

**Emmaus Baptist Church — State of the Church Address**  
**Sunday, December 4, 2022**

**1. What is the Soundtrack of Emmaus?**

Sometimes a book comes into your life that has an outsized influence on how you think and live. In 2022, I encountered one of these books – “Soundtracks” by Jon Acuff. The sub-title for the book is ‘The Surprising Solution to Overthinking.’ Needless to say, I was hooked from the beginning, because I’m a world-champion overthinker. (A few months ago, Acuff released a version of the book for teens called “Your New Playlist: The Student's Guide to Tapping into the Superpower of Mindset.”)

Beginning our State of the Church address with this book, I want to be clear – my life and our church will be based on *one* book, the Word of God, the Bible. From the foundation of God’s Word, though, we can learn from other books. To quote Charles Spurgeon, “Visit many good books, but live in the Bible.”

Although “Soundtracks” is not written as an explicitly Christian book, Jon Acuff is a believer, and his book is essentially based on two passages: *Philippians 4:4-9* (especially verse 8 - “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things”) and *Romans 12:1-2* (“be transformed by the renewing of your mind”).

What does Acuff mean by a “soundtrack”? Have you ever gotten a song stuck in your head and no matter how hard you tried, you couldn’t get it out? Many times, our thoughts are like that. Soundtracks are thoughts that play repeatedly and often automatically in our minds. This is okay if the thoughts are healthy; but too often, these soundtracks become loud, toxic, and even destructive. Plus, we can’t simply flip a switch and turn off the soundtracks. Instead, we need to learn how to turn down the volume dial and then replace the soundtrack with thoughts that match God’s Word and His Truth.

Acuff’s approach has 3 steps:

**1. RETIRE Old, Negative Soundtracks** - First, we must identify the negative soundtracks. He provides three questions for identifying thoughts in your head that need to be turned down and replaced:

- *Is it true?* - Is what I am telling myself true based on God’s Word and true based on the reality of the world around me? If you’re not sure if a thought is true, ask a friend to help you.
  - Example - “My life isn’t valuable.” - Absolutely untrue, based on Genesis 1 & Psalm 139.
- *Is it helpful?* - Are these thoughts leading me to act and speak in a way that is helpful to those around me and that is helpful to me becoming who God created me to be?
- *Is it kind?* - Would I say this to a friend? If not, retire the soundtrack and replace it.

## 2. REPLACE with New, Positive Soundtracks

- Invert old thoughts into better themes and patterns.
  - “That will never work” ...becomes... “I wonder how that could work?”
- Borrow soundtracks from people who inspire you.
  - Draw from God’s Word, from trusted friends, or even from people you don’t know.

## 3. REPEAT these New Soundtracks

- Use a Symbol or Object to Embed the new soundtrack
  - Sometimes having something to look at or touch will help the soundtrack embed in your mind.
- Repeatedly Play (Say Aloud) the New Soundtrack
  - It takes time to replace old soundtracks. Be patient, consistent, and determined.
  - “May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” - Psalm 19:14

Tuesday of this week – December 6th – will mark 36 years of Emmaus being incorporated as a church, after being a mission church of First Baptist Moore. For the past 7 years, we’ve paused around the time of our church’s anniversary to look back at how God has worked and look forward to what’s in store.

In Section 3 of tonight’s address, I want to share some of the Soundtracks that I believe have defined our church, our staff, and my own life over the past several years (and right up to today). We’ll begin to retire and replace these soundtracks and consider ways to move into the future with wisdom and hope. But, before we get there, let’s look back over the previous year.

## 2. Snapshots

### 2.1. *Jim Lehew’s Resignation Transition of Ministry*

Without a doubt, the most significant change at Emmaus in 2022 was reaching a point at which Jim Lehew was no longer on staff. Jim started at Emmaus in March 2001, and in many ways, his life and ministry were synonymous with Emmaus for the past two decades, especially in terms of how Emmaus has served our community and local schools. Serving alongside Jim has been one of the most impactful experiences I’ve had in ministry. Beyond his servant heart, ministry skills, and mission partnerships, our staff benefited most from his wise counsel and hilarious stories.

We miss Jim on staff, but it’s so clear how the Lord has prepared him to lead the new Oklahoma City Ministry Center for NAMB (North American Mission Board) and to serve as Human Resources Director for Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children. We are blessed that Jim wanted to keep his church membership at Emmaus, and he will continue to serve and worship as part of our church family.

## *2.2 Hiring Kennedy Lehew as Director of Missions*

For much of the previous year, I knew Jim's transition was likely on the horizon; I just didn't know how quickly the process would move. Over that time, I thought and prayed a lot about what to do next. One option that we wanted to avoid was simply trying to replace Jim. No one replaces Jim – that wouldn't be fair to Jim, the new staff person, or our church. But, I also knew we couldn't lose momentum with the mission partnerships Jim had established.

Slowly, a name began to emerge to lead Missions at Emmaus – Kennedy Lehew. In the time that I've known her, but especially over the past two years, I've been impressed by Kennedy's character, leadership, and abilities. I knew the Lord had called her to serve Him through mission work. We thought this would mean an upcoming move overseas, but several plans failed to materialize (some because of Covid, others for different reasons). One day, Amanda and I were taking our daily walk around the neighborhood lake with our dog. She asked what I was going to do about Jim's resignation. I told her that I planned to cry a lot and eat ice cream. She asked if I had any names in mind. I said, "Kennedy." She said, "Yes! Act now. Contact her now."

I knew the timeline would be tight since the school year was approaching, but God led us through each step with Kennedy, the Personnel Committee, and the church family. Members asked key questions; we formulated a plan for the current staff members to absorb Jim's other job responsibilities; and for the past few months, Kennedy has led our church through a series of Proclaim and Display Challenges, while traveling to a key location in the Middle East, connecting with our youth, college students, and young adults, and continuing her dad's tradition of early morning teacher devotions in local schools. In addition, she's planning trips for 2023 and preparing to kick off 2023 with "Missions 101," a general training for anyone who has an interest in future missions work.

I can't say enough about the work our staff members have done over the past several months. Jeron, Jeff, Cody, and I are coordinating pastoral care and overseeing the building staff. Abbi and Gwen have increased the type of support work they provided for Jim during his final years on staff (and Gwen has guided the projects for our gym lobby, apparel, and new front sign). Courtney and Amy have always helped around the building, and that work has only increased. I want to give special recognition to Jonathan Smith, our Finance Director, who has coordinated building usage, overseen finances, and served alongside the ministry staff in various capacities. We have an amazing team!

I should also mention at this point the incredible work done by our Emmaus Personnel Committee. Usually, committee work at Emmaus isn't overwhelming...unless you happen to be Neal Reusser and Denise Cole, who served on the Emmaus Personnel Committee from 2019 through 2022. They have helped us walk through Covid, which would be enough; but their term also included hiring a new Worship Pastor, a new Youth Pastor, and a new Missions Director, plus significant work with our personnel handbook and navigating other issues along the way. I thank God for the church members whom He calls to serve the church family on our committees and ministry teams.

### 2.3 Impact of the Past Two Years

Each year in September, we have our annual staff review process. This year, we began using a framework called E.D.G.E. – *Energy* (how are you doing personally?); *Diligence* (how are you doing at your job with productivity and effectiveness?); *Growth* (how are you improving and growing?); *Endurance* (what's next?).

The reviews often reveal common thoughts or feelings among the staff. This year was no different, but what surprised me most was how many staff members mentioned feeling continued emotional, physical, and/or mental impacts from the past two years. In my less healthy moments, I can too quickly move onto the next thing without recognizing and dealing with emotions. As excited as I am about the future, the staff reviews reminded me that we will only be effective long-term if we are healthy in the present and willing to deal with the past.

I want to take this chance to thank Emmaus for how well you care for the staff. We recognize this and appreciate it. And, we want to build a healthy team that can serve you for years to come. Our main job isn't to do the work of ministry, but to equip and encourage you to do what God has created you to do. We want our servant leadership to be humble and loving, never bitter or self-seeking. To this end, we need to pursue health and healing, as individuals and as a team.

Just as it's been hard for our staff, I realize the past two years have been hard for our church as well. We've been through a lot. We've seen people come and go. We've had several changes on staff. We've navigated Covid. We've established a master plan and almost completed Phase 1. As your pastor and friend, I simply want to say thank you. Before we ask things *from* you, I need you to know what I want *for* you – to be known and loved by God, to be secure in your salvation in Christ, to be filled with the Spirit for Kingdom living, and to be connected in loving relationships with those around you. And like I told our staff, if you're tired and hurting, we will do everything we can to provide resources and counseling so that you're able to live fully in the days ahead.

### 2.4 West Property

I mentioned in last year's State of the Church address that Phase 1 of our church's master plan was approved unanimously by the church on October 3, 2021. Work began almost immediately, and the projects are approximately 90% completed. Before mentioning some of these projects, I need to express the debt of gratitude we owe to Jeff Meyer for his work on the West Property. In addition to his endless work as our Maintenance Director, Jeff has overseen the implementation of Phase 1. His hard work, wisdom, and example of faith are a huge blessing to our church. Thanks, Jeff!

So far for 2022, the completed projects in Phase 1 include:

- Expansion of the youth room by allowing the students to have both their current space and the large conference room (Rooms 255 and 256 in Building C),

- Removal of the small barn (which was being broken into frequently), and expansion of the big barn, providing room for the people mover, all of the vans, and a new interior storage area for lawn and field equipment,
- Concrete driveway in front of the barn to improve access and also provide a place for basketball (with a new goal!) and other games/fellowship activities,
- Improved drainage in back parking lot to eliminate lakes that formed there when it sprinkled,
- Pipe fence to prevent vehicles from entering the back property (\*\*\*the pipe fencing was donated by a family who attends Emmaus and the work completed by a relative of one of our Emmaus members...thank you!!!),
- Bathrooms for use when we host outdoor events or activities (the bathrooms include locks that can be programmed to limit access),
- Pavilion that is large and flexible enough to be used for multiple events and activities,
- Multi-use green space for games, practices, and free play, and
- Playground for use by our preschool and children's ministry, Compass Preschool, the Classical Conversations homeschool group, and families who use the property for practices and games.

Inflation of construction costs and the desire to avoid a loan prohibited full development of some parts of Phase 1. Plus, construction often moves more slowly than we expect or desire. What remains to be completed, and what have we postponed or eliminated?

- Additional drainage and dirt work in the multi-use green space
  - Phase 1 initially included installation of a new well and irrigation. This proved cost prohibitive and has been removed from the project list for the time being. We already have irrigation back to the newly-installed bathrooms, and we will rely on rain or above-ground sprinklers to cover the remaining land to the west and south.
  - We have only done limited dirt work and ground leveling. We have enough land to host t-ball, softball, youth soccer, and flag football. We will do some more dirt work over the winter, but most ground improvements will need to come from teams that want to make a donation and do that work. I think groups will see the value of this land for practices and want to help out.
  - Sod will be placed around the pavilion to control mud.
- Sport Court Lines
  - We need some volunteers to paint basketball court lines in front of the barn and pickleball lines under the pavilion.
- Disc golf baskets
  - While a full-length disc golf course is not possible, we hope to install 4-6 baskets to provide a fun, short course for the church and community.
  - We hope to have enough funds remaining in 2023 to install the tee pads and baskets, but these may need to come from outside funds.
- Walking track

- I've been excited about the possibility of a walking track from the beginning of Phase 1 plans (and we even used a walking track to display giving progress with our initial fund-raising efforts); however, we always knew this would be very cost-dependent.
- In 2023, I hope we will have enough funds available to implement part of the walking track and then piece this project together in the years to come.

## *2.5 Celebration Snapshots*

The focus for all of these projects is on how to strengthen the church, connect with our community, and ultimately share the Gospel. The purpose is people, not projects. Stories, not statistics. When I asked our staff to share some of their favorite moments from 2022, here's what they mentioned.

First, we had (at least) 16 salvation decisions among our children's ministry. Each kid is working through books, talking with adults, and moving towards baptism in the coming months. One snapshot of God's work in our church was November 20th. That morning, two of our young ladies – Tillie and Tensley – were baptized. Hearing Dr. Harvey reading their testimonies, thinking about God's grace toward their family through so much over the past few years, was overwhelming. Then, that same evening, an older man at Emmaus, who has only attended for a short time and has been embraced by Tom Law's Sunday School class, was baptized. These baptisms – two younger girls in the morning service, an older man in the evening service – are a beautiful example of who we are as a church.

Another favorite snapshot from this past year is of the student ministry, huddled up, jumping up and down mosh-pit style, preparing to depart for Falls Creek. God continues to bring our student ministry together, raising up leaders (23 students and 3 adults went to Super Summer; new ministry teams are being formed), and sending them out to share the Gospel. Cody has asked that our church pray we can see fruit from serving with the Westmoore football team and begin seeing lost students come to faith during the regular weekly ministry times of Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights.

I've heard from several of you that a favorite snapshot is when you see our kids and teens leading out in worship and serving as part of the choir. The unity of ministry is on display when members of all ages sing and worship together, and both Cassidy and Jeron do a great job making this happen.

A final snapshot that I want to share is something I see every week – people sitting or standing around the Worship Center before and after the service. I appreciate that our church leaves slowly. These interactions are some of the most important worship that happens each week. I am always encouraged when I hear about groups of adults getting together throughout the week for encouragement and discipleship. Our Women's Ministry saw 200+ people at a sold-out My Favorite Things event, but this ministry continues to reach ladies through "small things" like coffee nights, small group studies, and mentoring relationships. What we do in Sunday School and Big Church is just a launching pad to see our members gather in smaller groups at other times. We want to equip and encourage you to build relationships and do the work of ministry that God has created you to do.

## 2.6 Spreadsheet Snapshots

Again, the most important work we do involves stories of life-change, ministry engagement, and spiritual encouragement. What about numbers, though? We have two main spreadsheets – one for attendance and the other for giving. These spreadsheets are just one snapshot of where our church is on this journey (and we’re going to work on some new, key metrics for the coming years).

Many reports across the nation aren’t great in terms of church attendance since Covid-19. It’s common to hear attendance numbers listed as 60%-80% of prev-Covid numbers (though, not surprisingly, there are many churches in our area doing much better than those percentages). At Emmaus, our numbers have certainly been up-and-down over the past several years, but through this point in 2022, the average attendance on Sunday morning is 555 (not counting the Covid weeks in January). This is approximately 40 less (93%) of where we were before Covid. I don’t say this as bad or good news, just to give a snapshot of where we are, so we can begin to think about what’s next.

In terms of finances, we have averaged \$34,575 per week in general offerings (2022’s budget would’ve required \$37,780 for full funding; the 2023 proposed budget requires an average of \$36,815 per week). This weekly total for the year thus far doesn’t account for the final two weeks of the calendar year, which are normally significant for us.

## 3. Soundtracks

As I mentioned in the opening, I’ve been thinking a lot about this idea of soundtracks. What thoughts play over-and-over in my head? Are my thoughts true, godly, and helpful, or are they toxic lies? I’m not proud of it, but in my flesh, I can become overly negative, pessimistic about ministry, and self-deprecating toward myself. Daily, I must fight these temptations and thoughts with the truth of God’s Word, the power of His Spirit, and the support of His people.

Groups can develop soundtracks over time, too. For the past 7 years, I’ve heard soundtracks that define Emmaus. In this section, I want to consider a couple of soundtracks from 2022 (and before), and consider how we can reshape these in 2023 (and beyond). You might not agree with each one, but I think you’ll recognize them in our church (and, if you’re a guest, this will peel back the curtain for you). Plus, I’d be interested to know other soundtracks that you think are common at Emmaus.

**Old Soundtrack #1: “We are a 25 out of 50 Church.”**

***New Soundtrack #1: “We thrive in the middle.”***

“What do you mean by a ‘25 out of 50’ church?” A few years ago, an organization-which-shall-not-be-named presented our staff with a certificate stating our church had finished 25 out of 50 churches

in the state for a particular ministry category. Needless to say, this certificate has provided some laughs for us. Why would you celebrate being 25th? Isn't that like the ultimate participation ribbon?<sup>1</sup>

In a world bent on being the greatest – including within church life – the temptation is to do everything possible to move from 25th to 1st. And, if I'm being honest, this soundtrack of being 25 out of 50 is *part* of what led me to pursue counseling in early 2021. I came to Emmaus being told our church had “potential to be great,” and I internalized this as needing to be one of the greatest (biggest?) churches on the south side of the metro. That is a dangerous gauge for success in ministry, especially when attendance drops during your years of leadership and you're receiving awards for being 25 out of 50.

But, I think there is a way we can flip this soundtrack. Instead of bemoaning the middle of the pack, we can recognize this seems to be where our church thrives. Here's what I mean: we're not a traditional style church, but neither are we particularly contemporary. There was a time in our history when Emmaus could have easily gone either of these directions, but we're best in the middle. Our music style is in the middle. My preaching style is in the middle – someone recently described it as “teachery-preachery.” I can live with that! Our church demographics are neither young nor old, instead we thrive with multiple generations interacting in ministry. Politically, we refuse to lean either right or left, and we have people from all perspectives. We're not ashamed of being Southern Baptist, but for a Baptist church, our church includes people from a remarkable number of church backgrounds.

In other words...we thrive in the middle. We're good at it, people connect with it, and God uses it.

A couple of clarifications, though, about being in the middle:

- Thriving in the Middle DOES NOT MEAN we are lazy, passive, or satisfied. We will “thrive” in the middle, not “coast” in the middle. We hope the middle is marked by not only humility and love, but also hard work and determination.
- Thriving in the Middle DOES NOT MEAN we will back away from outreach or stop trying to grow. Church growth (both numerically and in terms of spiritual health) is part of a thriving church. We simply realize that the best way to reach our neighbors and the nations is to be who God created us to be.
- The one thing we won't be middle about is confessing Jesus as Lord!

**Old Soundtrack #2: “People don't respond to the invitation at Emmaus.”**

***New Soundtrack #2: “People respond daily to God's Word and Spirit at Emmaus.”***

A couple of years ago, I was looking through some old boxes underneath the stadium seating and found a letter that Mike Booth (former Emmaus pastor) had written to the Emmaus Deacons describing some concerns about people not responding to the invitation and the worship. To be honest, I was encouraged to know Mike had worked through the same thoughts and concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> I should point out that we moved up from 25th to 20th this past year! :)

Admittedly, I've lived with this tension for some time, not just at Emmaus. Sometimes, people will say, "I wish more people would have responded today." And my response is usually, "They did, immediately after the service was finished." Very rarely has no one come up and talked with me or contacted me after the service about how God was working in their life.

Where does that leave us as a church? I want to be clear – we will never back away from calling people to respond to the worship, the preaching of the Word, and the call of the Gospel to repent and believe in Jesus. We will offer an invitation most weeks (and a call to respond every week), because there is power in offering an opportunity for people to respond immediately to God's Spirit. What I'm *no longer concerned about* is whether that happens during the final song of the worship service.

Why won't we judge the success of a service or sermon based on how many people come forward?

1. First, it's important to remember that baptism (not walking an aisle) is the "public profession of faith" in New Testament theology, and the Lord's Supper is for "rededication." There's nothing wrong with walking the aisle. It's just not necessary to express faith or repentance.
2. Second, worship isn't confined to what happens between the welcome and the dismissal. Some of the most important worship and most important "responses" to the Holy Spirit happen before and after the worship service.
3. Third, people will respond to God's Word and Spirit during a time of crisis on Monday, coffee with a friend on Tuesday, a meal conversation or small group on Wednesday, or a hundred other situations on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. We choose to believe that our people are constantly, daily responding to God's Word and Spirit. What I imagine are situations in which someone calls me during the week simply to say, "Pastor, I want to tell you how God has been working in and through my life today." Daily response leads to gathered response.
4. Fourth, the emphasis in the New Testament is on *believers* responding to God's Word in the gathered worship. Then, outsiders come in and (1) see the believers worshiping and (2) hear the Word of God. *We shouldn't expect guests or unbelievers to respond to God's Word and Spirit, if the people of God aren't leading the way.*
5. Finally, at any point God may unleash revival upon our church family, in which we don't have to compel anyone to respond or pray or move or get saved. In the meantime, we will continue to pray, sing, preach, and call people to obey the Lord.

**Old Soundtrack #3: "People always seem to have one foot out the door."**

***New Soundtrack #3: "People are here because they want to be here."***

The beauty of local church life is that no one is *forced* to attend a particular church gathering. At the same time, pastors quickly build up scar tissue when it comes to people leaving. In our worst moments, we become paranoid, bitter, discouraged, and even controlling. I have to battle a soundtrack that tells me, "That person is about to leave. They have one foot out the door. And they're leaving because of something I did (or didn't do)."

As you can imagine, that's not a healthy way to lead, and it's not healthy for the church as a whole. Instead, we need to flip the soundtrack and say, "People want to be here. They don't enjoy changing churches. They love their church family and want to see the church grow." The soundtrack "People Want to Be Here" is much more helpful and kind; plus, following Covid, this new soundtrack is more true than ever. Every person currently part of our church either deliberately made the decision to return after Covid or is new to our church. This is a powerful position, because we can build into the future with trust, momentum, teamwork, and excitement.

And this leads directly into the fourth soundtrack.

**Old Soundtrack #4a: "We attract people who are already Christians, not the unchurched."**

**Old Soundtrack #4b: "We struggle to reach College Students and Young Adults."**

***New Soundtrack #4: "People connect and stay because of people and purpose."***

Churches, like people, tend to have different personalities, giftings, and callings from the Lord. Some are incredible at reaching people far from God and seeing large numbers trust in Jesus for salvation. At Emmaus, this hasn't been one of our strengths, and it has developed into a soundtrack that I hear repeated (and that I tell myself). This soundtrack can become toxic when we either (1) stop sharing the Gospel and stop trying to reach those who are unchurched and unsaved or (2) become obsessed with reaching unsaved people through gimmicks or abandonment of God's Word and the Gospel.

What about struggling to reach 18-29 year olds? It's worth noting that we're not alone in this reality. Many churches struggle to minister to this age group, and many people have a testimony of leaving church after high school only to return later in life. There's nothing wrong with facing this reality. The problem comes when the soundtrack volume gets turned up, and we are tempted to make excuses, point fingers, or simply give up on this age group.

So, how can we flip these soundtracks? *People connect and stay because of people and purpose.* They connect because of meaningful relationships formed in worship, groups, serving opportunities, and friendships. And they stay when they are engaged in the mission and making a difference.

Most young adults and unsaved/unchurched people aren't looking for a church to attend. They are worse than *opposed* to attending church; they're *apathetic* about it, they simply don't think about church, it's not on their radar. But almost every person on earth is intrigued by what their friends are excited about. And they're doubly intrigued when they see lives being changed and relationships being formed. This is why new believers and new church attenders are often the best at inviting their friends. They invite because they're excited. What does this say for long-time Christians or attenders? We will invite others to join us when we're excited, when we see God at work in our own lives and in the church. Experiencing God drives us to want others to experience the same.

People often need a place to belong (people) before they actually believe. And, people want to do good work in the world (purpose) before they realize the work we're doing is actually God's work. College students and young adults (and Generation Z coming behind them) have no interest in propping up church numbers or attending for the sake of attending. They want to make a difference. They want to be heard and involved. And they are wide open to being mentored and discipled.

At this year's Oklahoma Baptist state meeting, one of the leaders talked about the need to more effectively engage the communities in which we live. In the process, he said something that got my attention. He said, "The answer to engaging our communities is found in engaging the people sitting in our pews. Listen to them. Learn from them." Let's do this together. Instead of worrying about who's leaving and who's staying, let's ask, "Who's going?" Who's going to their neighbors? Who's going to the nations? Let's give and go to proclaim and display Jesus to our neighbors and to all nations.

**Old Soundtrack #5: "We don't have a wealthy church."**

***New Soundtrack #5: "Generosity + Consistency + Stewardship + Miracles = Wealth."***

When I was interviewing with Emmaus over 7 years ago, the search committee told me, "We have a generous church, but not a wealthy church." That's actually turned out to be a very accurate description. I would characterize a "wealthy" church as one with a budget that far outpaces the general needs of the church or a church with multiple large givers who could fund large projects or solve financial needs on their own. We are incredibly blessed as a church, but these usual signs of wealth don't define our church family. (Though, to be clear, I wouldn't be *opposed* to having an outsized budget or multiple multi-millionaires!)

Instead of being driven by a scarcity mindset, I am learning to recognize that what we lack in wealth, we make up for in generosity and consistency. Instead of being obsessed with what we *don't* have; we will focus on optimizing what we *do* have. If there's a need at Emmaus, I never worry if people will meet it. And, I know our church gives consistently to the general budget of the church, so we are always in position to make plans for ministry and missions. It's worth noting that a church that isn't "wealthy" only works if everyone is giving as they're able. If you're not giving because you don't feel like you have enough to give, you're in the right place – simply begin with what you have and allow God to grow your giving alongside the church family. A church where everyone contributes what they can, plus a little more, will be characterized by teamwork, mutual encouragement, and humility.

What about miracles in this equation? "Miracles" means God is not limited by our view of money and resources. "Miracles" means that God works in such a way that only He gets the glory. "Miracles" might mean unexpected ministry opportunities; surprising gifts; new members; multiplying what we already have; or an overwhelming revival of the Holy Spirit. Miracles might be big or small, but they remind us we serve a God who is "able to do far more than we could ever ask or imagine."

## **4. Continuing On the Way**

### *4.1 Finishing our Sermon Series through the Gospel of Mark*

We are on-track to finish our *On the Way* series through the Gospel of Mark on Easter 2023 (April 9). You might be wondering, "What's after Mark?" I like to have sermon series planned several months in advance, but to be honest, I'm not sure yet where we're going in the final two-thirds of 2023. Yikes!

On Sunday nights, we finished 1 Peter in 2022 and will move through 2 Peter and Jude during the first months of 2023. Join us at 5pm on Sundays for hymns and God's Word, if your schedule allows.

### *4.2 Finishing the West Property Projects and Looking Ahead*

As mentioned in Section 2, we hope to finish details on the West Property in 2023 and begin using the pavilion and land for church and community events. With 2023, we reach an important turning point in the sense that we want to make sure we complete Phase 1, but we also need to develop line of sight for Phase 2 of the master plan, which is our Preschool and Children's Building. That phase will require significant savings and investment (and prayerfully some miracle gifts...remember the "wealthy" church idea?!).

Over the next few years, we'll turn our focus to saving a percentage of the Phase 2 costs for a down payment, and we hope our 40th church anniversary in 2026 can be a significant marker for this progress. Please remain generous with missions and consistent with your tithes; and pray that God will provide wisdom, insight, faith, and miracles for the Master Plan projects.

### *4.3 On the Horizon*

**Staff and Pastors Prayer/Planning** - In 2023, our staff will get away for a few days of planning and prayer (not consecutive days away...we have kids! But a few days over the course of the year). We'll do a basic SWOT analysis, but also work through a couple of exercises related to long-range planning and thinking strategically about how to reach our neighborhoods with the Gospel. On December 12, the Emmaus Pastors are meeting for prayer, to pray for our church members and seek God's wisdom for these 2023 meetings. Would you pray for the Pastors and Staff in the days ahead?

**Fun / Play** - I often think of something Steve Dighton told me several years ago. Steve is a legendary pastor in the Midwest, and I think he preached once or twice at Emmaus in the interim time before my family came. I remember Steve saying, "When people showed up to my church on Sunday, I obviously wanted them to meet Jesus. But also, I really wanted them to have a good time!" This could sound like a church-lite, attractional-only approach to church. But that's not Steve. He simply meant that being part of the church should be fun, enjoyable, and exciting. This is something I hope can be true of Emmaus. It's really cheesy, but I do think it's true that churches who pray AND play together will stay together.

**Podcast** - We're starting a podcast! Everyone and their dog has a podcast at this point in world history, so we thought it was time. Actually, Emmaus already has a podcast...but it's just the Sunday sermon uploaded each week. Moving ahead, we hope to produce an almost-weekly show that allows Emmaus members to get a quick recap of what's happening, hear interviews with other church members and mission partners, and get extra teaching/training on key topics. We'll probably also use some of the episodes for Q&A. If you don't already subscribe to the Emmaus podcast, now's the time!

#### *4.4 Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled*

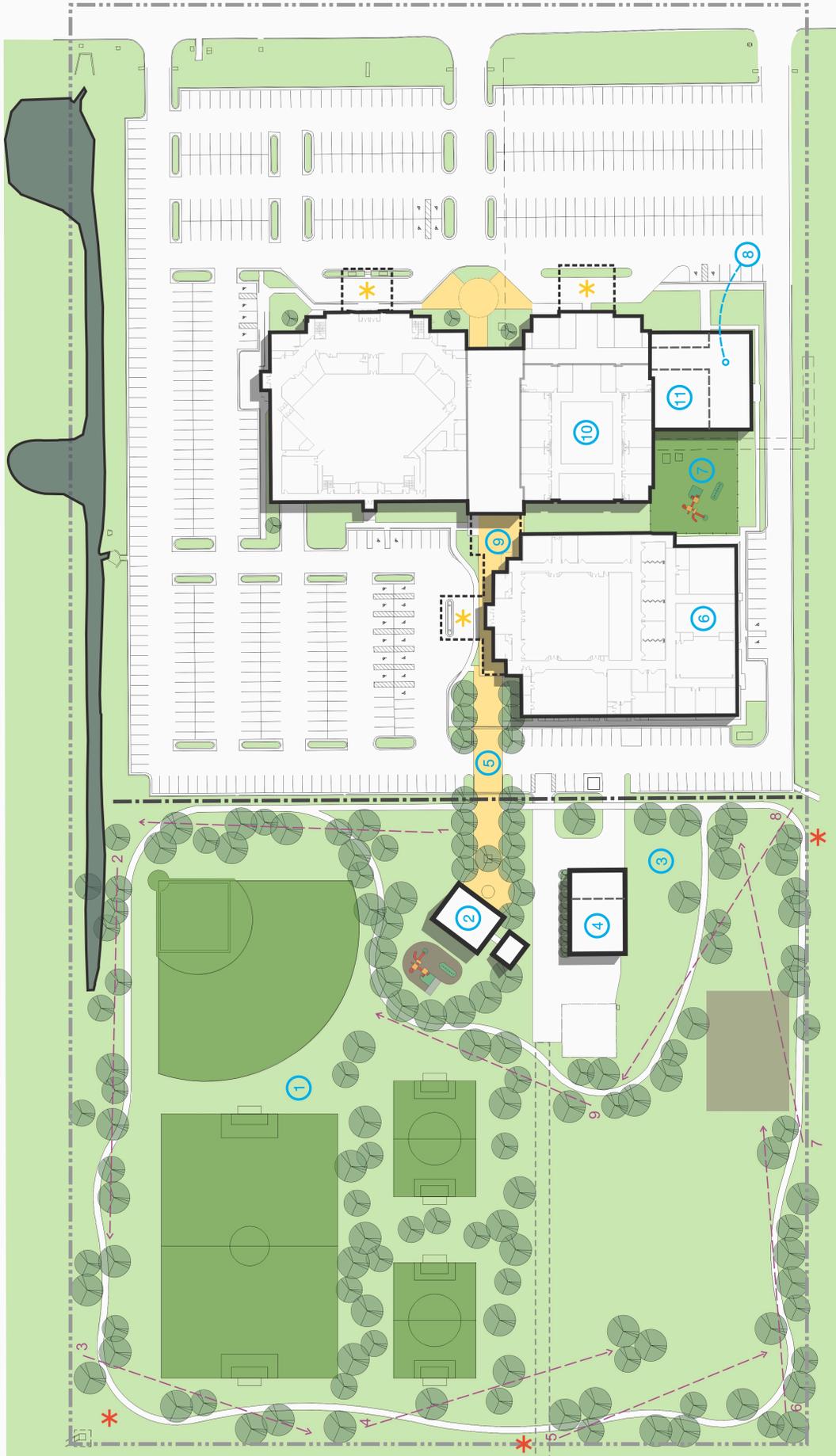
Since Genesis 3, our world has experienced the turmoil of sin and evil. What we face today isn't different in kind, but it often feels different in scale. Without being unnecessarily pessimistic, it's obvious we are living in a time of financial and political uncertainty – not just in our country, but on a global scale. As Christians, how we respond to these challenges will define our future.

How should we respond? In John 16:33, Jesus said, *“These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”* Earlier in John's Gospel, Jesus responded to Thomas and said, *“Let not your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.”* (John 14:1)

When the future is complex, there are rarely easy, quick answers. We need wisdom...and faith. We need patience...and focus. We won't be surprised, troubled, or discouraged. We will turn to Jesus. He is our hope and foundation. When the future is shaky and foggy, we simply take the next step, knowing God's mercies are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Owen Nease". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Owen" and "Nease" being significantly larger and more stylized than the rest of the letters.

Dr. Owen Nease ([owen@emmausokc.org](mailto:owen@emmausokc.org))



**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

**BOCKUS PAYNE**

north