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DATE: February 1, 2026
SERIES: Finishing Well
MESSAGE: Looking Back to Move Forward
PASSAGE: Psalm 105:1-5; Psalm 145:1-13
SPEAKER: Bryan Clark

I wouldn't say I have a sermon today. I feel like last week was my last real sermon, leaving you with five big themes that I would want you to remember. What we're gonna do this morning is a little bit different. What I'd like to do is celebrate you. I'd like to celebrate you, the amazing people that make up Lincoln Berean Church. You have been strong and courageous, and God has done amazing things—to God be the glory.

Two weeks ago, Ryan opened this short series by taking us to Joshua chapter one, which opens with the words "Moses my servant is dead." I have no doubt Joshua was completely overwhelmed at the call of God on his life to now lead these people into the promised land. So God says to him, "Just as I was with Moses, I will be with you. Be strong and courageous. I will not fail you. I will not forsake you." What's implied in that statement is that the people needed to go back and remember, think about, celebrate what God had done for his people in order to gain what they needed to be strong and courageous for whatever God had for them next.

Listen to the words of the psalmist. As he exhorts us to remember, to think about, to celebrate the great things that God has done.

[Congregational Reading + Video]

This morning, I want to take you on a little stroll down memory lane. In 1962, there was a group of people that gathered in a living room for a prayer meeting about launching a new church in Lincoln. At the very beginning of that video was that iconic shot of those people, and in that shot, there's two ornery little boys. They happen to be with us this morning, so I'm gonna invite them to stand. Mark and Leroy Rock. Their parents, Clayton and Shirley Rock, were part of that original group. I would say they are still ornery but grown up. Mark has been part of our staff for many, many years, our IT staff, and Lisa works as a receptionist. Leroy and Becky have been part of the church for many years, and their son, Kevin, happens to be my cello buddy in the orchestra. So it's really neat to have them as part of the church after these many years.

In 1962, the church started downtown in the old YMCA building. In 1964, moved to 11th and M, and then in 1968, moved to 17th and A. That building is still there. It's a big red brick building. That was the church that we actually grew up in. I was in the youth group. That's kind of my church, at least the building growing up. Then in 1978, the leadership of the church made a decision to buy a piece of ground out at 70th and Highway 2. I'm going to show you a picture of what that looked like in 1978. It was all farm ground. That picture's taken from 70th Street, looking to the northeast. There's an old barn, and some other ag building—there was nothing out here. I often think about the courage and faith it took to be an inner city church from 17th and A, and make a decision to move out on the outskirts of town, in the middle of nowhere, with the real risk that maybe people won't go with them. Very strong and courageous. Big step of faith.

In 1981, then the first building out here was completed, a building we call the A Wing. The original auditorium today is the preschool classroom. But it's a room that has a lot of meaning to me



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because that's where Patti and I were married. It's a room where my dad's funeral was. It's the real where my grandma's funeral was. Last Friday, a week ago, we gathered as a staff, and we opened a time capsule that had been placed in the wall of the A Wing building. It was just really fun to open it up. A lot of it was pictures, and for some of us it brought back tons of memories of the amazing people who were all part of making Lincoln Berean, Lincoln Berean. None of us would have what we have today without the faithfulness of those people.

In 1991, so 10 years later, we built the C wing, which today we refer to as the Chapel. Beautiful, about 750 seat auditorium. That was in 1991. Patti and I came in 1990. The plan when I came was to be an associate pastor, and over the course of five to seven years, I may or may not transition into the role of senior pastor. I came in September. Shortly after that Kurt was diagnosed with cancer. He was out most of that year, and that September, so one year later, I was voted in as the new senior pastor at the ripe old age of 35. I can't really even put into words how overwhelming it was to be made a steward of a church I grew up in, a church I really loved, a church that the people dearly loved. But God has been faithful.

We worked our way through lots of changes slowly and carefully, moving away from our fundamentalist roots to more and more of a culture of grace. In 2000, the D Wing was built, which is a three story educational building, and without a doubt, it is the most used building on the campus. So it's been a wonderful facility to have.

By the time we got to 2003, we were running six weekend services—three on Sunday morning, one on Saturday night, but also two were simulcasted into the upper room of the D building. Just to be clear, that was not an overflow, but rather we asked members of the congregation to consider making that your service in order to open up seats in the auditorium, because it was more likely visitors are gonna come to the auditorium. Everything in the upper room was live. Live ushers, live announcements, live worship, everything was live. Until you got to the sermon, and then it was simulcasted from the Chapel into the upper room. So those that were in the upper room had to time their worship to such a degree at the same point where it closed in the Chapel, it closed in the upper room, so that the preacher, which was me, would step up on stage, at the same time. You think about how many people it took to pull that off. What I remember vividly is casting the vision for that, and how many people just immediately were willing to sacrifice, make that decision, to make more room to accomplish the mission. It was just an army of people—most of them were not paid, they had full time jobs. They're busy people, but sacrificed considerable amounts of time and talent and treasures to make that possible. Somehow, we had to get to the place where we thought the next step was at least reasonably possible.

One of the other things that, for me, is a great memory during those days was those were the days of the Easter musical. For six days leading up to Easter, we had an Easter drama, an Easter musical. The chapel packed out, every single night, six nights in a row. The place was buzzing. People from all over the city came. It was a great outreach. God did amazing things through that. Robin Smith directed that, she did a great job. My wife, Patti, was actually in charge of all the sets, put together a team. But I think back about how many people that took, a massive army of people. Most of these people were not paid. They had full time jobs, they were busy people, but for months invested themselves into this, to make it work. Even just for our family, Patti was not paid, she was not an employee, but I can tell you, she was here all day, every day, for months, trying to put it together to pull that off. To me that just reflects the people's commitment to the mission, for serving, for coming together, to make that happen. And it was a great season for us.

But with all of that, we began to wrestle with the reality that this pace was not sustainable. Everybody was wearing out. The people were wearing out, the staff was wearing out. It's like, we can't keep doing this. So over and over, we as elders would discuss this. But it was a bit overwhelming. Our giving at that time was flat, and we were struggling every year just to finish in



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the black. It was a real scarcity mentality. On top of that, we had \$3 million in debt. And as far as we could tell from our research, the next step was gonna cost roughly \$15 million. So again and again, we had this conversation.

We finally came to what I think all of us that were on that elder board would say was a fateful elder meeting. We could sense God's leading, but we were struggling with being overwhelmed by this decision. So over and over and over again, we talked well into the night, well past midnight. And I remember as part of that discussion, I took us to the end of the book of Exodus, where Moses sends in 12 spies to view the land. Two come back, Joshua and Caleb, and say, this is a land flowing with milk and honey. We need to trust God. We can do this. But 10 of them said, it is a land flowing with milk and honey, but it's filled with giants. They're too big. We can't do it. Let's go back to Egypt. And as a result of the unfaithfulness of the leaders, God said as a result of that, this entire generation will wander in the wilderness until they die there. And then God will consider the opportunity for the next generation to have the chance to trust him and go into the land.

That's actually where the scene picks up in Joshua chapter one. It was time for Joshua and this next generation to trust God and to take the land. I remember saying to the elders, having thought about that passage for weeks, that as a leader, I don't think I could live with myself if I did not have enough faith and courage to trust God, and that a result of that an entire generation would wander in the wilderness and miss the chance to see God do amazing things. Ultimately, I told them I would rather die having at least tried to take the land than to spend the rest of my life wandering in the wilderness, knowing I never had the courage to try. So we came together as an elderboard. We all agreed, and on a unanimous decision, decided it was time to launch forward. We were determined to make sure this was about the mission. It's not about building buildings, it's about reaching people. But we were out of room.

So consistent with that, as we prayed, we felt like God was laying on our heart to do some other things also consistent with the purpose. One of those things is we believed God was leading us to hive off 250 to 300 people to go north to plant a church in north Lincoln, which today is North Point Community Church. To build a 2,500 seat auditorium, to build a detached youth complex, to plant at least 100 churches in India, and to see if we could start a leadership college. That was all part of a three year campaign.

I vividly remember the weekend when we unveiled this to the congregation. I laid it out, and you could have heard a pin drop. People were in utter shock. As a matter of fact, there were several people in between services that actually said to me, "Pastor, we think the elders have lost their minds." A couple of weeks ago, Patti and I had supper with a lovely couple from Lincoln Berean, who was in that meeting, and we were reminiscing, and they brought it up, that weekend when I unveiled all that. They said they went home, and the wife said to her husband, "What do you think about what Bryan said?" And he said to his wife, "I think Bryan has lost his mind."

But over the next few weeks, we just asked the people to pray about it, to seek God's leading. And it wasn't long, it was just a matter of weeks, where you could feel it. There was a buzz in this place where people were getting a sense that this is where God is leading, that we can trust God. We needed to step out by faith, and it was evident that the people were on board. Be strong and courageous, we are gonna do this thing. So we officially launched the purpose campaign.

Over the next 3 years, we sought to accomplish all of those initiatives that were laid out. I don't know, a couple years into it, this shell was built. The floor was still dirt, and on two occasions, we had large balloon payments do, and we simply didn't have the money. And on two occasions, the elders actually gathered in this room. We literally, physically, knelt in the dirt and we begged God to provide the money we needed. I think all of us that were on that elder board would say we will



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never forget that. And on both occasions, through unexpected ways, God graciously provided the money we needed.

This auditorium was scheduled to open Easter of 2007. It was really important to me that we have some sort of a family time together in here before Easter Sunday, because I knew on Easter Sunday there'd be a lot of visitors and guests and people wanting to see the building. So, on Palm Sunday of 2007 we met in the Chapel just like every week. But about halfway through the service, we let people know that we were opening up this auditorium, and there was a parade from the Chapel into this auditorium, and we had one time to be in here together as family, to celebrate what God had done, to celebrate the faithfulness of God's people, and to re-up our commitment to the mission. In 2007 on Easter Sunday, the building officially opened.

God has done amazing things. We've gone from a church with a scarcity mindset, always struggling to stay in the black, to a church that has a reputation throughout the Midwest of being a very generous church. It still is amazing to me that in 2016, for the first time since six months into becoming a church, the church became 100% debt free. We paid off everything for the purpose campaign. We paid off the C wing debt. We paid off the D wing debt. To me, it's very meaningful as I step away from being a pastor of Lincoln Berean that we hand over 50 acres of ground, a beautiful facility, and not one penny of debt, which sets the next generation free to listen and to follow God to whatever big things God has in store in the future. Because of your generosity, the people of Lincoln Berean, with your time, your talents, and your resources, we have been able to expand in many ways to things that we have done on this campus, out into the community, and globally around the world.

One of those memories for me is once we were debt free, one of the things we were able to do is one of our senior leaders, Tim Bohlke, had a vision for a ministry to leaders across the country, called it Harbor Ministry. And we agreed as an elder board to pay his full time salary, but allow him to spend most of his time launching that ministry. Today, that ministry has reached leaders all over the country. Tim is now full time with that ministry. I don't know of any other church I've ever heard of that has ever done that. But it's been an amazing investment into the larger Church around the country.

Last year, 2025, and the year before, 2024, we were able together in those two years to give away \$350,000 to the most practical, benevolent needs of people in our community. This money goes to things like rent, paying your utilities, hospital bills, grocery bills, the most basic needs that people have. And it's been exciting for us to be able to serve our community in that way.

Two other memories for me that I think are fun related to generosity. One is in 2016, we decided to do a Habitat for Humanity House, just as a way to serve our community. So, I remember meeting with Habitat, and they laid everything out. And roughly, we need to come up with, I don't remember what it was, \$80,000, \$90,000, and then the house would be built on our property and moved to its location. They had a huge notebook full of all these fundraising ideas. Car washes and all these different things you need to do. "We have lots of experience. Here's what you need to do to do it." And I remember vividly closing the notebook and saying, "That won't be necessary." They're like, "Oh, oh, yeah, this is what you have to do." It's like, "I don't think so." I said, "I think all I have to do is let the people know." So I laid out the vision for a Habitat house, and in a matter of weeks, \$90,000 had come in. We started the house out on the north little parking lot. Many of you participated in that, built a house, moved it, as just an expression of our service to our community.

The second one has to do with an opportunity in 2019. Prison Fellowship is a ministry started by Chuck Colson that serves around the world. It's been very effective, very effective in the prisons and we fully support that. We've actually been involved in the prison system all the way back to the 17th and A, all the way back to the '70s. So a rep from Prison Fellowship and one of the members of



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our congregation met with me in my office. The state penitentiary had a building in the center of the prison that was pretty run down and unused, and said they would make it available to prison fellowship as a place, ultimately, to reach and disciple the prisoners inside the walls as long as they came up with the money to do it. They couldn't use state money to do it. So I remember having that conversation, and the rep from Prison Fellowship said, you know, this is what we're doing, this is the vision, anything Lincoln Berean can do to help would be great. I asked a few questions, and I said, "Okay, I think we'll do it." She said, okay, like, whatever you can do will be very helpful. I said, "I'm not sure you understood what I just said. I said, we'll do it." The cost was \$100,000. I laid out the vision to the congregation, and in two weeks, we had \$100,000. I announced that we had hit the goal, praise the Lord, but so many people told me, we still wanna go, we still want to give. Went to \$150,000 like within weeks, which allowed them to do some more renovations to make it a beautiful facility for that ministry within the walls of the prison. To me, that's just one of many snapshots of the amazing generosity of the people of Lincoln Berean.

But it isn't just money. It's been a significant investment of time and talent. It takes an army to make this place go. Ultimately, it's you, it's the people of the body. You have jobs, you have lives, you have families, yet you sacrifice so much time, so much energy to make Lincoln Berean, Lincoln Berean. Which I just think is amazing. It takes roughly 350 people every weekend just to make the weekend go. Most of those people are not paid, they just show up and joyfully serve. Talking to the children's ministry, it takes about 230 people every month to make children's ministry go. Most of those not paid, they joyfully show up and they serve. Talking to Tyler, it takes about 100 people every week to serve in youth ministry, to make youth ministry work. Most of those, not paid. Right now, we have 265 Life Group leaders, about 1,400 people in Life Groups. Those people aren't paid, they show up, they faithfully serve, in order to make that ministry possible.

Over the years, I've told you this many times, but I want to tell you one more time. When people ask me, and they do ask me, what makes Lincoln Berean so special, I always give them the same answer: it's her people. God has always brought amazing people. People willing to sacrifice, people willing to serve, people engaged in the mission, people that are Lincoln Berean Church. You have been strong and courageous. You have trusted God. You have sacrificed, and to God be the glory, he has done great things among us.

There's a reason why senior pastors stay 30 years. Ryan mentioned this a couple weeks ago, that over 64 years, two senior pastors, now Ryan. The reason is because of you. Pastors stay a long time because this is a very special place to be. It has been the honor of a lifetime to be your pastor. I love you guys. I'm so proud of you. God has done great things. As I was with Moses, Joshua, I will be with you. Be strong and courageous. I will not forsake you. I will not fail you. So now we look forward. This is a big mission. There's a lot to do. We need to continue to trust God and be faithful.

So how I want to end the service is by commissioning, in a sense, our current staff as we move forward and expect God to do great things. So I want to invite all the current staff to come down front, fill up this space. This is ministry staff, this is business team staff, this is support staff, this is campus ops staff, full-time, part-time. Everybody part of the team. Everybody matters. I also want to invite the current elder board to join them, which fills out this team moving forward.

It's good to remind you this morning, that the official transition was made in 2021. Ryan took over as the lead pastor. I have not been involved in running the church since 2021. I don't go to the meetings. I don't make any of those decisions. This team's been doing it. So Monday morning, they're going to keep running the church. It's not like it's a big change. But I did think it would be neat to bring the team together and have an opportunity to pray over them, to commission them, to move forward, to accomplish the mission that God has given us.



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I've also invited back past elders. This would be the leadership team who's been part of getting us to where we are today. So first, I'm going to ask them to stand. I'm not sure who all was able to come back, but before you come down front, just stay there because I want to identify you. So let's see, [*names multiple former elders*]. I'm gonna invite them to come down front, invite them just to lay their hands on some of these staff members.

And I want to invite Roger Sand. So for most of my time here as senior pastor, Roger was the chairman of the elder board. Roger owned his own business, not paid. He was chairman of the elder board, he did a great job with that, he's been a good friend to me, he's been a great encourager. It just seemed fitting to me that Roger would pray a prayer over us as a congregation, over the staff, and I'm excited about what's ahead.

This is an amazing staff. When the elders gathered together years ago and began praying about this transition, what we were praying for was that God would give us a new, young, passionate, talented staff to take the church forward into her next season. I told the staff a couple weeks ago, looking around at them, it's like, this is what we prayed for. And it's amazing to see God's answer. I love these guys. They're talented, they're passionate. I'm excited because I know God's gonna do great things through them.

So, Roger, if you would lead us in prayer.

[*Roger*] Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we gather as your church this weekend to celebrate the great things that you have done among us. We thank you for the privilege of being invited to be a part of what you've done to impact our lives over these many years. We thank you for your faithfulness that all generations experienced over six decades of ministry in this community. We thank you for the many on staff and in the congregation who have listened to your voice, obeyed the call, and given themselves to the mission you've called us to. Today we look back and celebrate what great things you have done. May we be strengthened and resolute to hear and obey your voice, to accomplish the mission in the years ahead. May yesterday's victories fuel the faith we will need to move forward, to trust you for the challenges that loom in the future. We pray for Ryan, the elders, and staff as they lead us forward in the months and years ahead. May you protect and guide them. May they be bold to stand on your truth. May they be courageous to listen and obey what you are calling them to accomplish. May they be humble, grateful, and dependent so as to never lose sight of the reality that this is your church, and to you be the glory for the great things you do. God, finally, we ask that you would show yourself in the years to come in ways that are new and fresh. May you demonstrate your power, your compassion, your kindness in the lives of your people to a dark and hurting world. May the reality of your presence and the lives of your people provide refreshing water to the hurting around us, desperately in need of that which will satisfy their thirsty soul. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, blameless with great joy to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time, and now and forever. Amen.

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