

Heritage of the Gospel

Stewardship of Our Heritage

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In April of 1964 an article appeared in a little newsletter called "The Lifeline," which was the publication of First Baptist Church of Francesville, Indiana. I'm going to quote from just a portion of that for sake of time. They said, "The Reverend B. Rowe, pastor in his 13th year at Kossuth Street Baptist Church in Lafayette has experienced the joy of prayers answered and burdens lifted for the south area of town. Pastor Rowe met with a group at Kossuth Street in November, 1963 for the purpose of starting a new church. The group requested that Reverend Roland Reid, missionary pastor of the First Baptist Church of Francesville, work with the group and the committee toward the establishment of this new work. He consented and conducted weekly Bible study and prayer sessions with the group. Regular Sunday morning and evening services were commenced in the Farm Credit building on April 5, 1964. A Recognition Council met on April 20th at 2 o'clock at the Kossuth Street and the Faith Baptist Church was recognized by a Council of 14 members with 11 churches represented. Both pastor and people are grateful for the saints and churches who have travailed in the birth of this new work. As a babe, it needs nurture and control in the spirit and guidance in love. As it grows, it will gain strength from the encouragement and prayers of the saints. It will be buffeted about by the winds of every strange doctrine and will suffer the torment of the fiery darts of the adversary. More than any other thing, it will need the sunshine of God's love to flower and bear fruit. Now beloved, water this tender young plant with your prayers." This year we're celebrating the 50th anniversary of the birth of our church and the good news is that in many, many ways, it's an absolutely marvelous story to tell. We've been given a rather unique and an unusually blessed heritage, friends, and that's what I want to talk to you about during Stewardship Month this year, the stewardship of our heritage.

With that in mind, please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 1, that's on page 130 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need it. Now, while you're turning there, I probably need to put all of this in a bit of larger context. For many years, our church has designated November to be Stewardship Month. In fact, I was reading back through some of the minutes of our business meetings over the years and I came across this note from September 19, 1976 where a recommendation from the board was made that we allow \$1,000 to be used to set up a stewardship program. That would have been a new word for many persons in the church family at that time and it even explained where the thousand dollars was going: \$300 for a stewardship banquet; \$300 for 75 books that were going to be distributed to the people in the church family at the time; and then

\$400 for printing and other incidentals. One of the reasons that is significant is because Pastor Goode had just become our senior pastor the previous year and so one of the church's first major initiatives under his leadership was the establishment of Stewardship Month, something that many of us would say has had an incredibly positive impact on our spiritual growth and development over the years.

The word "steward" refers to a person who has been given a trust. It's one of the many metaphors used in the Bible to help us understand what does it mean to be a follower of Christ. Well, part of it is being a steward. Over the years, we've emphasized the four key principles of stewardship. In fact, my guess is right now, if I asked you either on this campus on the east side or the west side, to stand up to your feet right now and as Drew would say, my son, "Fire off," the four key principles of stewardship, you'd be able to do it for sure, huh? God owns everything and you own nothing. Think about that. God entrusts you with everything that you have. You can either increase or diminish what God has given you. God wants you to increase it, that's what stewards do. You can be called into account at any time and think about this in light of the fact that we just had a memorial service yesterday for one of our dear deacons. You can be called into account at any time and it may be today.

So every November we pause both as individuals and as a church and think about all that God has entrusted to us and whether we have been faithful to that trust according to the principles that we just enumerated. I think it's been very appropriate over the years for Stewardship Month to be held in the month of November because many times, as we evaluate our stewardship by God's grace, we can look to ways that he has helped us grow. Well, immediately we would want to what? We would want to thank God for any progress we have made spiritually and also to thank the Lord for our brothers and sisters in Christ who have been growing in stewardship right around us. So it's a natural time for thanksgiving as we reflect on ways he has helped us grow but it's also a time to be thinking about the coming year because if we love anything around Faith, it's planning, huh? That would have been a good time for a "yes." I should have heard that from Faith West. You're so excited about planning all the time and so Stewardship Month is a crucial time for all of us to make commitments for the coming year, right? In fact, when you got your bulletin today, I bet you let out a shriek of joy, didn't you? Because one of your friends is back, your Stewardship Commitment Card, your opportunity to think about commitments that you're going to be making in this coming year. If you say, "Aw, I'm not sure I like commitments." That's the way some of you just thought about it, wasn't it? I'm a trained counselor, I can read your mind. I know even with that snarky attitude. Well, just remember this: this church has been built by men and women who were willing to do these things: to carefully consider the Scriptures and then to carefully evaluate their lives and then to pick up a pen and a piece of paper and make written commitments to God and make written commitments to their church family about what they believe their stewardship ought to look like in many areas of life in the coming years. That's part of our heritage. More importantly, those same persons did everything in their power by the enablement of their Savior not just to make a commitment, not just to say something, but actually to keep the commitments that they made. You have been entrusted with a

heritage of men and woman who have lived that way. Paul said it like this, "It's required in stewards that a man be found faithful."

So as we think about our heritage this month, it's a lot more than a history lesson. Friends, it's an opportunity for us to marvel at the trust that we have been given because of the faithfulness of those who have gone before us and then to carefully consider what it means to fatefully steward that heritage in the days ahead. This morning I'd like us to think about our heritage of the Gospel. If this story is going to be told, it centers on the Gospel.

Faith began meeting in what was the basement of the old Farm Credit building at the corner of Teal Road and 18th Street. Many of you probably know that as the Lafayette Life building although it's not used for that purpose anymore either. But just like any church plant, they had to every Sunday morning set up chairs for the church services. They had to deal with all of the other groups that had used the space before and after them so frequently I'm told on Sunday mornings they'd have to clean up from all the parties that had been held in that same space on Saturday night so the church families were coming together and cleaning up the beer bottles and all that sort of thing. They had to rush to finish their Sunday evening service because there was a group of people, a square dancing group, who would literally be waiting in the wings to come and take over that space that they were using but that's part of our heritage. They did whatever had to be done in order to give birth to a new church. That particular location was very significant because that's what led Pastor B. Rowe and our mother church, Kossuth Strett Baptist Church, to plant that new work because at that time, south of Teal on 18th, that was the new south side of Lafayette and they believed that would be a great place to plant a new church in that particular location.

So they decided to buy some lots, residential lots in what was the Tecumseh 2 subdivision and when you read back through the minutes at that time, they figured that buying four residential lots would be plenty to meet all of their needs. However, in faith, they stepped out and you read the discussion and it's really interesting because money was involved but by faith, they decided to buy two more additional residential lots just in case God might bless them and they started constructing the first building in 1966. That by the way, is currently the home of Second Baptist on South 18th Street, just to help you get your bearings. This building was dedicated on January 8, 1967. Here are a couple of stats from the building dedication booklet that I thought you might find interesting. They talked about the building costs. You say, "I wonder what it cost to build that thing?" Well, those six lots cost them a total of \$13,875 and that church building, the picture that I just showed you, cost \$50,000 to build, a total of \$63,875. That was for land, for an auditorium that seated 280 adults, for eight Sunday school classrooms and an office, \$63,875. For a bit of perspective, by the way, that is actually less than any of our weekly offerings last month, the month of October. One week. By the way, as I was going through the documents, I noticed the name of the assistant building superintendent for that project. Just a young buck. Just a young buck, Jerry Jamison.

The dedication booklet had a section entitled "Do you remember?" Here are some of the things that that young church family wanted to remember. They said, do you remember the first letter sent out to start this church? What motivated that? Do you remember the first home that was opened to start our prayer meeting? Do you remember the first soul to be saved in our services? What did you hear Bella and Lucas just talk about? Do you remember the first soul to be saved in our services? Do you remember and this one actually, I'm just doing this for sake of full disclosure, I actually have a problem with this one: do you remember the problem the pastor had with the one hour services? I have no idea what that could possibly be referring to. Right? It just makes you kind of scratch your head, you too? Yeah, me as well. Do you remember the bedlam, think about this, four teachers talking at the same time in the Farm Credit building during Sunday school. You see, they did what they had to do. I love this one: do you remember the day the laminated rafters went up and the church started to take shape? Can you imagine that small group of people just rejoicing in that happening? I love this one too: do you remember the hours of work, night and day, the last month before we moved into the new church? You see, all of that is part of our heritage and men and woman who were thrilled to be part of this new church plant.

During the dedication service, they actually had what was titled in the program "An act of dedication." It was a responsive reading where the pastor would read a statement and then the congregation would join him in dedicating themselves to what had been said and as I've been reviewing this recently, I think this perhaps more than anything I could review with you, helps you understand the essence of our heritage. You see, here is what some people who will actually be with us today, many whom God has taken to other places and in most cases, people who have preceded us in death, here is what they said on January 8, 1967 at the dedication of our first church building. The pastor said, "To the purpose of maintaining worship in accordance with our belief in a verbally inspired and hence infallible Bible," the congregation said, "We dedicate this church." Then the pastor said, "To the preaching of the Gospel which is the good news of the substitutionary death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, We dedicate this church." And if you know history of religion in our country, you can understand why those statements were worded exactly the way they were. Then the pastor said, "To the proclamation of this same Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, We dedicate this church." Then he said, "To the teaching of young men and women to dedicate themselves to the ministry of the Gospel in whatever way the Lord may lead," and then the congregation said, "We dedicate this church." Do you hear the repeated emphasis? Long before groups like T4G, Together For the Gospel or the Gospel Coalition were formed, this church decided that what they believed God wanted us to make as our central emphasis, our central passion, our central message, our central mission, was to believe and to live out and to proclaim the Gospel, the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the free gift of salvation that is available through trusting him as Savior and Lord. Friends, that is the marvelous heritage with which we have been entrusted and the question for the past and the question for the future is: how faithful have we been and how faithful will we be to that trust? Our heritage of the Gospel?

Now, with that in mind, let's read from 1 Corinthians, beginning in chapter 1 just to try to understand where did our forebears come up with this emphasis. 1 Corinthians 1:10,

10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

8 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,

It was in Paul's day, it was in Lafayette 50 years ago and it is today.

8 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

We're talking this morning about our heritage of the Gospel and with the time we have remaining, let's think about three effects of staying tethered to the good news of Jesus Christ. Here's what I would encourage every person here to begin doing: to think about the words you said last week. Think about the emails you sent. Think about the places you went. Think about your passions. Think about what excited you. What you talked about. What you thought about in the shower. Then ask yourself how closely is your life tethered to the Gospel? How closely is your ministry, whatever that ministry is that God has given you, tethered to the Gospel?

Three effects of staying tethered to the good news of Jesus Christ. One is a heritage of Gospel centered unity. I mean, Paul is writing this book to a church that is unfortunately terribly divided, huh? And it's not hard to see what was going on. Somewhere along the line, love for the crucified and risen Savior had been replaced with a focus on personalities. That can happen in a church. Do you know that? Absolutely. Some people were saying, "Well, I follow Paul." Others, "No, I follow Peter. I follow Apollos." Even some trying to make themselves more spiritual than others, "I'm following Christ," but apparently not with the spirit or attitude that resulted in greater unity, therefore, it must have been a Christ of their own imagination. But Paul is saying in this text that the Gospel had been lost in the shuffle. You can't have a true focus on the Gospel and this much division among the church family simultaneously. Apparently in that church, a whole lot of people had taken their eye off the ball. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine that? Paul said, "Has Christ been divided? Paul wasn't crucified for you, was he? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" In other words, where is Jesus in all of this fussing? Great question. Great question. You realize, very few churches will celebrate their 50th anniversary with a church family of nearly 2,000 people? And I don't raise that point to glorify ourselves, that would be contrary to everything that we just read in Scripture but I am going to say this: the reason so many churches are so small is because you can't get more than 100 people together who can get along with one another for very long and the reason for that is that it's all about personalities or it's all about preferences instead of what our forbearers dedicated this church to.

When Pastor Goode hired me 27 years ago, I was 27 years old. He was 57 years old at the time but immediately, and some of you who will hear this message today remember these days, he immediately started putting me in all sorts of leadership roles, all sorts of teaching roles, even as a young man. Think back to the wisdom of that. Do you know why he did that? It's because it wasn't about him. That's why. He did not have to be the center of everything. He didn't have to have his hand on or in everything. The issue was the proclamation of the Gospel, not the promotion of personalities and when people get that straight, a laser focus on the Gospel instead of people's preference, blah, blah, blah, the result is a Gospel centered unity.

Instead of being focused on practices, Paul made a statement that's practically a death blow to those who believe in baptismal regeneration, those who believe that you have to be baptized in order to be saved, when he said, "Christ didn't send me to baptize," which on one hand is amazing because even part of the Great Commission is to ensure that once a person has placed their faith and trust in the Gospel, one of their first acts of obedience

is to follow the Lord in believer's baptism to demonstrate publicly what has already occurred in his or her heart. But Paul's point is that even as important as that is, it's not the Gospel and we can never confuse our works with the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Why? Why? So that the cross would be central to everything we are. That's why Paul said, "Christ didn't send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel." There it is. "Not in cleverness of speech so that the cross of Christ would not be made void."

We have several professional photographers in our church and one of them is Frank Oliver who works for the Department of Natural Resources. A couple of weeks ago, Frank was out and caught this particular picture as the sun was going down near a cornfield. Look at the way the final light of the sun is reflecting off that church steeple and the cross. What a great metaphor of exactly what we're studying this morning. This is what the founders of our church dedicated ourselves to 50 years ago and I'm not suggesting we've had perfect unity over our fifty-year history, no church ever has, but what has kept this very diverse group of people together is a passion for the Gospel. Forget my preferences. Forget personalities. Forget all the little goofiness that I can get wound up about and fire off emails regarding, right? Ain't got no time for that. Why? Because we're too busy accepting, believing, living and proclaiming the Gospel day in and day out as individuals and as a church.

Another effect of this commitment is a heritage of Gospel centered humility. Some if not many of the men and women in the Corinthian church struggled with pride. You see that theme throughout this particular book in the Scripture. You see, that was what was motivating all of this, "Well, I'm of Paul and I'm of Apollos." It's not just, "Well, my favorite teacher is better than yours." That wasn't really the point, it was, "I'm better than you because my favorite teacher is better than yours." Paul says that the message of the cross and the pride of man are completely incompatible for several reasons. One is that you are humbled by the nature of the message. The world laughs at what we believe. We believe a little baby was born to a Jewish teenager who never had physical relations with a man, the virgin birth. We believe that birth was predicted hundreds of years before it occurred by a prophet named Isaiah. We believe in fulfilled prophecy. We believe that birth was so important because the baby was the preexistent and eternal Son of God who had to be perfect in every way so that he could die in our place. We believe this Jesus never sinned. Never one time in thought or deed. He was perfect. We believe he performed miracles like multiplying bread and calming storms. We believe his teaching was the word of God because he was the Word of God. We believe he died on the cross as a perfect substitute for our sin. We believe his payment was accepted by the Father and that three days later he rose from the dead. We believe he promised to build his church. We believe he ascended into heaven after instructing his disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. We believe that salvation and eternal life are available for every person who will repent and believe in Christ. We believe the Gospel can progressively change every aspect of a person's life that does not please God. We believe that some day followers of Christ will spend eternity in a place called heaven that our Savior is preparing for us. By the way, much of what I just said, the so-called the fundamentals of the faith, were actually listed in order in our church's dedication booklet because they did not want there to be any lack of clarity on what this church believes and why we believe

it and I'm glad to tell you, that in 50 years we have never deviated from our church's doctrinal statement. But to Paul's point: the unbelieving world listens to all of this and shakes their corporate head. "The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." You see, there is no place for the pride of man in a church that is focused on the Gospel. We believe things that the world laughs at and God, friends, designed the Gospel to be that way so we're not going to strut around as if we're all that because of the inherent nature of what we believe.

As if that wasn't enough, a message the world considers foolish, we're also humbled by the character of the messengers. Did you read this? "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world." Who would that be? It's the guy you saw in the mirror this morning. "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world," who is that? That's this bunch, "to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world." That's why I don't know how to use all those forks. "The base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God."

Well, that kind of puts us in our place, doesn't it? And the beauty of that is that our fifty-year history has nothing to do with a bunch of superstars. Do you realize that? On our best day for the most part, we're a pretty ordinary group of people and even for those who have had some accomplishments in this life, they don't strut around this church like they're all that and a bag of chips. We just did Kevitt Brown's memorial service yesterday. I learned some things about Kevitt Brown as I was preparing for his memorial service I never knew about him. Like the fact that he had a PhD in plant genetics from Cornell. I never knew that. Kevitt Brown has developed a number of patents in that particular field. I never knew that. I've been his pastor for a long, long time. I never knew that. So Kevitt Brown, a pretty sharp guy, they don't hand out those PhD in corn flakes boxes, I mean. But you know, Kevitt Brown wrote a series of letters to his family and friends from the hospital. One of them that I was reading this week started with, "I'm listening to the drip, drip, drip of my chemotherapy treatment." It's amazing as Kevitt Brown was talking to his family and his friends about things that were most important, Kevitt wasn't talking about his accomplishments. He wasn't talking about his wisdom. Kevitt was talking about his sin. He was. He was telling his family, reminding them about all the ways that he fell short and that never could he stand before God in his own righteousness but that he needed a Savior, a perfect sacrifice to die on the cross in his place. So even those among us who are unusually smart or unusually gifted or who have accomplished a lot in the world, when they walk into the church house, it's not about them. Why? So that all glory can be directed to our crucified and risen Savior.

Paul said, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" So friends, if there's any glory from our fifty-year story to a person, we want it to be directed to our crucified and risen Lord. I'm

saying there's a direct relationship between your focus on the Gospel and the humility of your life.

I really hope our church family today gets this but when you read through the minutes of the various business meetings at our church, what you see is a passion for proclaiming the Gospel and some of our old timers that are still here would say, "Well yeah, some of the things we tried to do didn't work out so well." Well, they didn't but thank God they tried them, huh? Thank God they tried them. Here are some minutes from February 1, 1972. This was at an annual meeting and they reported that the membership was 217 active members so they were growing pretty rapidly at the time. What I found interesting about this particular annual meeting all those years ago, they also reported this, "The board has been discussing three things: the bus ministry, we hope to have eight buses by the end of the year." I realize some of you have no idea what that means. Are they taking people down to Indy Airport or what does that mean? No, that was a bus ministry to go and pick up children in those various neighborhoods and bring them to church to tell them about Christ and at that period of time in many of our kind of churches, that was a big deal and so they were talking about that. I realize somebody might say, "Oh, that was kind of foolish though and that got off track and we ended up having more kids in the church then we had adults, blah, blah, blah." Thank God they were trying. That's what I've got to say about that. Thank God for people in our heritage who were doing everything that they could to try to reach this town for Christ.

They were also talking about a new building. They were even talking in 1972 about the possibility of having to relocate. They were also talking about this in 1972: a television ministry in the planning stages. Yeah, you know what? We had a television ministry here. They actually did that. That's right, it didn't last very long but they had it. It was called "The Hour of Faith." It was actually shown on WLFI, "The Hour of Faith." There are some people in our church who can say, "Yeah, that didn't go so well," and it didn't. Like there was the one Sunday where they had a special speaker who was waxing eloquently, they had the congregation there and of course, the TV camera is focused on the speaker and then live shots of the congregation. What was happening though, there was a problem with the sound system that was actually under the pulpit and so some people who were here today can remember this, some poor guy starts crawling along the church platform below the sight of the camera trying to get to that sound equipment. So the poor special speaker has to continue to wax eloquent while this guy is crawling around. The poor congregation has to look all serious because their faces are on TV. Then the poor fellow splits his pants wide open. Now, thank God it wasn't immoral. Can you imagine the poor special speaker who continued to preach the word. The people in the church who had to keep a straight face because they might be on TV while this guy is crawling along the platform with his pants split wide open. There's your heritage right there. There's your heritage.

Hey, are you hearing the DNA though? Do you hear what they dedicated themselves to? Do you see the kind of things they were doing? They were focused on proclaiming the Gospel in any way they possibly could and that's why we've enjoyed tremendous unity. That's why our church family has been a fairly humble group of people, it's because when

there is a relentless passion for the proclamation of the Gospel, there is not a whole lot of time for anything other than that.

When Chris and I were asked to come here, I wish I had a video of the interview. This was back when our church had just relocated here to State Road 26 and we had a room that we used to call "the fireplace room" where we had a lot of meetings and so it was just the original first building on this side of town. Chris and I were asked to come to this meeting with Pastor and Mrs. Goode and the deacons and their wives and so they had everybody set up. I can remember Pastor Goode had these little nameplates for everyone and what he had them do was a very wise thing, I think, he had them go around and talk about the things about our church that they liked, that they were thankful for but then he asked everybody to also mention something that they were concerned about. Why were they asking me to come and join the staff and what would they want me to work on if I did. To a person, the men and the women in that room all talked about the need for greater outreach. Even with everything that had already been done, even for all the ways the Lord was already blessing us, what the passion of the hearts of the men and women in that room, that's what attracted Chris and me to this place, they want to get better at reaching this town for Christ.

So when we got here, that's what we started doing, just focusing on outreach. Outreach. Outreach. Outreach. We started a vacation Bible school ministry. You might say, "Well, everybody does that." We weren't because historically when the church bus ministry thing flamed out for some good reasons, our church kind of went over to the other extreme of, "We're not going to be involved in any children's ministry like that," and BBS, believe it or not at that time was even a bit controversial but we tried it and by God's grace, it was blessed. Then we decided that Easter was coming up, let's try a drama musical at Easter time and that didn't start at Long Center, that started on the platform of our east side location. In fact, in this particular service, Doc Smith is here. Doc Smith was in the choir in the early drama musicals. I remember that because I was in the choir too. The bottom line is, if you didn't run fast enough, you got a dress thrown on you and you were in the choir. It wasn't all that great, it really wasn't but we were just trying. We were trying to do everything we possibly could in order just to reach people for Christ.

Then we were doing some counseling training down at a church in Slidell, Louisiana and they mentioned to us that they had this Christmas program, a Living Nativity that was really being blessed of the Lord. The following Christmas season, Pastor Goode and Arvid Olsen and I flew down to take a look at their Living Nativity with the plan of maybe bringing it here. I can still remember parts of that trip. The plane was delayed so we got there late so we couldn't even eat supper before we had to run over to their church to see how they were setting up the Living Nativity. I remember one of their pastoral staff members was dragging this donkey down the parking lot. This donkey was actually sitting on its haunches and so this pastor was dragging this donkey with all of his might and the pastor yelled out, "We call him Deacon," they said. I didn't say that. I would never say such a thing but I felt duty bound to report it. Anyway, I remember Pastor Goode loved Outback Steakhouse. If you traveled somewhere, you were going to the Outback, you knew that but we got there so late we couldn't go to the Outback until

afterward so it's like 9:30-10 o'clock and he still wants to go to Outback. So we eat these seasoned steaks and he loved those blooming onions and so we're scarfing, we're so hungry, scarfing down these blooming onions and these seasoned steaks and then we went back to the hotel and tried to go to sleep. The next 12 hours were not pretty. I mean, that's just kind of the bottom line.

I'm just simply saying that's all a part of this church's DNA. That's all part of our church's heritage and that's the bottom line. We have always wanted to have a Gospel centered focus. Paul said in chapter 2, "I determined to know nothing among you," that's why we're not arguing about this and fussing about that. "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." That's why our church has had such a strong emphasis on foreign missions. You realize that a lot of money that's given here goes right out the door, the back door, in order to support missionaries around the world. Why? Because that's part of our church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel. Now, we have young men and women who have grown up in this church that are now serving as missionaries around the world. A number of young men and woman who are not in vocational Christian service but wherever God has taken them, they are living the Gospel. They are proclaiming the Gospel right now. Remember back, what did they dedicate themselves to? To the teaching of young men and young women to dedicate themselves to the ministry of the Gospel in whatever way the Lord may lead and that's the way a number of the young people who have grown up in this church are now living. Praise God for that.

We've tried to bless missionaries any way we possibly can. We had a booklet that we put together 25 years ago that just talked about some aspects of our church's passion. I thought a couple of them were especially interesting. Do you know that pastor and Mrs. Goode and Dr. and Mrs. Smith have traveled to at that time, Mexico, Liberia, Peru, Brazil, Haiti, Québec as part of the church's ministry to missionaries proclaiming the Gospel? It also said this: did you know that every year in February a missionary conference is held at the church with a week of meetings for the missionaries who stay in the homes of church members? That was talking about what is now our Biblical Counseling Training Conference that last year had 1,900 people in attendance. You see, a passion for the Gospel.

Now there are just so many connections. Some of you remember the fact that we supported Dr. Jack Sorg who was a medical doctor who started a clinic in the Amazon region of Brazil. Well, Dr. Sorg is no longer there, his replacement is a physician named Dr. Chip Phillips. Charlie Hodges, another physician from this church and I were just in Brazil and guess who we stayed with in a little condominium while we were speaking at that conference? Dr. Chip Phillips, the new medical doctor at that clinic started by one of our other missionaries to the Amazon region of Brazil. Why was Dr. Chip Phillips with us? It's because he wants to be trained in biblical counseling so he can use his medical knowledge in that country similar to the way our Dr. Smith and our Dr. Wickard and our Dr. Hodges have used it here. Do you see the connections? When you love proclaiming the Gospel around the world, it's just marvelous the relationships that you are able to build.

Time doesn't allow me to talk about all the things our church didn't focus on. Think about history in this country over the last 50 years. Think about history in the world over the last 50 years. Think about all the things this church could have gotten sidetracked by and it's not that those things are unimportant, it's not that we never had anything to say about that but we didn't let this war, we didn't let this cultural issue, sidetrack us from keeping the main thing the main thing.

Well, what are the take aways? One is: I hope you'll thank God for the truth of the Gospel, huh? It's a beautiful story. It's a beautiful message, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Friend, I hope you leave here today more thankful for the Gospel than ever before. I hope also, oh, please tell me that we've accomplished this this morning: I hope you'll walk out of here more thankful than ever for your and our delightful heritage. We have had some marvelous men and women who believed what we've been talking about this morning, not just with their mouth but with their feet, with their arms. They believed in living out and proclaiming it. What a heritage. What a heritage.

I want to ask you to think about this: how tightly tethered has your life been to the Gospel? Are you sure you believed it? If not, I would invite you to place your faith and trust in Christ as your Savior and Lord today. Are you living the Gospel as a Christian? Are you preaching the Gospel to yourself every day? Do you have a passion personally to proclaim the Gospel to those the Lord has placed around you? Then think about your service here at our church. How tightly tethered is whatever God has called you to do to the Gospel? Do you understand there is such a thing as a Gospel centered nursery worker? Oh absolutely there is. You know, in some churches a couple who have not been in church and God's done something in their life and they decide to go and they've got a little baby and they take their baby into the nursery. This is their first contact with anybody from the church and the nursery workers are so busy gabbing about whatever that they don't even pay any attention to serving the person who's new. You say, "What's wrong with that?" Those are people who forgot why they are there. Those are people who are not tethered to the Gospel. They're working in the nursery and God bless you if you are. Your first job is to take care of those babies well, huh? And your second job is to interact with every person who comes in, recognizing that this may be the first Gospel they ever see, namely the way you choose to love and serve them. I think there's such a thing as a Gospel centered maintenance worker, don't you? Absolutely you do. Thank you for saying amen so loud, I heard it from Faith West. Because I believe this: I believe we ought to be more excited about the Gospel of Jesus Christ than McDonald's is about selling cheeseburgers, right? Which is why our flowers ought to always look better than McDonald's. Our grass ought to always look better than McDonald's. Our mulch ought to be put out before McDonald's, etc. etc. etc. Please tell me you agree with that? There is such a thing as everything about this place screaming the message that we think Jesus Christ is worthy of our absolute best. God deliver us from service where Jesus gets the leftovers. If what we're talking about this morning is true, then Jesus gets my what? Jesus gets my passion. Jesus gets my enthusiasm. Jesus gets my heart. And Jesus gets my best.

And when I'm going to serve for Christ, I'm going to do it with all my might because I recognize everything around here screams a message about what we think regarding the Gospel.

I would also say this to you: those of you who are younger, I'm a little bit worked up, I'm going to try to settle myself down a little bit but probably not. Those of you who are younger, you say, "Define younger." One day younger than me. I have to have some kind of a test so that's what it is. Those of you who are younger, I want to encourage you in this: take pride in backfilling for the tired Gospel proclaiming warhorses around here. Look at some of the people that God has been using for a long, long time and say, "I want to be like that person and I want to serve with that person. I want to shoulder the load of that person." So for example, we're coming up on the Living Nativity, Arvid Olson, Ken Sherwin, they should not have to do a thing. Those guys are old. Those guys are warhorses. They've been doing the Living Nativity for like ever and you young ones, I hope you'll say "I'm going to come that day and I'm going to say, Mr. Olson, please sit down in this chair. Mr. Sherwin, can I get you another cup of coffee?" They should not have to lift a finger. All they should have to do is explain to others what needs to be done and then criticize the way they are doing it and talk about how it used to be in the old days. That's the way it ought to be. I would say that we ought to get one of those chairs like they used to have in Egypt that they carried around on poles. We ought to carry Arvid Olsen around on one of those chairs. We ought to carry Ken Sherwin around on one of those chairs. We ought to say to Greg Boyer, "You don't need to set up Bethlehem anymore. You're old, so just teach us what you need. You just sit there in that chair and smoke, well, you just sit there in that chair. You just sit there in that chair."

Friends, that's the heritage of this place. That's the heritage of this place. We have been a Gospel proclaiming machine and we should be and I hope that every last one of us would say that we've been entrusted with that. I want to do my part now.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, Lord, I do thank you for our heritage. I thank you for our Savior. I thank you that the Gospel is worthy of our best and so, Lord, as we think about what growing stewardship looks like, Lord, help us to focus our lives on the cross. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

