addition of new members, the development of new small groups, major improvements in communication, a new mission partnership in Calgary, local missions through Serve Day and Mission Emmaus, a new cabin for Falls Creek, and consistent maintenance, updates, and best of all, use of our facilities. This is one of my favorite parts of Emmaus—that God has provided us with these buildings and resources, but you all refuse to let them sit idle. They're used to minister to our community and build relationships.

### **Music Ministry**

I know questions remain about music leadership at Emmaus, so let me address that area as best I can early in our time tonight. Within my first few weeks at Emmaus, I sat down with Hance Dilbeck who was recently named the new Executive Director of Oklahoma Baptists (a reason to celebrate from my perspective...I love Dr. Jordan and I believe Dr. Dilbeck is the right man to follow Dr. Jordan). Hance told me that situations in leadership will arise when, from an outside perspective, a process looks stalled and you appear passive. Instead, you're learning about the church, having productive conversations, seeking God's counsel, and trusting that it's God who builds His Church, not your personality or the talent of anyone on staff or on the stage.

I feel that's where we are, because in the last year I've come to know our church better, and to know myself better. I've had productive conversations with the staff and the Personnel Committee, not to mention multiple side conversations with our members and with other pastors. We've utilized different worship teams and styles, including some great times of musical worship at Wednesday Worship. And mostly I've come to understand how many factors are inter-related with music ministry, including how we structure our staff, how we steward budget dollars, how we utilize our worship center, and how we work through generational tensions.

I can tell you this—I feel more confident than ever about God's guidance in this area of our church. Any concerns about music ministry should be immediately alleviated by the fact that, week in and week out, we have music quality and leadership that is excellent, humble, and spiritually mature. David continues to lead faithfully and consistently, with an open heart about how he can best serve Emmaus and God's Kingdom, and I thank God for him. And I pray that what might look like passivity on my part would instead be seen as an honest desire to seek God's guidance for our church instead of just doing something because we've always done it and then asking God to bless that. As I said last year, I'd ask you to keep an open mind that musical leadership in the church might not look the same as it has in the past. This role—what we pay for, what we expect, what this person does during the week, whether or not it's one full-time person or multiple part-time people—will require a lot of flexibility from us as a church. But what won't change is a commitment to gather for worship in spirit and in truth.

### **By-Laws and Member ReConnect**

A more technical, but still important, project from this past year has been an update to our By-Laws to clarify who we are and how we operate as a church. The project won't be complete until next week's Business Meeting, but the progress has been beneficial.

One project related to the By-Laws that you might not have heard of is called Member ReConnect. As of Summer 2017, the Emmaus records showed over 2,500 members. But, put simply, church membership is not about having your name on a list. The phrase 'Inactive Church Member' is not helpful or spiritually healthy, even though churches have used that phrase over the years.

Members are those who have committed themselves to a local church to worship, grow, and serve, not for personal preferences or conveniences, but in order to use their gifts to build up the body and further God's Kingdom. Multiple studies have shown that higher expectations for church members result in healthier churches. We've tried to raise the expectations through our Membership Classes and presentation of new Members with a commitment from 2 Corinthians 4:5. The Member ReConnect project is an extension of this focus on membership.

So, what is it? The Member ReConnect Team is made up of staff and Emmaus members who are going through our list of members to reach out to those who haven't been attending. The goal of this project isn't to clean up the rolls, so to speak. Instead, the goal is to take seriously what Scripture says about caring for one another and keeping watch over another (Hebrews 13:17). We're leaving the 99 to make sure the 1 is found and cared for, whether that care happens at Emmaus or another church. So far, we've gone through over 1,500 names and made some significant contacts.

### **Church Growth**

As we discuss Membership rolls, that brings up the question of church growth. Church growth comes in two forms: growth in terms of spiritual maturity and fruitfulness, and also growth in terms of numbers. I'd like to address both of these for a couple of minutes, then wrap up by looking toward the future with anticipation.

In terms of numerical church growth, it's very important we establish there is no such thing as church growth that isn't evangelistic church growth. Here's what I mean- we can't say our church is growing if people are simply moving from another church to our church. Certainly some of that happens because people move into the area; additionally, I know there are times when, because of a new season in life or unhealthy situations at another church, there is need for church transfer. But biblically, that's still not numerical church growth, because the Church of Jesus Christ hasn't increased in number when a person transfers from one local church to another.

At Emmaus, we must confess—and it begins with me as Pastor—that we have grown over the years largely from transfer growth. And in many ways, I believe God mercifully guards us from accelerated numerical growth because such growth would probably come from further transfer growth, which in turn would cause people to focus on us not

God, and could easily gloss over the tremendous need we have for evangelistic growth. I realize that could sound like a desperate attempt to spin the data and explain why we haven't seen significant increase in attendance, but I stand by it with a clear conscience. When it comes to numerical church growth, everyone of us—whether you've been here for decades, recently moved in, or are looking to transfer here—must commit ourselves to evangelistic church growth.

This evangelistic church growth will come in part as we begin having more Gospel conversations among ourselves. It sometimes feels uncomfortable talking about the Gospel to others, because we're not talking about God's goodness and power among ourselves. Worship, prayer, fellowship, and Bible study should drive our evangelism, not hinder it. In short, we must get serious about sharing the Gospel personally and corporately, not attracting more church people.

### **Confronting Apathy and Pursuing Revival**

Tied to this need for evangelistic growth is our need—once again starting with me—for deep, spiritual renewal. As a church, we have to ask if we are drawn to the idols of comfort and tradition. Stability in a church is a great thing, so don't misunderstand me here; but Gospel peace and casual comfort can be hard to distinguish on first glance. If our things changed—our model of ministry, or meeting times, or the set-up of the building, or the number of services, or the time for small groups, or the aesthetics, or the existence of a program, or the people attending—would we be more worried about losing those things than what we might gain for worship, discipleship, and missions?

But there's something more going on here, beyond programming or a model of ministry. I see it in the deceptiveness of my own heart and I see it at times in our church. Along with comfort and stability often come their dangerous first-cousin named Apathy. So, we have to ask, are we at times apathetic—unmoved or uncaring—about the things of God? I've tried to be cautious about tying spiritual vitality to emotions, because I'm a pretty unemotional and stoic person myself. But we must search our hearts and search the deep corners of our church to find out if we understand what it means to experience a Holy and Powerful God? Do we know what it is to give ourselves fully to God? Do we know what it is for the same Spirit Who raised Jesus from the dead and propelled the Church in the Book of Acts to be at work in our lives and our church?

You could rightly ask, "What would spiritual growth and renewal look like? What do you have in mind?" I think it begins when our gathering with other believers is a matter of anticipation. And, when we gather, we come to care for others and their needs, not our own. Prayer happens spontaneously in the lobby and hallways. Conversations revolve around how we have seen God at work throughout the week. We follow up during the week with phone calls, text messages, or letters. In turn, we invest in our neighborhoods and guard our schedules so we can proclaim and display Jesus to those who are lost and broken. We anticipate guests and go out of our way to greet and serve them, especially those not like ourselves. Traditions and preferences take a back seat to fervent evangelism and sacrificial love. Our primary question isn't, "Do I like this?" but "Am I giving myself completely to God and His people?"

These things I've mentioned aren't a matter of young versus old, Pharisee versus Prodigal. They apply to everyone of us, the Pastor and Staff first of all. In addition, this way of living can't be manufactured or faked; when it's manufactured or faked, that's the worst kind of hypocrisy and just seems so weak and hokey. Instead, we experience spiritual renewal from the overflow of what God is doing in our lives through His Spirit and Word.

### **The Future**

You might be tempted to say, "Owen, you seem negative or discouraged or even frustrated from those last couple of paragraphs?" I want to say as clearly as possible that I couldn't be more excited about Emmaus and where we're headed; not to mention the fact that many of the things I just said are already happening in our church. Even more, when challenges come up and when I sense this spiritual apathy in our church, I want to address these things. And here's the thing, I want to go through them *with you*.

God did not call me and my family to pastor First Baptist West, or Graceway South, or Newcastle North. God called us to Emmaus. I am seeking His direction and power for this people in this place at this time. We will honor the past and learn from it, but we won't live in it. There are too many people around the world who need to hear about Jesus, too many people next-door broken and lost in sin and pain, too many marriages crumbling and children hurting, too many teenagers without hope, and too many senior adults wasting their final season of life, for us to live for our anything less than a powerful outpouring of God's power in and through our lives.

So we will lay down our preferences, we will lay down our plans, and we will lay down our lives in order to get the Gospel to those around us, even while this same Gospel transforms our lives, families, and church from the inside out.

We say with the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:7-11, "Whatever gain I had, I count as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

Seeking to serve *with you* and *for Him*,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Owen Nease". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and email address.

Dr. Owen Nease  
owen@emmausokc.org