May 23/24, 2015

Stories of Transformation and Renewal

Habakkuk 2:14

Pastor Mark Kremer

Some of you may remember this, but about four or five years ago we did a post Easter series called *Life after Death*. I think it became known as *The Heaven Series*. There were six weeks, and I got the straw of judgment, hell, and eternal punishment. (*laughter*) I don't even know if that made it onto the final CD thing. So I'm a little excited that after Bryan had to walk through the dark waters of Habakkuk for three weeks, I get to lead us for the next two weeks in a time of celebration and challenge.

You know the problem in Habakkuk was that the people of God were not living righteously, and because they failed to be the people of God and live righteously in the world, God was going to discipline them severely. And so we are left with really two questions leaving the book of Habakkuk. One is: What does it mean to live righteously as the people of God in the world? What does it look like? What is it that God is calling us specifically, as His people, to do to live righteously, to seek the shalom, the flourishing of the city, to seek the advantage of others even at our own disadvantage? And secondly, we are left with the question: If we do live righteously, will it really make a difference? Can we really see the culture change? Could we really see God elevated and the Kingdom values—the peace and joy and love that are the hallmarks of God's Kingdom—come to earth and be seen and known in a city and a community? And so over the next two weeks, we are going to explore those two questions together.

In the New Testament Jesus basically summarized living righteously as, "*to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the second was like the first, that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves*." Jesus also told His disciples in Matthew chapter 5 what that mission was to be, and I want us to read together just a couple of verses out of Matthew 5 from the screen, if you would read out loud with me. This is from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said:

> **"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."** (*NASB, Matthew 5:14-16)

One of the privileges as a pastor and a leader here, for all of us as leaders, is to see that there are hundreds and hundreds of people here at Lincoln Berean who genuinely want to live as lights in the world, and as you stream off of our campus every weekend to go out to the places where you live and work and serve, you go out with a sense of mission and purpose. The church scattered around this community is making a huge impact, and so we decided to celebrate the ways that God is calling His people here to live righteously in the world and to do that by way of story because it's one thing to sort of see, "Hey, let your light shine before men that they may see your good works," but it really begins to pop in our minds and in our hearts when we see living examples of people who are doing that. So this morning you're going to get to hear seven stories. Some are on video; some will be in person; some I will just tell—stories of people living righteously in our community and the difference that it's making. I think you're going to be encouraged, and I hope you'll be motivated and I hope you'll see yourself either now or in the future in these stories. So let's enjoy

and celebrate together as we see the ways God is using us in our community to shine the light of the love of God so everyone can see and know Him.

Video:

Sandy: "We started by going to a luncheon here from the Juvenile Justice Ministries through Campus Life, and you take a training program. They had openings for chapel time, which is what we do on the first, third, and if there is a fifth Sunday of the month. I meet with the girls, and Mike meets with the guys."

Mike: "The big thing we always pitch is just grace, grace, grace. These kids—some of them have been physically abused; some of them have been sexually abused; all of them have been psychologically abused. Many of them have drug habits. A lot of them haven't been exposed to the gospel before. They have a lot of questions."

Sandy: "They can take this as their darkest moment, but it can be turned into something beautiful because when God gets involved in their life, He can turn their life around, and that's just different for them to hear because one girl said to me, 'Well, of course, we're losers. We're in here.' And I said, 'Well, let's just reframe that. God can use you after this, even maybe because of this.'"

Mike: "We prepare lessons each week. They're our own design, and it's really on topics that we think are relevant to them, so I don't come in and Sandy doesn't come in with a 20-pound Bible and whack them over the head. We have videos downloaded. We use music and a whole bunch of other videos."

Sandy: "And sometimes you can tell they're just not really wanting to listen, but then if I pop in a music video with music that speaks to that, like how God loves you, God thinks you're valuable, you just can see so many girls will start crying—these hard girls. That just touches their heart."

Mike: "The music videos, actually, that's the discussion for the day. 'What do you think of this?' And I had one video, and it talks about who you are as a man, and it goes through this whole thing. He's standing in a hall. He's saying, 'You're strong. You're powerful. You've got jokes to tell, and you've got love to give.' And while I was showing this video, there was a kid who was a gang member in the back, and he started sitting like this, looking at me, and I know he's not connecting with everything. He came back the next week, and he came running up and he says, 'You got that video?' I said, 'What video?' 'You know, the one about men and what we are?' I said, 'Yeah, I got it. Why? Did you like it?' He said, 'Aw, man, that changed my life!' I said, 'Really, why?' He said, 'I just never heard that before.' I said, 'You mean, nobody ever told you, you were awesome?' He said, 'No, man. Nobody ever told me that.' And I said, 'Well, you are.' And he started to cry."

Sandy: "It is a little scary when you drive up here, and you think, 'I don't know what I'm walking in to, and who am I? Who do I think I am?' I mean, that's just Satan, you know, playing games with me, and I realized that, so it's helped me to have a godly confidence to say it's not about me. I'm bringing God in here with me, and He's going to take what little things I do and use it for His glory."

Mike: "We need more mentors, both male and female, because they've never had anybody be there for them, never had anybody be steady in their lives, and they just need that." (Video ends)

Mark:
"I'm bringing God in here with me." I love that story. I love what Mike and Sandy are doing. You know, Mike is a scientist. In his spare time Mike writes sci-fi novels. I mean, this guy is a brilliant mind. For years and years, Mike and Sandy led worship in children's ministry here, and at a point in life where a lot of people are saying, "I've done my part. It's time for somebody else," Mike and Sandy Olive, along with thirty other people, go regularly to the detention center to reach out to kids who desperately need to know and hear about God's love. Now, I think that's living righteously.

There are at least eight folks here from Lincoln Berean that are a part of that detention center ministry, and we have dozens of people in our congregation who are in the jails and prisons around Lincoln and around the state through various ministries. You can connect with some of those out in the foyer this morning after the service, but I just think we all ought to say thank you and praise God for people who feel called to go to those places because if we're going to see flourishing in our city, the majority of these people—the vast majority of these people—will be back living among us in just a couple of years and so they need to come back into society with a new life in them—and without folks going to tell them, that's not going to happen. So let's give a hand to those people who serve with those ministries. (applause)

Now, if you're a young person who doesn't make the kind of choices that lands you in juvenile detention, growing up in our culture today is still pretty tough. Confronted with a lot of decisions, a lot of things, it's a little hard sometimes just to know: How do I navigate through what's life about? Where am I going? Where do I find joy and peace? What's my life going to be about? So I want you to hear this next story about a life that was changed, a high school student through the *Young Life Ministry* where, again, director Chris who's here, goes to our church, leads that ministry. A number of our people are involved as volunteers, and this young man came to Christ and then led his brother to Christ, who is now a part of our youth ministry here, so take a look at this Young *Life* story.

Video:

"I'm A.J. Wiley. I'm a junior at Lincoln Southwest High School, and soccer consumes a lot of my life. I started in sixth grade; my brother played soccer, and I was on varsity when I was a freshman so I was on a team with him, which was really cool. We went to the state tournament and we were the number two seed. Throughout the tournament me and my brother Justin had six of the seven goals in the state tournament, and we moved on to the state finals. I was really nervous. You could tell everyone was nervous. It was the seventeenth minute, and I passed to my brother Justin, and he let the winning goal in. I just remember that clock hitting zero, and it was one of the best feelings I knew I could ever have, especially with my brother there.

"The summer came, and the state championship high kind of wore off for me, and I knew that there was something more. I talked to Chris Riley, the main guy for *Young Life*, and he mentioned going to camp with them, and I wasn't really sure what I was getting myself into. The camp was around the end of the summer, so there was a gap between what we were doing, and in between then we lost one of my friends, Blake Burklund, and it was a really bad time for us. We hadn't really gone through that before. It happened a couple weeks before camp started, and I had a great idea of bringing everyone to camp with me. Chris helped me with getting everyone there, and I could literally tell the first night that there was a smile on their face for the first time in awhile.

"I was introduced to God at camp. One night we had to just kind of sit and look at the stars in Colorado, which was beautiful. That was when I first felt the presence of God, and I knew that He

was my Savior, that I could trust Him for anything. When I got home, I told my brother all about it, told my family all about it. I just had this new, this happiness from God. Through *Young Life* I kind of saw a lot of people of God, a lot of people of Christ that I looked up to. I see God's love through them, and people see God's love through me. My brother Justin is getting into *Young Life*. During high school he wasn't a part of *Young Life* at all. I'm really glad that me and my brother are part of *Young Life* now. I influenced him for once.

"Learning how God's love is would correlate to my state championship because with state it's feeling that I was on top of the world, and with God I would say it was a whole new level." (End)

Mark:
So what does it look like for us as God's people to live righteously in the world? That's what we're talking about this week and next. We're telling stories about people who are actively seeking to live righteously, to bring shalom, flourishing to our city, to the world. One of the other questions however is: If I live that way, if I go out and serve, if I go out and lay my life down for others, will it really make a difference?

Now, if you watch the 24-hour news cycle and only take in bad news, bad news, bad news, bad news, I am convinced you will come to the conclusion that no matter how hard we work, no matter what we do, we just can't make a difference, but I would agree with Dorothy Day who wrote this quote that I want to share with you this morning—that that's not true. It's a lie from Satan—that he wants us to think we can't really, truly make a lasting difference. This is what Dorothy Day said.

> *"The sense of futility is one of the greatest evils of our day. People say, 'What can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort?' They cannot see that we can only lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time. We can be responsible only for the one action of the present moment, but we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform all our individual actions and know that God will take them and multiply them as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes."*

You see, we're not out doing this on our own. We're infused by the Spirit of God who is actively at work in our world right along with us in partnership, and it's His power and strength through us that truly can make a lasting difference.

I want you to listen to this next story, and I say listen because it's not a video. It's not pictures. It's just audio. We're going to step back in time for a minute. Pretend like we're in the 1940s and we're all gathered around the family radio, and you would sit as a family, and you'd listen to stories. This is a story that a woman from Lincoln Berean Church delivered last week to a national convention for alumni of foster care, that is, adults who had been in foster care in Baltimore, Maryland. And I want, as you listen to the story, to both identify with the story but also to see what God can do even with the darkest, deepest pain of our life and how He can turn it for good. This is the story of Hattie Leigh Strickland. Take a listen.

Audio:

"Hattie Leigh Strickland was born in the summer of 1966, born the fourth child into a home of an alcoholic father and a mother with an eighth-grade education. Even under the best of circumstances, life would have been a struggle, but Hattie wasn't born into the best of circumstances and sometime before her first birthday was introduced to foster care. Hattie Leigh Strickland became a number for

the Department of Health and Human Services. She went from being a baby with a name and a face and a personality to a piece of paper with basic information.

"Workers for case #S2274 would begin to add to the sheet of paper information they felt important to pass along, things like:

Biological Father: Alcoholic, dark complexion, 6 feet tall.
Biological Mother: Virginia, petite, 5'2, eighth-grade education.

"At age two Hattie suffered convulsions. The conclusion? Poor environment. Sometime around Hattie's third birthday she was found abandoned, and the state no longer moved towards bringing Hattie home. At age three Hattie said goodbye to Virginia. For three more years Hattie would live in a foster home. This foster home was not a comfortable place to live. The other children in the home were all older than Hattie, and one had physical disabilities that limited her mobility. The home was a sterile environment. Never was there a toy on the floor to be played with. Never was your voice to be loud enough to be heard, and never ever did Hattie receive a new belonging. There were no hugs or kisses or kind words of approval. Case #S2274 had little history, but Hattie did have siblings, an older brother, two sisters, Maryann and Sheila, but she only knew them as friends.

"Hattie learned to whistle in the dark when she was scared. Pixie had become case #S2274's nickname, and it seemed to fit because she was petite. Right before her seventh birthday, Hattie would be adopted. She was moving hundreds of miles away from everything she knew as home. All that she had to take with her to show for the first seven years of her life was a bag of homemade cards from the first grade class she was a part of and the clothes she was wearing that included shoes two sizes too small.

"In 2006, my husband and I were licensed foster parents. One day the telephone rang. On the other end of the line was an agency worker asking if we would be willing to take a placement of three little ones. The twins were three, and the baby was two months. Two hours later three little girls were at our door. In the Midwest in March the weather can still be chilly, and this particular year there was still seventeen inches of snow on the ground. The twins wore spring-like clothing, and the baby only had the diaper and sleeper she was wearing. After a mad dash to the local Wal-Mart, we had purchased the necessary items to help the girls be comfortable in our home, simple things really, like toothbrushes and pajamas, new socks and underwear and baby items including diapers and wipes and formula.

"Out of this placement and those that had come before, the *Foster Care Closet* was born. An understanding that there had to be a better way to meet the needs of children coming into care was a driving force to begin to formulate an idea into a service. As you think about finding your niche, what is it you are passionate about? What keeps you awake at night? How do you want to influence those around you, and why do you want to make things better for those who come behind you? For me, I became passionate about helping children come into foster care with their basic clothing needs met. It was twofold really—giving children the very basic clothing while doing so in a respectful and dignified manner, and at the same time helping foster parents like my husband and me being able to stop looking at the checkbook to determine if we could take in a placement, and start looking at how we could meet the emotional needs of those we were caring for immediately.

"I want to share one other story with you. This time it's a story of Esther. Esther, unlike Hattie, was a true orphan, no mother or father. Her uncle had taken her in and cared for her. Esther was born in a time of kings and kingdoms. The king had a queen, but the queen made him angry, so the king's

men went out through the land to find a new queen. Esther's uncle heard this and placed Esther in a position to be seen by the king's men, and she found favor with them. They thought she was beautiful and took her to the king's court. There she was dressed in fine linen and brought before the king. He, too, thought she was beautiful, and she found favor with the king and became Queen Esther. Now Esther did not forget where she came from and kept in touch with her uncle, who had learned of a plan to kill Esther's people. Obviously upset by this, Esther made known the plan to the king, who ordered those who planned this attack to be killed. Scripture goes on to tell us that for such a time as this, Esther was born.

"As you think about your niche and embrace it, I want you to remember that you are here for such a time as this, that what you have to bring to the table to influence those around you and to change the world for those behind you is coming to fruition at this very time. Now, you and I may not be called to save our people like Esther was, but we surely have been given abilities and talents to change things for the future.

"Hattie Leigh Strickland would grow up, and she would embrace her journey. She would become a wife and a mom to six children, and just as Esther never forgot her roots, I will never forget that I was once Hattie Leigh Strickland, and I am born for such a time as to change how children come into foster care, how to meet their most basic clothing needs, so that others can focus on meeting the emotional needs. You are here for such a time as this. It is your turn to find your niche. Embrace it and change the world around you for the better." (End)

Mark:
Can we celebrate together that story? (applause) I've known Leigh Esau for a long time. I didn't know her story, but out of the darkest and deepest pain of her life is now hope being shared with hundreds of children and families in our city and across our state. It truly is a redemptive story. This is a picture of Leigh. I don't know if they put it up on the screen. That's Leigh. You can see her out in the hallway at the *Foster Care Closet* booth. She's an awesome, awesome woman, and the *Foster Care Closet* is an incredible ministry that has been birthed and continues to flourish and grow and serve the foster care community here in our city.

I want to tell you just a couple of other quick stories, just personally. One of the places that a lot of people from Lincoln Berean are involved is at McPhee Elementary School. It's a school that we've adopted as a church. It's just about a block south of the state capitol in the Near South Neighborhood, one of the poorest, one of the most integrated if you will, neighborhoods in our community. Lots of immigrant families have settled in that area, and because of the poverty in this school, there is no parent/teacher organization. There's no one that helps with the book fair and parent/teacher conference. No one really ever does anything appreciative for the teachers, and there's no one there to throw parties for the kids when they do well. And so a number of people from Lincoln Berean have stepped in and adopted the school and are there on a weekly basis just being alongside and making the school experience a better place and building relationships. And we have gotten over the course of the last few years, hundreds of notes from kids that say, "Dear Lincoln Berean Church, thank you for making our school a great place." Now, what I love about that is not only that we're there serving and helping that be a great experience, but the entire view of these people, who are probably very far from even understanding what a church is, their view of the church is positive. It's good. These are good people who are helping and doing good things, and that's the view that they go into life with.

One of the amazing things we got to do the Christmas before last, when we asked the school what we could do for families over Christmas, they kind of came up with this idea that very few families in their school had ever had a family picture taken. They didn't have any family photograph and so with the help of our photography clubs here at Lincoln Berean, we went in on a day and invited the families to come together and have a family portrait taken. They were able to have that for free, and many, many families came and had their picture taken for the very first time, and my prayer is that as they look at those pictures on their dresser or wherever they are at their house or on the wall that they would see in their own faces the very image of God, and that we've had a chance to help them see how valuable they really are.

One of the other things that I get so excited about—and it's hard to even pick with all the stories that we could tell here this morning—is there are just individuals who on their own initiative do amazing things to reach out and care for other people. I want you to see on the screen Jacob and Laura Campbell. They became friends with a Sudanese refugee named Juma a number of years ago. Juma was homeless. He was in and out of, off and on the streets. They began to bring him to their house occasionally, give him a meal, a shower. Once in awhile he would spend the night at their home. They built this lasting friendship.

About two years ago Juma began to have some serious problems with his leg, and here this young couple just literally have walked beside Juma and provided care, got him to the right doctors, and on May 5th he had a total hip replacement that they saw fit that he finally got. In the course of the journey, they uncovered that he had some serious addiction issues, and with their help he is in treatment now and recovering from those addiction issues. There's Juma's picture after his surgery, all smiles, and in fact, he's back running again in just a matter of a few short weeks. This is just purely a couple on their own, loving someone that God brought across their path and showing him the love of Jesus in a really powerful way, and I think that's something that's worth celebrating.

Just a few blocks from McPhee Elementary School is a house. It's at 659 South 18th Street, and it is a *lighthouse*. It's a house where the light is always on, the light shining the love of Jesus into one of the poorest neighborhoods in our city. And we get to be a part of this amazing feet-on-the-ground ministry of love called *Jacob's Well*. Take a look:

Video:

"Howdy, I'm Garry DeFreeze . I was born in Grand Island, Nebraska. I was in the hospital for a month, and the doctors told my mom and dad that I would never walk; I would never be able to use my hands or, you know, I would be just like a vegetable. The doctors told my mom and dad that they needed to put me down in Beatrice. It's a state institution down there run by the state. I was down there until I was nineteen years old. When I was growing up, even some of the adults would tell me that I couldn't do anything—I can't do all this, or I can't fix this; I couldn't do anything, but I had to prove that I could do it.

"I know I'm handicapped, but I don't claim to be handicapped, and I don't let my hands or my handicap get to me. I love working with my hands. Now also I do some woodworking. I built almost this whole bedroom suite, and I built the entertainment center, and I have a shelf. It's not just a shelf, but it's got like a western background. Jesus is the one that gave me the gift that I could use.

"How I got started with Jacob's Well is Mark had a block party here. Mark is the director of *Jacob's Well*, and the first block party they had here, I really got to know him. A block party is where

everybody gets out, and we get to know each other. It's a lot of fun. We get to have hot dogs and hamburgers, and there's live music. You get to know a lot of people. A lot of people know me, and I like to joke around with people and so that's my thing. I like to be ornery. Yep.

"Another thing I help do here is give food away. To me, that's a lot of fun, and we do it on the first and third Saturday of the month. Here at the neighborhood of *Jacob's Well*, we share the love of Jesus to everyone, and I just think it's one of the best things that could ever happen to this neighborhood. I hope and, you know, wish they'd keep it going for many years.

"You know, I have family, and they don't have anything to do with me. *Jacob's Well* is family. I feel like I'm part of their family. I know that *Jacob's Well* feels the same about me as I do with them."

Mark**:**
One of the things I love about *Jacob's Well* is that Mark Thornton and a few friends just got a house in a neighborhood in the poorest part of our city and just began loving people there. The last block party they had, there were over 500 people, and from that front porch, from that house, a light is shining in a neighborhood. Much like Mark Thornton, twenty years ago Brad and Carma Bryan bought a house at 25th and U Street and moved in and began to love that neighborhood, and now it's become City Impact that has a huge footprint in our city. We'll talk more about it next week.

Or recently, Eric and Becca Willman bought a house on North 23rd Street that has become a magnet for kids and families all up and down their block. They flock to the house just to be loved and to be cared for and to have some food and some fun and to have a little light in their life, and that makes me ask the question: What if God wanted to plant lighthouses on every block in the core of our city, houses where the light was on 24/7? Not an incandescent light, not a fluorescent light, not a vapor light, not an LED light, but the light of Jesus was shining out of these houses block by block in our city. I think God's stirring a movement—a movement of people who are willing to do extraordinary things like get up and move from a comfortable place to maybe a place that seems a little uncomfortable and be a light—and I pray that *Jacob's Well* will be multiplied dozens and dozens and dozens of times in the years to come because our city truly could be transformed.

Now, the stories we've told this morning are stories that have been birthed. They're active; they're out; they're going. But I want you to know that one of the exciting things about our church is the fact that there are always new ministry ideas being conceived, and I can't tell you how exciting it is to have such an entrepreneurial congregation. There are people that are just being moved by the Spirit of God, and God's calling them to do something in particular, and they say, "Yes, God, I'm willing. We're willing to go and do that even though we don't know exactly where we're going or what it's going to look like."

So the last thing I want us to do this morning, I want you to meet two young women who I have the deepest respect for. Come on up, ladies. This is Libby here next to me and Abby, and they both work in social services. They have a great education, but they're not sitting around waiting for life to happen. They feel called by God to something very specific, and that is to work with young women who are aging out of the foster care system and prevent them from going down a dark path that will lead to all kinds of destructive things in their life. So I want them just to say a brief word this morning and, Libby, if you would tell us, what are some of the things that often happen? What happens to girls who age out of this foster care system if they don't have anywhere to go after that?

Libby: "Yeah, so when youth in the foster care system turn nineteen, all of the support and services that they've been receiving stop, and so they're just forced to do life on their own. Transitioning from childhood to adulthood is hard for anyone, but I can't imagine what it would be like if you'd experienced neglect and abuse and mental illness and very dysfunctional families.

"So there's a statistic by the *Journal of Housing and Community Development* that 14-30 percent of these women will experience at least one night of homelessness within their first three years of being emancipated, and there's a lot more that teeter on the edge of precarious living situations and literal homelessness. So while the young women that you love are starting college and new jobs, these women struggle with homelessness and unemployment, low academic achievements, becoming pregnant, entering sex trafficking, or ending up in the judicial system. These approximately 307 youth that will phase out of the foster care system in the state of Nebraska could cost the state over $90 million in responsive services over their lifetimes.

"What it essentially comes down to is just love. These women don't believe that they deserve to be loved, or they feel like they have to earn it. They don't know their worth. They don't know that they were created with a purpose for a purpose and so they look for love in all the wrong places because they just don't know."

Mark: And, Abby, what is it that you two envision doing to change all of that?

Abby: "Okay, earlier this year I sat at the foster care summit here in Berean, and one of the girls sat on a panel, and she had been through the foster care system, and she said that she had gone through thirty-three different homes, and so I can't imagine the instability and what that must be like trying to be on your own. And so if you were to look up the word *heiress*, the definition is *a woman to inherit considerable worth* and so, I guess that's what we feel like God might be calling us to do—to provide some sort of a transitional living program where they could receive consistent mentorship and investment in their lives, work development, life-skills training. So that's kind of where we're at right now with that."

Mark**:** Aren't you proud of these two young women? I mean…(applause) It's just like Abraham really, right? God said, "Get up and go to a land I'm going to show you," and he went, and they're going, and they don't exactly know where or when or exactly what it's going to look like, but they're looking for a home where they could invite four or five girls at a time to come and live with them for eighteen months and love on them and disciple them and help them get on their journey. I just think it's outstanding, and they just are a small sample of the many people, but lots of young people who feel passionately called to love and live in this community in a righteous way to shine the light of God's kingdom in the darkest places of our community. And I think that ought to give us great hope and joy. We get, together, to be a part of that.

And so this morning, I want to say thank you to the hundreds and hundreds of you who are actively involved in some way out in our community. What you do matters.! When you leave this campus and go out to serve and love and give your life away to others, it matters. It makes a difference, and together as we go out to do that, we truly can see transformation happen. So I want us all to say thank you to those who are doing that together. Would you join me in doing that? Thank you! (applause)

And I want to say thank you to one more person. She about killed me when she saw that I put her picture up last night, but I'm going to do it again. I want you to know Barb Harms. Barb is the

director of *Lincoln Berean Serves*. (applause) That's her husband Marv with her. Barb and I work very, very closely together, but let me tell you, Barb does more to engage people in living righteously inside the walls of the church and out than anybody else I know. She is a gem and a treasure that we have as a church, such a passionate person to see people live out their calling and to find that place of calling. So when you see Barb, tell her thank you as well.

Now, here's a conclusion for the morning. We're going to talk more about this next week. One is, the question again is: How are we to live? I think you've seen through these stories just a small sample of ways that we can live righteously, represent rightly the kingdom of God out in the world, and these are just a few of hundreds of stories we could have told. Literally, it was so hard to narrow it down, and we will tell a couple more stories next week.

So I hope that you've come to the conclusion that: Yes, God is at work in our community and secondly, yes, *you* can make a difference through your efforts! So the question is: What is God calling you to do? Maybe you already know it. Maybe you're already doing it, but if not, we have given you a great opportunity this weekend and next to connect to thirty-three organizations—faith-based and non-faith-based—that minister and serve out in our community. They're in our hallways, and we want you to stop by, find out what they do and explore the possibilities of ways that you can plug in to make a difference in our community in the years to come. God is calling us out to *let our light so shine before men that they might see our good works and ultimately glorify the Father who is in heaven*. Let's pray together that God would make that happen to an even greater degree.

Father, we are so thankful to be a part of a church with so many people who are living with a clear sense of mission and purpose and making such a profound difference in many different corners of our community. Lord, we celebrate it. We rejoice in it. We thank You for the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that calls us out just like Jesus entered into the mess. You call us out into the messiness of brokenness to bring light and hope and peace and so our prayer is, God, that You would take this awesome movement that is happening here among us and multiply it out a hundredfold. Help us never to be content or proud of what we are doing but always to seek Your face and press into what it is You're calling us to in the future. I pray there would be no spectators in Your Kingdom but that every single one of us would have a clear sense of our own personal calling and mission and that we would be obedient to that call to the glory of Your great name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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