State of the Church 2020: Part 2

Pastor Tim Bohlke

(Video)

The leadership journey begins with passion, with purpose, with a sense of calling, of destiny. We know who we are and how we hope to impact others. We're sure of our story. Our mission seems clear. Then life happens. Distractions, disappointments, detours, struggle, things that can pull us toward compromise. We stop grieving. We begin to doubt, to lose focus, to forget, or worse, to settle. We look around and see many who started the leadership journey, falling by the wayside. Too busy, weary, burned out, they've fallen and given up, or just walked away, sometimes leaving the wreckage of organizations, of ministries and churches, of families in their wake.

So a few years ago, burdened by what we saw on our own story, as well as in the lives of others, we threw ourselves into this conversation. It was our belief we could make a difference and change this leadership story. So we invited leaders from around the country into something different, something deep, an invitation to step away, to quiet down, listen, to deeply connect with God their own story and with others who are navigating these murky waters. To recalibrate, refocus, and set a course toward a life-changing kind of rhythm and a resilient faith, to leave an intentional legacy, lay a foundation—to finish well.

We do this through two leadership journeys: "RHYTHMinTWENTY" a three-event, three-year journey for 20 millennial leaders at a time, and "Rogue" a two-event, two-year journey for more seasoned leaders. When we started "Harbor Ministry" we believed we could change the world, just 20 leaders at a time. Now with multiple groups into this journey, we believe that more than ever, when you see we have this calling to deeply impact your stories. And we're seeing that impact in the lives of these leaders multiplying exponentially, helping us reconnect leaders with the calling, the mission and the passion that made them dangerous in the first place. Help us equip them to live with rhythm, to leave a legacy and to finish well. Let's rewrite this leadership story within a harbor.

(Tim Bohlke) Good morning, everybody. Welcome to a second part of a celebration of what God has done in this decade through this place. Celebrating and remembering are powerful things. I mean, I had a couple of memories on the first two songs there for me that were triggers. One: "*Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*" was a song that was sung when I was in the eighth grade and went forward at Camp Comeca in Central Nebraska. It started a journey where I would be much more serious about my faith, and every time I hear that song, it gives me chills.

And the "*Doxology*". We'd circle up at my grandmother's house in Kennesaw, Nebraska, on Sunday after church, and before the meal she'd have us all grab hands—and as a little guy I just kind of went with it—and we'd sing the *Doxology*. It didn't sound quite like that, but the power of the moment of what they brought in that, as I think back, that's what it was like. I mean, what a powerful memory and moment of proclaiming God here in this midst, in this moment!

Last week, you heard Bryan Clark talk about the *Decade on Purpose* and several initiatives that we launched the first of this decade, and it was really encouraging to hear and see all that went on there.

And one of the things he mentioned as he talked, was *multiplied vision*, having a kingdom mindset to let the vision go beyond the walls of Lincoln Berean. And as he said, we were all surprised to see how that ran its way through leaders and pastors around this country. And that came hand in hand with the launch of *Harbor Ministries*, but I think Bryan would say, if he was here today, that one thing I was, as well, surprised at, was the personal impact that it had on my life. And so in his absence, I thought it would be very good to hear from his words how *Harbor* and the *Rogue* leadership journey impacted him. So give a listen to this.

Video: (Bryan Clark)

I first heard about the concept of kind of a Harbor Ministry from Tim, even before he came on staff with Berean. So, you know I've been in ministry now for almost four decades and felt like I've worked really hard to maintain healthy rhythms, don't feel like I burn out or stress out. So, I didn't feel like I needed to go for that, but I was very supportive of what Tim was doing. I'd seen a lot of the collateral damage in ministry, so I felt like the best way to understand it was to get involved and be a part of it.

So, then a week before the Rogue event, everything really changed. I had open heart surgery when I was 39. It was a fairly complex surgery, and everything went well for about 10-11 years, but then my aortic valve started leaking. My cardiologist had said it's pretty obvious there's going to have to be a second surgery. I could tell by the way he talked to me he was pretty concerned, and it felt like this was probably the time. So that really changed my frame of mind. I began to think about Patti, and I began to think about the girls. I began to think about the church, tried to process a little bit of why it has to be this way, and just the impact of all that.

The first full day in Estes was a half day of silence and solitude, four hours with you and your journal and God. Most of the guys were going up to higher ground, a better view. I started up the hill and I remember vividly my heart beating through my chest and thinking. "This isn't too smart when I'm not quite sure what's happening." So I went down the other direction and actually there was a meadow down below. There was a creek going through the meadow; there were some woods there, and it was well into the afternoon when I was just trying to process some of these things and pray and trust God through all this, but then was concerned when I heard the sound of bull elk bugling. I actually heard it for a little bit before I actually saw him. He came out of the woods and was maybe 50 yards from me, and for probably 30 minutes, just moved around the meadow and continued to bugle every now and then. It was a very majestic scene. But in the midst of all of that, it's like God spoke to me. I didn't hear an audible voice, but it still was really clear.

(Recording from a previous sermon): "So every time you're tempted to worry and be fearful and anxious about the everyday stuff of life, the birds remind you that God will take care of you. He's promised."

About two months before that, I had preached a sermon from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said, "You know, if I take care of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, can't you trust Me to take care of you?" And all of that came back and it's as if God was saying, "Bryan, do you believe what you preach?" So to this day, I have a picture by my desk of that elk and another one engaged in a fight. That just reminds me of God's faithfulness, of the lesson I learned there, and that no matter what I face, I just need to trust Him.

You know it would be meaningful for me to let the people of Lincoln Berean know that whether they understood this or not, they have been a part of making it possible for Harbor Ministry to have this kind of an impact, not only in my life, but with people around the country. One of the things we want to do is celebrate what God has done, not only here, but all over the country, and it's because of faithful people here at Lincoln Berean, that that's been made possible.

(Tim) Psalm 62 in *The Message* says something like this: *"God, You're the one and only. I'll wait for You as long as you say. Everything I hope for comes from You. So why not?"* Even when oceans rise, and fear surrounds me, why not follow You straight into the dark? Life's too short, way too short. The obstacles are great, the darkness and opposition too intense to do this alone. No matter how hard the struggle, or how pressing the questions, how deafening the silence, or how long a time in the wilderness, we can still find you because Psalm 62 says, "*You're a solid rock under our feet, breathing room for our soul, an impregnable castle. With You, we're set for life. My help and glory are in God, You are granite-strength; You're our safe-harbor. So we trust in You absolutely; people lay their lives out for Him."*

For God, He is our anchor. He's a solid rock; He's steady. He's a safe place for us. And in these days and these moments we're in, the world has been shaken, hasn't it? I mean, our lives, the country, the things we think are solid, the world—they've been shaken. I've never been in an earthquake, but I've talked to a few people that have and one of the things that stands out in this conversation is they said the thing that you think is most solid—the ground under your feet—isn't. And it rocks you and creates this kind of uncertainty and unsettledness that tends to stick with you awhile. And I think that's kind of what I felt. I don't know about you over these last few months, but the world and the things that we think have been solid, have been shaken, shaken at its core. Man, we need that solid rock that Psalm 62 talks about, don't we? That rock *so we will not be greatly shaken*, it says in verse 6. We need to drop our anchor there and figure out how to tie into that rock so that we can not only endure these times, but be the kind of person that others can look to, who would say, "There's something different there." We need to figure it out, what that is, and why that is. And we need to cast ourselves and tie to that rock. How do we do that? Jesus, in the very earliest moments of His ministry, showed us the way. He showed us the pathway to do it, and we've got to look back at that and see what it was that He did, and what was so powerful in that moment?

The gospel of Mark starts with Jesus as an adult and starts the story there as He enters His life of ministry at 30. And the first big encounter He has is with this wild man in the desert, this crazy guy that is dressed in camel hair and eats locusts and wild honey, and he has a band of people that follow him. And he's daring enough in those days to say, "What you've been hearing isn't the way; God's the way." And he was baptizing people in the river, the kind of person that would be just radical enough today, we might look at that and go, "Something's off there." Yet this wild man of the desert, John the Baptist, continued to declare God to a people who desperately needed Him.

In the first encounter Jesus had, of significance, in chapter 1, was with John the Baptist, and John baptized Him in the river. And what was the first thing that Jesus did, coming off that baptism? In the very first moment, verse 12 in Mark 1 says it. "*God the Holy Spirit compelled Him to go to the wilderness for forty days, to go into solitude."* Not quite the start you'd think for the Man that's going to launch a ministry of three years that's going to shake the world, change its fabric, and is still shaking it today. The first thing He does, right out of the chute, is go into solitude and quiet; He goes into the desert for forty days.

Now, I grew up in the church. I don't know how many of you have, or if you are familiar or heard that story, but when it was taught to me, it was kind of taught in the sense of this as a time of weakening—40 days in the desert! Jesus is being beaten down. You know, He's thirsty; He's hungry. He's in a weakened state, and in that weakened state, the enemy, the devil, comes and throws every temptation at Him. "I'll give You, if You get out of this and turn from God, I'll give You rule of this whole kingdom; it's yours—riches, wealth, influence—everything that comes with it!"

That's what I kind of thought, but my perspective on that has changed significantly as I thought about that and read and been influenced. Author Dallas Willard says, "*This time in the desert, only at the end of those forty days, was Jesus at the height of His strength, not weakness. The desert was His fortress, His place of power. He emerged from that desert after forty days ready for anything, anything that would come His way. That was a place of strengthening."* I truly believe that, because when you put it in the context of everything else Jesus did, and how we get the account of His life through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we see Him go to the wilderness, go to the quiet to gain strength and perspective when needed. The first thing He does is that, and after He emerges from that time of strengthening in the desert, He heads to the Sea of Galilee, and things start to happen. He reaches out to Simon Peter for the first time and says, "Peter, follow Me." And the text says Peter immediately dropped his fishing net—his livelihood, his business—and followed Jesus on the spot. And the next verse talks about Him reaching out to brothers James and John and says, "Follow Me," and the text, at that point, says they immediately dropped their nets, left their father in the boat, and followed Jesus.

Now think about that. That's immediate! Their dad is still in the boat. They probably jumped out, swam, and said, "We're in." That's immediate. The word *immediate*ly is used about 11 or 12 times in the first chapter of Mark. So the context is to say this is happening; things are on the move. This is time to launch this—this thing that's going to really change and rock the world—and James and John immediately follow Him.

Then we follow that chapter on down to verse 32, where it says, *"When evening came and news about Him spread, everywhere people were being brought to Him to be healed…after the sun had set, immediately, they were bringing everyone who was ill and the whole city gathered at His door."* But then a couple verses later, "*In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went away to a secluded place and was praying there."* So in the midst of the launch, and this full day and days of ministry of immediate things happening—things are happening at such a fast pace—Jesus withdraws, gets up before everybody else, heads to the wilderness to pray. And we know He was there for a while—it doesn't say how long—but in the next verse, His disciples go looking for Him and they say in verses 36, and 37, "Jesus, where were You? Where have you been? Everybody's looking for you." So it was more than ten minutes; that's for sure…long enough.

And in that moment, Jesus declares the plan, says, "The time has come. I've been sent on this earth to stir it up, to disrupt it, and it's time to lay it out. We're going from town to town in this area and start declaring the hope that is the salvation God offers." Eventually that pathway led them back to Capernaum and Capernaum is a town with one of the most significant stories for me in the Bible. It talks about this radical encounter that people had with their crippled friend who couldn't get to Jesus.

If you remember, and were here last year when I preached, I talked about this story in Mark 2. In this story, where the crowd had turned out en masse and surrounded the house, and no one could get to Him because so many people wanted a piece of Jesus, to see what was going on. At the end of that

scene, four people came, carrying their friend on a pallet. The person had been crippled his whole life, couldn't walk on his own. And they did what it took because they so believed that an encounter with Jesus could change things—that if they could just get their friend to the foot of Jesus, things could change. They did what it took. They fought the crowd. They crawled up on somebody's house and cut a hole in the roof and lowered their friend down on a pallet to the foot of Jesus, and you know what it changed. The very public ministry of Jesus was launched because that man picked up that pallet and walked out of there for everybody to see.

But that story of Mark 2 doesn't happen without the foundation of Mark 1, where Jesus' time of strengthening in the wilderness, of pulling back from the pace and the speed of which everything was happening, and consistently going into the wilderness to be with God and to pray. That's what powered the stories of the Gospels, and we see this not just in Mark chapter 1, but throughout all four Gospels in the Bible. Many, many times those that walked with Jesus knew. They knew that He had a practice of withdrawing at often random times, unpredictable times, to go into the wilderness to pray, to seek strength.

That same truth is there for you and me. Jesus did it in the midst of success. You heard in Bryan's video him talk about the Sermon on the Mount. That was the time when they had food enough for a few people, but Jesus turned it into fish and bread that fed 5000. You know, this was a time where you say, "This is game on! Man, let's go!"

And after that, what's the first thing Jesus does? He withdraws, doesn't keep it going. He understands He's got to withdraw…get into solitude…get strength. We know Jesus did it in times of crisis. He did it after His friend John the Baptist was killed for his faith. And the first thing that happens after that is Jesus withdraws to the wilderness to pray. He does it for direction. He does it when He faces His own trauma, in the disappointment and despair that He was facing with His own death. We see Him once again withdraw, go into a place of solitude and quiet to get strength to face whatever it is that's going to be thrown at Him this day.

This is a practice as we invite leaders into *RHYTHMinTWENTY* and *Rogue.* Under the umbrella of Harbor Ministries, we invite them into a two or three-year process, and this is a practice we challenge them to do: Seek solitude and quiet as a discipline. Like other disciplines, and for those that do that, it's a difference-maker for those who find ways to quiet and focus on what God has to say, and to withdraw from the noise and the pace long enough to do that. That's difference-making; that's the separator. That's what gives people a compelling strength to say, "Something's different." It doesn't mean you don't struggle but something's different there that I'll follow. (Song)

Man, when you slow the words down to that song, don't they become powerful? I mean, do we need this today or what?

I won't fear what tomorrow brings.
With each morning I'll rise to sing
My God's love will lead me through
You're the peace in my troubled sea,
Oh yeah, You're the peace in my troubled seas.

We need that peace today, don't we, in the midst of all this division and fighting and struggle and on so many levels that we've been exposed to over the last few months? In so many forms there's such

discord, struggle, anger and emotion right on the sleeve, and we need that peace that going into the harbor can bring.

When we launched Harbor Ministry 11 years ago, I was new on the directional team, the leadership team here as well, but felt God moving me that this was the time to get this started. And one of the things that really cemented that was the actual definition of **harbor**: a place to give shelter and refuge in the storm; a place so situated with respect to coastal features to provide protection from the storm; a place to drop anchor, to refuel the resource to get restored. That was the hope and the vision and the dream of bringing people into a harbor on a two or three-year journey. That's the vision and hope for you and me as well, to find our way into the harbor.

So how do we do that? How do we apply what Jesus so clearly modeled for us in Mark 1 and throughout all the Gospels? No matter how much is going on, and no matter how much success or struggle or pace—whatever is going on in your life—you have to find ways to come into the harbor. You have to find ways to connect with God. Out of that, you the strength to go on and take that next step and face whatever God has for us. So, let me give you a couple of practical steps, real practical stuff here.

First: *schedule it.* You've got to schedule it! If you don't put it on your calendar, it'll never happen. So my challenge to you this morning—and you've heard me say something like this before if you've been at Berean here for a while—is get it on your calendar and, before you leave this parking lot today, plug two hours of solitude, of quiet, of entering that kind of desert wilderness, into your phone, or on your calendar, and commit to it. So, you've got to schedule it!

And then you got to *fight for it*. Because you and I both know when that kind of thing gets on your calendar, there's going to be fifty other things that come up and are going to get in your way and demand your time. Most of them are good things, I'm sure. But in all kinds of things you could do and put off, because there is uncertainty around what a couple hours with just God would be like and what to do in that time, but you got to fight for it. So, schedule it; fight for it.

Find your place—the holy place—you know, the kind of place where you can go to kind of detach and then awaken it…*awaken it!* Do something that kind of wakes up the senses and your spiritual journey a little bit. For me, its a quick bike ride. It might be a hike, a walk, might be a song, or something you've read. Go back to that thing that kind of made your heart jump when you did it. Get something that will awaken you.

And then *look back and look forward*. So, you're scheduling it; you're fighting for it; you're awakening it, and then in that practice of that time you have, look back and look forward. In my bike ride this week, I went out to the Mopac. I don't grind it for the whole hour, grind it for a little bit, and get to a spot where I like to go. And then I look back and say, "God, what's been going on?" And this one last week was like, "Why am I so angry?" I mean, I've felt anger for a while, but now I was really feeling it. Why is that?" Well, I'm angry at a lot of things; honestly it helps to name it. I'm angry the Big 10 canceled football. I mean, that goes well beyond football, right? I'm angry about that though. I am, and so it felt good to name it. I'm angry that we have friends going through such hard times. We've got some really close friends we walk with, and she's in the battle of her life with cancer. I mean, you know what? That's not okay. You know, I'm angry about that. I'm angry she has to face that. And in so many stories like that, it really helped to name it.

And then I kind of put my gaze *forward* in the last bit of time. God, what do You want me to do with that? What can I do with that? How can I give that to You? How can I not let it control me? And that's what I do every time. You know, when I'm going into those kinds of solitude and quiet times, I look back, and then I look forward. That would be my challenge to you this morning. This will be difference making…this really will be difference making.

Schedule it, fight for it, awaken it, look back, look forward. And those that do this, there'll be a different substance about you going forward. Those that have dared enter the Harbor journey with us, like I said, that's been the difference maker and the separator for them. You heard us in the video talk about *RHYTHMinTWENTY*-level-leader journey for Millennials. We have *Rogue* for guys, upper 30s and up. And this fall, hopefully, all things considered, we'll launch Revel, which will be the first women's leadership event under Harbor. That's going to be a part of what we're doing going forward as well. There have been hundreds of people—pastors, leaders of businesses from all over the country, 44 states now and several countries—that have entered into one of these journeys with us. It's been the ride of our lives and when Bryan said, as he said last week, we were all amazed at what God has done. That's something we can kind of enter into and celebrate together. Last summer, John, who's playing the drums, Bryan Olesen and I went on an eleven-city tour, so to speak, going around to multiple cities where we've had a lot of guys that have entered into a Harbor Ministry journey with us, to get around them, do something like we're doing this morning, and invest in them and, it was a really neat time.

One of the places we did go to, and we have every year, is St. Petersburg, Florida. That's a place where we've had a lot of guys that have come through. It's been a high-impact area and I wanted to show you some stories of St. Petersburg, Florida, and what God has been doing through Harbor—in that city, as well as many others around the country. So we can enter into this together and say, "Man, thank You, God, for what You're allowing us to do, and for the people in this place who have had such a radically great Kingdom mindset. So, check out this video:

(Video)

(Narrator) When we started Harbor Ministries, our mission was to change the world by reaching just 20 at a time. That seemed like a crazy calling, and it was. But then God started moving, and over the years, we continue to take leaps of faith, believing God would carry us towards that calling. Now several years later, we've impacted hundreds of stories, leaders and ministries, businesses and families. They go out from the Harbor, inspired to live with rhythm, leave a legacy and finish well. We've reached leaders all over the country, places like Texas, California, New York, and everywhere in between. One area we've seen a ton of impact is in St. Petersburg, Florida. We've now had more than forty strategic leaders from that area that have been a part of our Rhythm and Rogue groups. A while back, we held an event in St. Pete, and invited everyone who had been a part of those groups, as well as friends and spouses they invited.

(Tim Bohlke) Thank you, as Bryan said, for coming and being a part of this. I mean, it's surreal for us seeing the faces around the room, and so many of you have been through it and now invited others to kind of get exposed to what Harbor is about. God has called us into this radical investment into people because we believe if you radically invest in 20 right guys at a time, you're going to change the world. Those that are passionately pursuing God is a difference-making kind of people. And nowhere is that more evident than St. Pete.

(Participant) For me, tonight was about fellowship with other people in our community. It was also a small reunion of sorts for those of us who have walked through this Harbor Ministry thing together. When you see, you know, the same faces that experienced the thing with you, and you see the pictures and you're just reminded of the mission, it helps take you back to that place where God changed you.

(Wife of Participant) It is just so refreshing to see somebody thinking so outside of the box for people who really can affect so many people around them and in our community.

(Narrator) All of these guys have unique stories and unique circles of influence. Blake was a part of one of our first Rogue groups. He was a youth pastor who got burned out, and he was ready to walk away from ministry all together. But through Rogue, Blake found affirmation that ministry was still his calling.

(Blake) So I was in my first year at Rogue, and I was still trying to figure out what was next, even who I was going to be, where I was supposed to go, and I think it was the last day we were there when I remember Tim putting his hand on my shoulder and saying, "Man, you've got the heart of a pastor." And at that moment I just, it just, it just, gave me an overwhelming sense, because it just resonated with, "Yeah, I do feel that," but it's good to hear it from someone else, you know? And that shifted me like, "Okay, this is true. Now this will dictate everything else from this point forward".

(Narrator) Blake returned to Saint Pete and started RADIUS, a church focused on reaching the inner city by being the hands and feet of Jesus. One tangible way they do that is a food-truck ministry, started through the church. For every sandwich sold, one meal is given away. And through that, they provide thousands of meals to those in need in their area.

Beyond ministry leaders in St. Pete, a number of business leaders have been impacted as well. Justin is the vice president at a large company where he oversees 1500 employees. A few years ago, he was struggling to find balance between work and family, and he found himself on a destructive, unsustainable path.

(Justin) The sheer weight of balancing everything on my own was absolutely crushing. Something was going to explode—professionally, personally, family—I just could not keep it all together. So I heard about Rhythm, right around this same time that I was willing to try anything. My biggest takeaway from that first year was really the need to put in a practice in my life, to have space literally and figuratively for an extended period of time to reflect and reorient my heart to God, and reprioritizing my support of my wife and my family, my faith, my walk with God, as well as continuing to pursue work and serving the work that God had placed me in, but in a much more balanced and rhythmic way.

(Narrator) The new rhythm in Justin's life disrupted the direction he was headed and changed the future of his family. Now he's a better husband, father, and leader. In just this one area of Florida, we're seeing God use Harbor Ministries to deeply impact the stories of strategic leaders, and then that impact multiplies to the thousands they collectively lead and influence.

(Participant) Any time that you have a small group of people who have an encounter that changes them, they're going to go tell somebody; they can't keep that in.

*(Participant) It is kind of like, you know, the stone thrown in the pond that can just ripple beyond what any of us truly can imagine. That type of impact—that's exactly why we believe we are accomplishing the mission—*c*hanging the world, just 20 at a time.*

(Tim) This has been an incredible ride and for that event down in St. Petersburg, Florida, we took Bill Griepenstroh here from church down to capture some of the stories there with us. And it was a really big marker time for us and for me and the journey of Harbor. And that was about the 28th of February this year. I basically just got back from that on a plane, and the world shut down. A lot of what we were doing, you know, in the next months ahead had to stop and get postponed, as y'all are all too familiar with. But that event became this huge marker for me; that was one of my takeaways from that. It was just God saying, "You've got fuel back in the tank; you've got to keep going. You've got to fight through whatever's coming. You've got to stay the course. And you keep taking this because it's so worth it." And I don't know, as we gathered down there, what kind of stands out to you from that time, Bryan?

(Bryan Olesen) It was obvious that there were a lot of leaders coming from that area. It was great to see them again. After the event, though, the wife of a participant said, "You don't realize; you might think St. Pete is just this beautiful place where everybody wants to be, but it's incredibly difficult to be a Christian leader in ministry or business here." They'd been praying for a long time to have some way to build up the leaders there and unify them. She also said the people in this room didn't know each other before they experienced Harbor. I kind of thought that they did. But it wasn't until they went through the Rhythm and Rogue journey, that they met each other. And now they've got that bond there that wasn't there before God used this ministry birthed out of Lincoln, Nebraska, to bring them together. So it's pretty awesome!

(Tim)Yeah, it's pretty cool. I think as we saw those people come in, what struck me as well was the impact Harbor and thus, Lincoln Berean and many others that give to Harbor Ministry, has had in a city-changing way in St. Pete. I mean, there's people like Blake and Justin who are on the video. They're there, and many others like that are impacting this city in Central Florida and several of the largest churches in that area. Their pastors have been through it and been impacted by this. Blake's story is amazing in terms of what they're doing and how they're reaching the inner city there. They're just really, really cool.

I think there's such power in remembering, I mean such power in remembering and celebrating, right? I mean, one thing that COVID has done is, it's robbed us of celebration. It's taken so much away in that regard. We can't celebrate championships and can't celebrate the ways and movement of God and the things God is doing. You know, we are missing that we can't celebrate weddings like they should be celebrated, can't celebrate people's lives. When it comes to the end, we can't bring people together even in a funeral setting, and really celebrate what God has done through that person…can't do that. Everything's limited, right? I mean, it's robbed us of celebration. And that's what has been so valuable about the last two weeks and what we've tried to do here, because we got to celebrate. We got to come together and say, "Look what God has done!" We got to remember and celebrate…remember what God has done in our own lives, and what He's so powerfully done through this place, as well in hearing your stories. We got to find ways to connect and do that. We have to find ways to remember and celebrate what God has done.

As I've been preparing for this weekend, I thought over the last 12 or more years that I've been in leadership in this place, and then over the last decade of really focusing in on Harbor Ministry, and

what God has done, I'm so thankful that I get to be a part of that. I'm so thankful for this place, because when I think of the children's ministry here, and the youth, and the college ministry that keeps slugging it out and doing such great work, and the men's ministry, and the women's ministry and Shereen and Marlys and all their faithful years they've given, and spiritual care and all the dynamics of what goes on in this place. There are so many beautiful stories, we've got to celebrate! We've got to remember!

And we got a chance to focus the last couple of weeks on some specific areas. But how about what God is doing in India through the heart of a man who's been relentlessly pursuing what God has in India! And Jeff's leadership has been beautiful…amazing…and you know, hundreds and hundreds of churches through that country! As a result, people are getting changed in one of the darkest, hardest places to live—amazing!

And then you look at bringing leaders into a harbor here, because it's not just about 20 as we tried to illustrate this morning. It's about what those people do and who they lead and, as a result, some of the largest churches in St. Pete, Florida, are being impacted and changed, and thousands of people in that area as a result of that. Man, that is a reason to celebrate! That's a reason not to forget! COVID and what's going on there and in the dynamic of this country right now, that's not going to win. There's going to be a time when things change. The Healer is coming, is active already. I mean, He's coming and things are going to change. He's in our story; He's here. Now He's here with us, and we sensed it coming into this weekend service—that God was about this.

He's going to meet you guys uniquely in the place you need to be met. I just want to stand here and say thanks, as someone who has been in the mix of this. Thanks to you and this church for freeing me up in something that not typically has been done, and to pursue a ministry calling that's not a regular thing in most churches, and would allow me to do that, and see God so powerfully work. I was looking at that picture that Bryan Clark was in they showed, that group of Rogue he went through with, and in that group was Bryan Olesen, Bryan Clark, Mark Brunot, Stu Kerns, and other pastors from Florida and other places. What an amazing thing to see God work and have that change!

But for you and me—we need to remember, and we need to celebrate—so we're going to celebrate with a song here pretty soon, but I'm also going to ask you to remember what God has done and how He's coming into this story and into this year in the United States of America in a powerful way. He's working through this! Don't forget it.

I want to close with this passage out of Isaiah 35, so powerful. I truly, honestly, believe these words are for you today. There's something in here for each of us. And so I'm just going to ask you to stand and we're going to pray this passage through as I read it to you. Again, I'm having kind of a moment here, as I look around and see if people have fought through what they need to fight through to get here, to show up. That's so much of this, showing up and God's meeting us here. And so let me just close with this Isaiah 35 passage:

Energize the limp hands,
strengthen the rubbery knees. (God,)
Tell fearful souls, (If there is one in this room, tell fearful souls:
"Courage! Take heart!
GOD is here, right here, (You believe that? He's here, right here; He's)
on his way to put things right

And redress all wrongs.
He's on his way! He'll save you!" "Listen, friends…
Blind eyes will be opened,
deaf ears unstopped,
Lame men and women will leap like deer,
the voiceless break into song.
Springs of water will burst out in the wilderness,
streams flow in the desert.
Hot sands will become a cool oasis,
thirsty ground a splashing fountain…
…barren grasslands flourish richly.
There will be a highway
called the Holy Road.
No one rude or rebellious
is permitted on this road.
It's for GOD's people exclusively—
impossible to get lost on this road…
Not even fools can get lost on it...
Only the redeemed will walk on it.
The people GOD has saved;
will come back on this road and we're going to
…sing as we **make** our **way home** (We're going to sing our way, all the way
to Zion. (Amen) (*The Message, Isaiah 35: 3-10)

*Scripture taken from The Message.
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