

Emmaus Baptist Church — State of the Church Address
Sunday, December 3, 2023

1. A Small Obsession with the Number 3

3 years and 4 days from today – on Sunday, December 7, 2026 – Emmaus will celebrate its 40th anniversary as a church.

As you might know, I suffer from a small obsession with the number 3. I like to think it's a God thing (the Trinity!) or a reflection of God's character built into the world (think of the use of "thirds" in art and photography or the series of three lines often used by comedians), but it could just as likely be a symptom of my overthinking.

At the conclusion of each of the past 8 years, I've presented a State of the Church address to summarize where we are as a church and where God might be leading us. (If you're struggling with sleep, these addresses are available online at www.emmausokc.org/state-of-the-church.) I've presented each paper during the end-of-the-year Business Meeting, but this year I wanted to incorporate part of the address into the Sunday morning worship service.

So, here's the plan. Using Hebrews 11:1-7 as the foundation for this year's address, we'll begin with a study of this passage and a focus on the theme of Faith. Then, I'd like to present a series of 3-year "frames" for our church's future. Why 3 years? Well, the number 3 of course! But also, we live in a world where things are changing so quickly that long-term planning needs to be broken down into smaller sections. Each 3-year frame must remain *incredibly* flexible – it would take a dump truck to hold all of the caveats and cautions associated with these plans – but we also can't sit back in fear and passivity. We need to move forward. We need to put our faith into action. And, I hope this year's State of the Church address will help with that.

At tonight's Business Meeting, we'll continue the conversation by studying Numbers 10, doing a quick SWOT analysis of our church, and then spending time in prayer for the future.

Let's get started this morning by reading Hebrews 11:1-7.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

2. Forward Faith - Hebrews 11:1-7

Are you a person of faith?

The term *faith* is core to our Christian life, but it's a word that also creates confusion and controversy.

Fuzzy Faith? - We often say about people, "That person is *a person of faith*." But this phrase can describe someone from virtually any religion or even someone who is "spiritual" but has no interest in Jesus, the Bible, or the Church. Saying "I'm a person of faith" sounds good – it acknowledges there is more than just the material world and it's a great place to begin a conversation – but faith, by its very nature, has to be faith *in something (or someone)*. Faith is not just the act of trusting; faith is based on the object or person in which we trust. What we believe matters!

Intellectual Faith? - Biblical faith is more than simply holding to a set of doctrines. The Bible talks about the "faith once delivered to the saints," but even this faith – this theology – impacts how we live. Faith is not passive and not only about the mind. True theological faith is about belief-in-action. Here's another way to say it – Do we *believe* God (relationally trust Him), or do we simply *believe in* God?

Word Faith? - Another confusion about faith has to do with the so-called "word faith" movement. This is connected to a health-and-wealth, name-it-and-claim-it approach to religion. In other words, if I truly have faith, then I will receive God's blessings that I ask for – especially material blessings of money, physical healing, or promotion. These blessings are supposedly based on my amount of faith. And, this viewpoint can cause extreme hurt when someone is facing difficulty – sickness, mental health challenges, poverty – and begins to think these challenges are primarily because of their lack of faith.

Blind Faith? - How about some other phrases you might've heard? "Take a leap of faith." Or, "We need to have blind faith." These phrases aren't necessarily bad, they can be potentially misleading because they imply we have little-to-no reason to believe something. But, is that what biblical faith means? No! Biblical faith doesn't mean you leave your brain at the door. *Plus, Biblical faith has more to do with bending the knee and taking small steps, than it does with leaping into the dark.*

In "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade," Jones is at the edge of a chasm. He takes a step into what looks like thin air; his foot lands on something solid. But Jones has a map. He knows the bridge is supposed to be there; he just can't see it. And, with each step forward, the ability to take the next step gets easier, even though it's still not visible. We live by faith, not by sight; but faith still has substance.

These four types of faith – fuzzy faith; intellectual faith; word faith; blind faith – none of these will give life. None of these are the type of faith we see in Hebrews 11. So, what's going on in Hebrews 11?

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.

Forward Faith! - While not intended as a *technical* definition, Heb. 11:1 is certainly a *functional* definition of faith. Here's the key point – **The author presents *faith* in contrast to *retreat* (drawing back; shrinking back).** *The word for “assurance” in Heb. 11:1 purposefully sounds similar (in Greek) to the word for “shrinking back” in Hebrews 10:39. The author uses two words that sound similar to establish a contrast between the “retreat people” and the “faith people.” Based on this, the rest of chapter 11 into chapter 12 is a long illustration of what faith looks like when it's put into action.

So, what is faith? Here's a one word definition = **Forward**. Faith in Hebrews 11 is about endurance, perseverance, steadfast faithfulness. Faith moves forward with Jesus and forward toward eternal life.

Here's a longer explanation. *Faith = pressing forward – on the basis of God's Word, Jesus' sacrifice and example, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the example and encouragement of the Church – despite not being able to see above or beyond our current situation. This “forward faith,” which sometimes includes big steps but always includes daily faithfulness, might have different short-term results (even some hard, painful results), but will always lead us on the path of God's life, now and forever. Faith is the defining characteristic of every Christian, not just so-called heroes or saints.*

We have reasons to believe, but these reasons are not visible in the way we expect. The two parts of verse 1 – “the assurance of things hoped for” and “the conviction of things not seen” – represent the two realities we can't experience without faith: the **divine reality** (so, a “**spatial**” dimension) and the **future reality** (so, a “**temporal**” or eschatological [end times] reality). With our senses, we can't see “above” to everything God is doing, and we can't see “beyond” to where things are going, but faith is the assurance and conviction of trusting God's Word, His character, and His promises.

Verse 6 reminds us that the only way to please God is to live with faith, and that God is not unjust, but will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

Why can we have this kind of faith?

- **God's Revelation (World and Word)** - We believe God created all things that exist, and this creation came about by the power of His Word (Hebrews 11:3). What is visible is not ultimate. The created world points us to a Creator. We sense this when our hearts are drawn to justice, beauty, morality, and adventure. We sense this in math and science. We believe God is before and above all created things.

We know this most directly because God has spoken through His prophets, and He has spoken ultimately to us in His Son. His promises are certain; His Word won't pass away; and He is perfectly trustworthy. Faith isn't opposed to wisdom, but neither is faith controlled purely by common sense. Faith is based on spiritual wisdom from above, on the power and truth of God's Revelation.

- **Jesus' sacrifice and example** - Leading up to Hebrews 11, the preacher established – over and over again – the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice for us. Jesus is Better! He is the great High Priest and the perfect sacrifice for sin. We have faith because of who Jesus is and what He has done, even though we can't physically see Him reigning and even though He has not yet returned to bring final salvation and judgment. Plus, we are able to move forward in faith because Jesus' life and ministry was an example of this endurance (we'll see this more as Hebrews 11 concludes and transitions into 12:1-3 on Christmas Eve).
- **The Holy Spirit's guidance and power** - The Holy Spirit indwells, empowers, and guides us. We are filled with the Spirit and able to walk in faith – to keep going, to follow Jesus. Plus, the Spirit's work in our lives is the “guarantee” of future, eternal life (Ephesians 1:13-14). This is why Craig Keener writes, “[The] future reality invades our lives by the Spirit. The Spirit is promised for the future age, but through Him we can taste God's presence and power in our lives in the present.”
- **The Church's example and encouragement** - Additionally, God gives us one another – He gives us the church – to encourage us to keep going in faith. We need one another. We need the local church and the global church. But, we also need the historic church – people of faith throughout history who have believed God's promises, remained faithful, and kept moving forward even when it didn't feel like or look like things were going well.

Beyond the initial comments about faith, Hebrews 11 is probably most famous for being the “Hall of Faith” chapter. In this chapter, we see multiple examples of faith throughout history. These examples were looking forward to salvation; and as we look back to Christ's death and resurrection, we can learn from their example of persevering and moving forward.

We'll look at several examples in the two weeks ahead, but the opening verses of Hebrews focus on Abel, Enoch, and Noah. What do each of these characters have in common at the beginning of this Faith chapter? **Each believed God deeply for the future, and this led them to live faithfully for God when others around them were not.**

***Abel made sacrifices.** Does our faith lead us to live sacrificially toward God and others?

***Enoch walked with God** and lived in a way that pleased God. Does our faith lead to holiness?

***Noah obeyed God with reverence**, building a boat when rain was nowhere in sight. Does our faith lead us to put our faith into action each day, no matter how others might be living?

I think the best summary of this type of faith is found in Romans 12:1-2 - *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies as a living sacrifice [Abel]**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **Do not be conformed to this world [Enoch]**, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may **discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect [Noah]**.*

Each of these characters took steps of faith over a long period of time, and God rewarded each – though not in the same way or at the same speed! – with salvation and eternal life. Faith isn't a formula. Faith doesn't always produce the immediate results we want, but God is ALWAYS faithful to carry His people of faith into a future of eternal life and New Creation.

Faith has an eternal focus that produces daily faithfulness. Faith is future looking, allowing us to see beyond the material world and beyond the present time. But faith involves a tension – sometimes it means making plans for the future and taking risks; other times it simply means walking faithfully each day in the Spirit. Faith and wisdom aren't enemies. Because we have faith that God's promises are true, that His future is good, that His way leads to life, we remain faithful to Him in the present and we move forward with confidence and hope. This hope leads to action – action that testifies to God's power and love and goodness.

***Faith isn't a matter of having every step outlined for us. Sometimes God leads with a pillar of smoke and fire; sometimes He leads with a Bible verse and well-timed conversation; sometimes He leads with the lifelong formation of spiritual wisdom. But we can know that God always leads His people forward. The question is, Will we trust Him?

What does this mean for your life?

- We have to ask - Am I moving forward in faith, or am I shrinking back from God – from His people and His mission – in fear?
- Do I have assurance and confidence for the future, especially eternity?
 - If you're struggling with doubts or fear, reach out to someone today.
 - Don't doubt alone. You are surrounded by people who will love and encourage you.
- Is every decision in my life determined by what I can see and control, or am I allowing God's Word, the example of Jesus, the guidance of the Spirit, and the encouragement of the Church to help me live with faith and take steps I wouldn't take otherwise?
- What step of faith is God calling me to take (generosity; marriage; work; ministry; etc.) that requires moving forward even though I can't see every step on the path ahead?

What does this mean for our church?

- We must move forward in faith. We can't allow fear or apathy to prevent us from continuing the mission of making disciples, strengthening the church, and advancing the Gospel.
- This pathway of faith will – in *many* ways – look similar to what we've been doing for 37 years: an emphasis on the Word of God; a commitment to proclaim and display Jesus to our neighbors and the nations; and a spirit of humility, unity, and love.
- A bunch of faithful little steps will prepare us for the future. But the path forward will *definitely* require some big steps of faith.
- Before we consider these steps, let's look back to see God's faithfulness and work in our church this past year.

3. Looking Back: Part 1

Each year, in the State of the Church, we look back at God's faithfulness during the previous year. I've put together a Top 10 List (not in order of importance!) for 2023. We'll look at five examples this morning. Come back this evening (or flip ahead to page 13) to see the other five.

1. Baptisms

- a. So far this year, we've had 32 baptisms. At one point, we celebrated baptism 7 out of 9 weeks in a row. Some "church numbers" matter more than others. Baptisms matter!
- b. If you have questions about baptism, please reach out to someone around you or to me (owen@emmausokc.org; 580-658-0652). I'd love to talk with you about this step of faith. Make the holiday season of 2023 or the beginning of 2024 the time for your baptism.

2. New Church Members

- a. This year, we've seen 73 new members join Emmaus.¹
- b. ***How does someone become a member at Emmaus?**
 - i. **On the 2nd Sunday of each month, we offer a New Member Info Meeting in the main lobby.** This is a chance to talk through expectations for membership and to help guests get a better understanding of our church.
 - ii. Following this class, we meet with prospective members to hear their testimony, then new members are presented to the church at various points during the year.
- c. ***What about Discover Emmaus?**
 - i. For several years, we've offered a free lunch for guests 5-6 times per year. This Discover Emmaus Lunch hasn't been required for membership, but it's been a helpful first step. In 2024, we're going to make a slight adjustment (and if the experiment doesn't work, we'll simply change back to the lunch plan).
 - ii. **For 2024, we're going to offer a Discover Emmaus "Brunch" at 9:30am in the Main Lobby on the first Sunday of each month.** This will be a good first step for guests (not required for membership). Plus, I'll still be asking members to come as table hosts to this Discover Emmaus Brunch, since guests have really benefited from connecting with Emmaus members at our previous lunches.
 - iii. Hopefully (famous last words), this strategy will be simpler and allow us to connect with even more guests. Plus, it'll be easier to communicate and easier for you all to remember. Invite someone! Come with them!
 1. Know a guest who wants to take a "**first step**"? That's the **First Sunday** of each month, in the main lobby, during Sunday School, for the **Discover Emmaus Brunch**.
 2. Know someone who wants to move toward **membership**? That's the **Second Sunday** of each month, in the main lobby, during Sunday School, for the **New Member Info Meeting**.

¹ Up to this point in the year, we have averaged 585 in attendance on Sunday mornings. This is just short of our 2019 average. It's +65 from last year and +112 from 2021.

3. College and Career / Young Adults and Young Couples

- a. God has brought multiple people into our Young Adult Ministry. (This ministry area is infamous for being hard to label and categorize. Essentially, the area I'm talking about is 18-29 years old, but 29 can easily turn into 33, or 39, or 41, or 99!)
- b. The Young Adult Ministry at Emmaus meets all together at times (hibachi!!), while also dividing up for Sunday School and small groups. As more students head straight into the workforce, our "younger" group is a combination of College and Career. The "older" group is a combination of single young adults and young marrieds.
- c. These young adults do an amazing job encouraging one another in various seasons and stages of life, when it'd be so easy to disconnect from faith or church. I thank God for how kind He has been to us in this area, and I look forward to the years ahead.

4. West Property

- a. Phase 1 of the Master Plan is 90+% finished. The West Property pavilion and walking track are being used consistently, the new barn is much more secure, and we already have groups asking us about using the property in the Spring for sports and events.
- b. We're finishing up a few small projects (tables, trash cans, sport-court lines, signs, etc) with some remaining funds, but any other major projects (batting cages, new irrigation, etc) on the West Property will come from designated funds or outside investment, because we need to move our focus and funding toward Phase 2 of the master plan.

5. New Falls Creek Cabin ... Same Falls Creek Celebrations

- a. First, it was Ranch o' Ponca (FBC Ponca City); then it was Sharon Baptist Chickasha; now it's First Baptist Durant, which has a great location and plenty of room for growth.
- b. No matter the location, Falls Creek remains a key way to invest in students, connect adult volunteers, and see lives changed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

4. Looking Ahead

In this section, I want to walk through a series of four 3-year frames. For each frame, we'll focus on both "who" and "what". Faith shapes our character (the who) and guides our actions (the what).

2024 includes many unknowns – Continued war in Ukraine; the Israel-Gaza war; uncertainty about China's actions in Taiwan; another presidential election (!); the global refugee crisis; deep economic uncertainty. And, those are the obstacles furthest from us. I'll mention more, closer to home, tonight.

With this uncertainty in mind, **why develop these long-term frames?** Two words: **Preparation** and **Margin**. By being prepared and building margin – both time and money – we'll be less likely to force our own plans to happen and more likely to continually seek God's will and purposes. We want to be prepared to respond to God's work in our lives. As we grow spiritually and consider the future with wisdom and faith, we will be ready to respond to the direction of God's Spirit (just ask our members who went through the 'Experiencing God' study this past year!).

*The fun of the next few pages only works with deep trust in God's sovereignty, a commitment to humble faith, a focus on loving people over programs or buildings, and a crystal clear focus on worship, discipleship, and missions. We establish frames, knowing that even as we make plans, He will often work in unexpected ways.

- *"The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes His steps." (Proverbs 16:9)*
- *"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring." (Proverbs 27:1)*
- *"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit' — yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'" (James 4:13-15)*

So, with those humbling reminders in place, what's a pathway forward?

2024 - 2026 : Frame #1 = "Strengthen"

***Who might we become?** Connected. Strengthened. Focused. Prepared.

***What might we do?** Develop disciples and leaders. Increase giving and revenue. Establish a Missions Advisory Team, and develop ad-hoc teams to prepare for 40th Anniversary and Frame #2.

- ***Strengthen our Biblical and Theological Focus***
 - UP: PRAYER AND PRAISE
 - Continue to focus on prayer, corporate singing, and the ordinances
 - Continue to develop and share sermons based on God's Word
 - IN: EQUIP AND ENCOURAGE
 - *Sunday School* - great first step for relationships, encouragement, and Scripture
 - *Small Groups* - join up with a few people – or a few other couples/families – to focus on building strong relationships for support and spiritual growth
 - *Equipping Classes* - offered at various times (often Wednesday nights) to focus on a book or theme and connect with people you might not know otherwise
 - ****Plus, we need to focus on connecting with those who are homebound or who work almost every Sunday. How can we extend our arms around these folks?**
- ***Strengthen our Missional Focus***
 - OUT: GIVE AND GO
 - Evaluate mission partnerships through a *Missions Advisory Team*
 - Prepare for our 40th Anniversary coming up in 2026
 - Establish a *40th Anniversary Advisory Team*

- **Strengthen our *Financial Base* for the Budget, Missions, and Phase 2 of the Master Plan**
 - Increase Overall Budgeted Giving to Build Margin, Absorb Inflation, and Match Growth
 - Increase the Future Building Budget Line Item
 - **2024** - projected Future Building Budget Line = \$150,000
 - **2025** - projected Future Building Budget Line = \$200,000
 - **2026** - projected Future Building Budget Line = \$250,000
 - Identify Additional Sources of Funds
 - Additional Revenue Streams/Ideas - For long-term Budget and Building Planning.
 - Long-term Gifts/Estates - Promote and develop long-term gift options.
 - Large, “Miracle” Gifts - Celebrate sacrificial generosity and stewardship.
 - Establish a *Transition Advisory Team to Focus on the Master Plan and Finances*

- **Strengthen our *Relational Base* of Disciple-making and Leadership Development**
 - As a suburban church, we’re always going to experience some “turnover” in our membership. To maintain focus, though, we need to build trust between new and long-term members. This trust and unity will be particularly important as we move into Phase 2 and beyond.
 - Plus, in order to grow spiritually and numerically, we need all members to be equipped and encouraged to make disciples. And, we need to expand our number of leaders to prepare for new groups, numerical growth, and ministry opportunities in the days ahead.
 - Hebrews 10:24-25 is our guide for this – pay attention to others, gather, encourage.

- **Study John’s Gospel and Writings**
 - During these years, we will likely work our way through the Gospel of John and the Letters of John as we consider the topics of faith, love, strength, and abiding in Christ.

2026 – *40th Anniversary of Emmaus is Monday, Dec 7, 2026

- **Develop Prayer and Ministry Initiatives for Fall 2026**
 - 40 Days of Prayer and the Word?
 - 40 Gospel Projects?
 - 40 Stories of Life Change? Other ideas??

- **Establish a Giving Goal for the 40th Anniversary**
 - Maybe a December 2026 goal of \$400K? More?
 - Half for Phase 2 (hopefully bring this Future Building account to \$800K+)
 - Other half towards missions

- **Approve Plans for moving forward with Phase 2 of the Master Plan in 2027**
 - Vote to approve a 2027 Future Building Budget Line of \$300K
 - Begin Loan research and acquisition, Architecture plans, Contractors, etc.

2027 - 2029 : Frame #2 = “Transition”

***Who might we become?** Flexible. Unified. Active. Evangelistic.

***What might we do?** Build. Reshape ministries and programs. Start new groups.

- **Build a New Preschool/Children’s Building with a Connection Atrium**

- This portion of the long-term plan is definitely scary, not only because of the amount of money involved, but also because a building project would disrupt many of our ministries and schedules. We would need to be prepared for temporary modular buildings, multiple services, and disrupted programming and services.
- This period will take tremendous teamwork and patience (*assuming it remains the wise step to take* and assuming the money, permits, and materials are in place).
- If you’d like to see a layout of the current Master Plan, this drawing is on the last page of the document. Also, page 19 includes some key questions as we think about next steps.
- We don’t exist simply to build buildings, and we can’t lose focus on missions and disciple-making, but we must embrace the future with faith and joy, not fear or passivity.
- Prayerfully, we could be into the new building by the end of 2029 or into 2030.

- **Study Exodus and Ephesians**

- During these years, we will likely work our way through Exodus and Ephesians, in addition to plenty of other studies along the way.

2030 – *Celebrate 2000 Years of Christ’s Public Ministry

2030 - 2032 : Frame #3 = “Live like Jesus”

***Who might we become?** Hospitable. Loving. Joyful. Disciples.

***What might we do?** Open our homes and buildings. Expand NextGen ministries. Expand missions.

- **Study the Life of Christ and the Gospel of Luke**

- Scholars debate the exact years of Jesus’ ministry, but many place the beginning in AD 30 (working backwards 3 years from a probable date for his death and resurrection).
- Based on this, *AD 2030 will mark 2000 years of Jesus’ public, earthly ministry.*
- We want to spend these years learning again to live as Jesus lived. Having our lives shaped by his teachings and actions. Having our church shaped by hospitality, prayer, and outreach to the vulnerable that we see in Luke’s Gospel.
- Our kids will potentially be in a new building learning about the never-changing Word of God; we’ll have a Connection Atrium to promote relationships and hospitality; and we’ll maintain a missional focus on reaching those whom others might overlook.

- **Help Finish the Task**

- Many churches will also be working during these years on the so-called “Finishing the Task” initiative, leading up to 2033 as the 2,000 year anniversary of Jesus’ death and resurrection.
- Prayerfully, every people group on Earth will have some sort of access to the Gospel.
- From 2023 to 2033, we are praying God will connect our church with a people group that has never had access to the Gospel!

2033 – *Celebrate 2000 Years of the Resurrection and the Church
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2033 - 2035 : Frame #4 = “Be the Church”

***Who might we become?** Spirit-filled. Courageous. Prayerful. Missionaries.

***What might we do?** Pray for the Kingdom. Plant a church. Prepare for our 50th Anniversary.

- **Resurrection and The Book of Acts**

- As with Jesus’ public ministry, scholars debate when Jesus died and was resurrected; however, a fairly strong consensus puts the death of Jesus on *April 3, AD 33 at 3pm*.
 - Yes, I realize the number 3 shines through here! :)
 - But historians have good reasons for dating the event to this date and time.
- This dating would make *Spring 2033 the two-thousand year anniversary of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection and the Holy Spirit’s outpouring at Pentecost*.
- After studying the Gospel of Luke over the previous few years, 2033 would be a good time to explore the Book of Acts, as we seek the Spirit’s power for unity-in-diversity, miracles, strengthening of the church, and advancement of the Gospel.

- **Planting Another Church**

- During this three-year window – if not before – I pray God will open doors for Emmaus to start another church (with the goal of doing this before or on our 50th Anniversary).
- In the early 1980’s, First Baptist Moore had the God-given vision to start a little church in the middle of nowhere in southwest OKC, with the Baptist Children’s Home as our strategic (and only) neighbor.
- We need to pay this forward by getting involved in church planting. I don’t know if this new church will be in east Moore, the Middle East, or somewhere in between. The location will come; we need to pray and prepare.

2036 – *50th Anniversary of Emmaus is Sunday, Dec 7, 2036
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5. Numbers 10:11 - 11:1

As we look back on this morning and think about our need for God's direction and power, I want us to look this evening at Numbers 10. Starting this past Summer, we've been studying through the Book of Numbers on Sunday nights. At first glance, it might seem like a boring book, but so many powerful lessons emerge from the book.

Chapter 10 is a key transition point in the book (and in the entirety of Israel's story). Since Exodus 19, the people have been in the wilderness of Sinai. Beginning in Numbers 10:11, Scripture says,

In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony, and the people of Israel set out by stages from the wilderness of Sinai. And the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran. They set out for the first time at the command of the Lord by Moses.

The cloud of the Lord will guide the people. And this guidance by cloud and fire is not disconnected from God's word given to Moses. In verses 14-28 we see the people moving out orderly according to the responsibilities given to them in previous chapters. These verses continue the themes of order, harmony, and holiness which are key to Numbers 1-10. In verses 29-32, Moses invites his brother-in-law to join them, both for service in the work but also because Moses doesn't want Hobab to miss the goodness of the Lord. These verses speak again of grace, unity, and hope.

So they set out from the mount of the Lord [on a] three days' journey. And the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them [on a] three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them. And the cloud of the Lord was over them by day, whenever they set out from the camp.

And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you." And when it rested, he said, "Return, O Lord, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel."

Notice the theme of "rest" that is connected with God's power and presence (symbolized by the ark). We have seen this same theme in Hebrews 3 and 4. The Lord is moving His people toward the Promised Land. And He will guide them on this journey with the cloud of His presence, His Spirit, and His Word. When it was time to act, the people were given courage by Moses to move ahead. When it was time to rest, Moses called on the Lord to protect and refresh the people.

These are such comforting themes when we think about church life:

- God's Presence and Power
- His Grace and Guidance
- His Spirit, Word, and People
- The Harmony, Order, and Responsiveness of the people
- The Inclusion of Women, Children, and "Outsiders"
- The Rhythm of Activity and Rest / Courage and Comfort

It must've been an amazing, fulfilling journey to the Promised Land!

...for about 3 days.

You'll have to join us on Sunday nights in 2024 to see the full effect, but if I told you Numbers 11 begins with "*And the people complained,*" I think you'd get the idea where this story is heading.

The people knew the journey would be hard. They knew enemies and giants awaited. But they had the God of Israel with them. They had each other. They had a history of God's faithful provision and guidance. And what did they do? They complained. They rebelled. They sinned. They lost focus.

We need to heed this warning. We have amazing days behind us, and we have exciting days ahead. But the way will be hard, and enemies and giants are guaranteed. We must trust God's Word and seek His Spirit's guidance through unified, desperate prayer.

This morning, I presented several "frames" and plans for the next 10+ years. I hope I did this in a way that humbly admitted these plans might change. Tonight, before we spend time in prayer together, I want to celebrate five more examples of God's faithfulness (finishing the Top 10 list from this morning) and lay out a quick SWOT analysis of our church to help us prepare for the future. This type of analysis can help us know how to pray and prepare for the challenges that might come.

6. Looking Back: Part 2

6. New Hires

- a. In the Summer of 2021, we hired Cody Moser to lead students.
- b. In the Summer of 2022, we hired Kennedy Lehew to lead missions.
- c. The Summer of 2023 saw two new hires:
 - i. In June, Nola Moseley began working as our Office Assistant, serving the staff and receiving guests at Emmaus.
 - ii. Paula Lawson came later in the Summer, in August, to lead Compass Christian Preschool and oversee ministry to our preschoolers and their families.

7. Sabbaticals

- a. A few years ago, Jim Lehew paved the way for staff sabbaticals at Emmaus. No one has ever deserved a sabbatical more than Jim, and he taught us the value of investing in staff by providing dedicated times away.²
- b. Jeron followed in 2022. Then in 2023, Courtney and I both stepped away for 4 weeks - me in May, Courtney from mid-September to mid-October.
- c. Jeff Hemphill will be taking his sabbatical in 2024.

² The Emmaus sabbatical policy provides ministry staff with a sabbatical every 10 years, and the senior pastor with a sabbatical every 7 years. The sabbaticals are currently set at 4 weeks. The Personnel Committee can change the frequency and length, as appropriate, at their discretion. We're thankful for these opportunities to get away, focus on spiritual growth, connect with family and friends, and seek God's guidance.

8. Ages and Stages

- a. Cody and Jeron periodically bring the students and senior adults together for game nights, plus they encourage our students and senior adults to pray for one another. The mom of a middle school girl told me that one of her daughter's favorite things in the student ministry was when they had pizza and game night with some of the older adults.
- b. A few weeks ago, an older adult Sunday School class partnered with their 4th grade class prayer partners to pack Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes.
- c. The Finding Hope Support Group, for loved ones of alcoholics and addicts, began in September after years of prayer, and this group is one of the best examples of what it means to encourage and care for one another across multiple stages of life.
- d. Each Monday night, a group of men provide mentoring to recovering alcoholics and addicts at the South OKC Hope is Alive home.
- e. We love when the NextGen praise team helps to lead musical worship!
- f. Age-specific ministry is a great gift – we won't back away from that – but there is something powerful that happens when we connect with people in the church who are in different stages or have different perspectives than our own.
- g. Courtney sent me this note recently - "When I look back on this year I feel like it's a common thread of how many kids made salvation decisions at home. We of course had a ton of decisions during VBS and Camp, but I feel like all year long I had parents contacting me to tell me their kid had prayed at a random time during the week. To me this is an encouragement because it's a reminder to families that God is always working and calling us to Him, at home, in the car, during sports, at church, etc."

9. Sermons

- a. On Sunday mornings in 2023, we finished the Gospel of Mark on Easter, then saw how the Resurrection overcomes three primary fears (that the Past will Control us, that the Present will Overwhelm us, and that the Future will Disappoint us). Starting in the Summer, we began a series in Hebrews that will take us through Easter 2024.
- b. Sunday nights in 2023 included completion of a series through 1 and 2 Peter and Jude, then we began a series in the Book of Numbers.
- c. **In 2024, after finishing Hebrews on Sunday mornings, we are going to begin a new series on the Minor Prophets in the Old Testament.** This series should take us through 2024, and the Sunday night series on Numbers will go through 2024 as well.
- d. If you're curious, at the end of this Address is an appendix with an overview of all sermon series for the past 8 years.

10. Prayer

- a. On Oct. 8th, we "flipped" the service – first the sermon, then singing, then an extended time of prayer. In a way I can't explain, God prepared our church for this.
- b. Many people told me, "God has been teaching me about prayer." Or, "God has been moving my life toward more dedicated prayer." The students even dedicated their Fall Retreat to prayer.

- c. God is doing something in our church family with prayer, and we don't want to miss it!
- d. We need God to work by His power and for His glory. We need dependent, discerning prayer. Jeron reminded our staff recently (based on a book he is reading about prayer) - "Lack of prayer is not a discipline problem, but a heart problem."
- e. We can't separate prayer and faith. To move ahead in faith, we must be a people of prayer. We live in a world with suffering and spiritual warfare. Prayer reminds us where our help comes from, and refocuses our hearts and minds on what truly matters.

7. SWOT Analysis

● **Strengths**

- Strong history of local and global missions
- Consistent members, who value unity, service, worship, and God's Word
- Members who support and encourage one another
- Place of healing and hope for those from hard church backgrounds
- Good reputation in the community and state

● **Weaknesses** (*the first three reflect a weakness in my own life, not just the congregation; I need to grow personally and as a leader, even as we grow stronger as a church)

- Limited evangelistic growth
- Limited number of small discipleship groups and outside-church member interaction
- Limited number of leaders and volunteers (but the ones we have are very committed)
- Staff members are within a limited age range – need to become younger as a staff, while also maintaining the wisdom of age and experience

● **Opportunities**

- Deep desire among our people for prayer and discipleship
- Likelihood of additional southside OKC metro growth
- Growth in our young adult ministry (and growth in the number of babies/toddlers)
- Community and local school connections
- Room on our campus to develop buildings and projects and handle transition times

● **Threats**

- *Political turmoil* - Will political changes at the local, state, or federal levels radically impact the type of ministry done by local churches? Will worsening tensions in the world lead to war, security threats, or other challenges?
- *Economic turmoil* - Will inflation, recession, or other unforeseen events impact the amount of money available to our members?
- *Environmental / Tragic turmoil* - Will severe weather impact our campus and/or area? Will an unexpected tragedy alter our church and/or our future plans?

- *Denominational turmoil* - Will the Southern Baptist Convention continue as a denomination? Will the SBC continue to be a healthy partner for Emmaus?

***For each of the previous four threats, *we have almost no control over these circumstances and developments!* We can only determine our *preparation and response*.

However, there are two other threats over which we have some measure of control, in terms of how big the impact will be. For each of these threats (which often accompany spiritual warfare), we must fight with the full armor of God.

- *Internal turmoil / divisions* - For the first ten chapters of Numbers, the people were building harmony and holiness. Then, when the journey began, they began to complain, argue, and turn against each other. In the Book of Acts, some of the challenges to the church came from the “outside” (from government officials or cultural pressure), but the biggest challenges came from the “inside” (neglecting those in need; ethnic divisions; sinful behavior). In the years ahead, our unity and teamwork will be threatened. It will require humility, forgiveness, trust, and patience to walk ahead together. And, if God leads people in different directions (remember Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15), we will trust the Lord and continue to love one another.
- *Loss of focus / Spiritual apathy* - Bring on crazy elections and denominational meetings. Bring on the loss of money and property. Even bring on intrasquad squabbles and divisions. The one threat that will truly sink us is if we lose a white-hot focus on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If we become spiritually apathetic and cold. Without the resurrection of Jesus, without revival driven by desperate prayers and spiritual power, without a sense of eternal urgency, why make plans for the future of a local church?

***Every person on earth faces two problems they can't overcome on their own: sin and death. But, Jesus has dealt with both of these through the Cross and Resurrection. On the Cross, He died for us, in our place, taking on the sin, brokenness, and evil of the world. And through the Resurrection, He defeated death, rose to reign, and will return one day to make all things right.

8. Prayers of Faith

In this year's State of the Church address, we've covered a lot of ground, and I'm excited about the future! It's time for **Faith Forward**. At the same time, we've learned that faith is characterized not only by big plans, but also by faithful, daily steps.

None of the initiatives in our four Frames matter at all if the Lord is not with us, guiding and empowering. Without abiding in Christ, without walking by the Spirit, our efforts will be in vain.

What we must do – more than plan, more than raise money, more than build – is pray!

God, make us a church of prayer! Make us a people who pray in faith for one another, who pray in faith for the lost, who pray in faith to build up the Church and advance the Gospel, who pray that God's Spirit will guide us every step of the way.

More than once, we have ended a State of the Church address with Ephesians 3, and that's where I want to end again tonight before we transition to a time of prayer.

Ephesians 3:14-21 - For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Owen Nease". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent initial 'O'.

Dr. Owen Nease
owen@emmausokc.org

Appendix 1 - Sermon Overview

For 2023, I will have preached (or at least given a short sermon/devotion) on 44 of 52 Sunday mornings. Over the past 8 years, this general ratio has been fairly steady.

(Bold = Sunday AM sermon series; Italics = Sunday PM or Wednesday PM services)

Books of the Bible

- *Leviticus (2018-2019)*
- *Numbers (2023)*
- **Joshua (chs 1-7 2017; chs 8-24 2018)**
- *Judges (2018)*
- **Ruth (2018)**
- **Ezra (2021)**
- **Nehemiah (2021)**
- **Esther (2021)**
- **Psalms (various)**
- **Proverbs (2016)**
- **Daniel (2021)**
- **Matthew (2018-2020)**
- **Mark (2022-2023)**
- **1 Corinthians 12-16 (2018)**
- **Galatians (2020)**
- **Colossians (2017)**
- **1 Thessalonians (2016)**
- *2 Thessalonians (2016)*
- *1 Timothy (2017)*
- *2 Timothy (2017)*
- **Titus (2017)**
- **Philemon (2017)**
- **Hebrews (2023)**
- *1 Peter (2022)*
- *2 Peter (2023)*
- *Jude (2023)*
- **Revelation 1-3 (2016)**

Themes/Theology

- **3 Circles Evangelism / Acts 17 (2016)**
- *World Religions (2016)*
- **Music “weTunes” (2017)**
- **Holiness / Sanctification “Holey, Wholly, Holy” (2018)**
- **Sports (2018)**
- *Ten Commandments (2019)*
- **Who is God? (2020)**
- **UnLIMITed: The Gift of Limits (2020)**
- **Fruit of the Spirit (2021)**
- **Fresh Start (2021)**
- *Twelve Apostles (2021)*
- **Women of Christmas (2021)**
- **“I Doubt It” (2022)**
- **“Foundations, not Fences” / Hard Issues: sexuality, money, politics, etc (2022)**
- **Rest (2023)**

Appendix 2 - Phase 2 Overview and Considerations

What is the current version of Phase 2 of the Master Plan?

- New Preschool and Children's Building (two-story), attached to the Worship Center by a Connection Atrium. In the current plan, the north two-thirds of Building B would be demolished.

Why build a new Preschool and Children's Building?

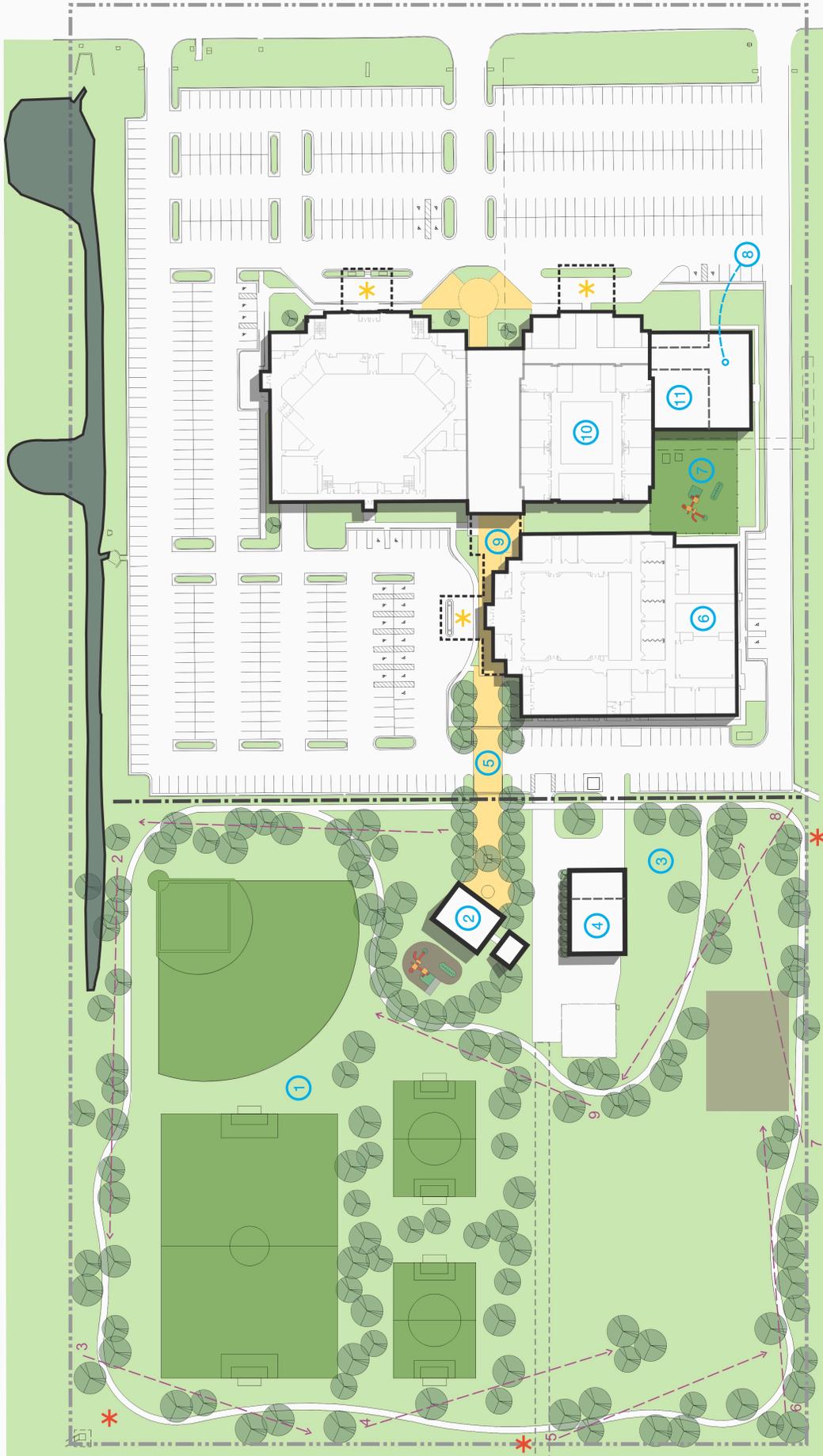
- **Security** - we currently have *way too many* access points to the Preschool/Children's area. These areas need controlled access both for security purposes and parent-child check-in.
- **Tight Hallways / Small Rooms** - Our Preschool and Children's leaders have made the most of repurposing old spaces, but the rooms are undersized and the hallways are much too small.
- **Passed over previously** - Over 15 years ago, Emmaus had to decide between a new Worship Center (previous location was in what is now the Gym of Building C) and a Preschool/Children's building. To handle crowds in three worship services, a new Worship Center was built, with hopes of adding or updating the Preschool/Children's space as soon as possible.
- **Key marker of ministry** - For a church located in a suburban area, a solid Preschool and Children's building can be one tool to catalyze ministry for generations to come.
- **Compass Christian Preschool** - A new Preschool and Children's building would allow more opportunities for growth and ministry with our weekday preschool.

Why *not* build a new Preschool and Children's Building (at least in its currently planned form)?

- **Cost** - the new building will be extremely expensive (originally estimated at \$6M+, up to \$8M).
- **Intended and best location is inconvenient** - several people who have looked at the property have suggested demolition of Building B. We always want to be cautious about demolishing buildings, even if they're older. Plus, the demolition and rebuild would be expensive and alter programming for a couple of years.
- **Changing demographics / Changing needs for families** - we're very thankful for our current Worship Center, but one thing we've learned since its construction is that we built a style that was already dated as it was being constructed. The building is nice, but lacks flexibility. We don't want to make the same mistake with a Preschool and Children's Building. We don't need a building like this simply because other churches have one; we need a building that is flexible and functional enough to accommodate changing generations and needs.

Could we reposition or redesign elements in the Master Plan?

- Yes, the Master Plan (and the proposed location for the Preschool/Children's Building) is a working document, not a contract. We still need formal church approval to proceed with Phase 2. Over the next couple of years, the Staff will work alongside the ad-hoc Transition Team and the Building Committee to determine what plan will be presented to the church in 2026.
- We want the building to be visible to guests and community members and also accessible and easy for young parents. As we further assess plans, we might find new ways to build a fresh Preschool and Children's space, while also optimizing foot traffic, securing the buildings, and connecting with guests.



community connection * porte cochere

phase I

- 1 - sports fields
- 2 - outdoor pavilion / restrooms / playground
- 3 - new water well
- 4 - expanded big barn / remove small barn
- 5 - pedestrian connection to outdoor areas
- 6 - youth renovation
- 7 - enclosed outdoor play area

phase II

- 8 - admin offices (dashed)
- 9 - covered walk
- 10 - early childhood - 6th grade ctr / compass / atrium / 2 story

phase III

- 11 - admin/adult class addition

campus masterplan
scale: none

emmaus baptist church | conceptual masterplan | september 12, 2021

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