

August 14/15, 2021

State of the Church 2021

Faithfully Forward Series

Pastors Bryan Clark, Ryan Harmon, Jeff Petersen, and Josh Luse

(Video):

Excerpts from various messages from our first pastor, Curt Lehman, then from Bryan, beginning in 2002, throughout the years following, ending with excerpts from our current staff up to today):

(Curt Lehman, 1993)

I want to do just a couple of things here. I want us to, first of all, take a quick look back. Now as we look back, I'm reminded that this church was founded in a prayer meeting. Those few people prayed that God would do whatever it would take to be honored in their lives and in this city. We didn't tell God what to do. We just told Him we were available for whatever He wanted to do, in us and through us.

(Bryan Clark, 2002)

Sometimes God just says, "Go, and it doesn't work in the budget, and we don't necessarily have a great strategy for it. We just walk by faith. That has been the history of this church.

(Curt): What does this new building mean to you and me today? Is it a tool to accomplish what God has called us to do? I hope it is. Is it an opportunity, a means to an end to glorify God? I trust that it is. And we're to meet together here to honor Him by celebrating in worship, of studying the Word of God and applying it to our hearts and then taking the Word of God and reaching out to others around us who are in need.

(Bryan): Those that have gone before us have run a great race. Is it unreasonable that we do the same not only for our generation, but for the generation to come?

(Jeff Petersen): Each of us has a choice. Will we shrink back in fear, or will we boldly step forward in faith, understanding that God is in control? And we get the amazing privilege of having a part!

(Bryan): When people are seeking God, the last thing we want them to hear is "Sorry, there's no room for you." So we believe that God is leading us to build a new auditorium, a youth complex, plant one hundred churches in India, and we believe that we have to have a church in North Lincoln, to reach North Lincoln.

For the first time in thirteen years, at this hour of the morning, there are empty seats. It's been really hard to keep the mission in focus when there's nowhere to sit. But this is a new season; this is a new day. And it's important for every single one of us to re-up our commitment to the mission.

Our mission statement says:

"To glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ."

Whenever we talk about presenting people *complete in Christ*, it comes down to seeing lives changed, one life at a time. In other words, God's going to say, "*I gave you fifty years of life. What did you do with it?*" There's only going to be one answer that will satisfy and that is, "I used my time, my talents, my energies, and my resources to build your kingdom!"

(Jeff): God has called us to be a church that is unleashed, to have a transformational impact in our city, in our region, and literally all the way around the world."

(Ryan): So my prayer for us, as we seek, as we pray about how we should engage, is that our focus would be on Jesus, and that our vision of Him would become so large, that we'd be able to go out with confidence and with courage and with joy.

(Bryan): We have grown and expanded our ministry in dramatic ways. God is doing amazing things in Southeast Asia. We have invested ourselves out into our community. We have grown with our ministries on this campus. And in the midst of all of that, God has provided what we need to completely eliminate our debt. If you gave, if you served, if you prayed, you've been a part of what God has done around the world, and we should celebrate that together!

(Curt): Dear people, I see in you all the potential that God wants to release through those who will trust Him. And you've demonstrated that again and again, as you have trusted God to work through your life in a way that you had never even dreamed possible. And God has done marvelous things!

(Bryan): Nobody runs an individual race; nobody's running just a sprint or a marathon. It's always a relay. Your purpose is an invitation into something that's bigger than all of us.

(Josh): Do you realize that God meets us right where we're at? It doesn't matter our age, how young or how old we are. It doesn't matter how we screwed up a situation in life that we're at. He meets us where we're at and invites us into something incredible. The God that has saved us and reconciled us, wants to come and work with us and through us into the lives of others. It's not something we do on our own."

(Jeff): It is only as we all seek to sharpen our focus and invest our hearts, minds, and lives in that which matters most, that we will have any hope of seeing such a beautiful picture of *Church* painted in our midst, leading to a powerful change in our world.

(Ryan): God gave us an opportunity to bring others into what we're experiencing. We can invite others into this moment, where we're coming to know Jesus, we're becoming more like Him. And then we help many, many others do just the same. (*End of Video*)

Bryan: One of the distinctives of Lincoln Berean Church is that, in our nearly 60 year history, we've only had two senior pastors. That's really quite unusual. One of the realities of that is, when it comes to transitions, it's not necessarily something we're really good at, because in 60 years, we've only done it once. When I came in the fall of 1993, I can just tell you, "Nothing in the transition plan went as planned." So, I've always had it in the back of my mind that we need to plan. We should plan but, ultimately, the decisions are God's.

When we started what we called *The Decade on Purpose*, I said, at that time, I thought this was my last decade in this role. A couple of reasons for that. The primary reason was I would be in my early 60's, and I thought that's probably the time when we need to transition to younger leadership in order to continue to go forward as the church. The other part of that is, most of you know, when I was 39, I had open-heart surgery. I knew somewhere in that decade, that was going to happen again. It certainly was affecting my health, and all that together, influenced my thinking behind that comment. So, in 2017 we, as an elder board, began to put together the plans to move forward with that. In 2018, we announced to the congregation that we were beginning an official search for the next senior pastor and, over the next year and a half, I would say, we worked really hard to search for who that person would be. But at about 18 months, it didn't just seem like we were finding someone. It seemed like that door had been closed.

Now I can tell you, as a leader, the temptation is just to push it through and make it work, because no one likes to stand in front of several 1000 people and say, "I think we were wrong." But that is what we did. We decided to go back to praying and discussing this as an Elder Board, but the value of young leadership was still a value. So, at that time, Mark Kremer, Tim Bohlke, and I—three of us as senior leaders—chose willingly to remove ourselves from the senior team, in order to make it possible for younger leaders to be on that team and continue to push forward that value. So, we functioned that way for about nine months, but we realized, at some point, this was still really confusing. I was the senior pastor. Am I in charge? Is the directional team in charge? How is this going to work moving forward? So we entered into a discussion related to that, and several options were put on the table. One option was that I could move back on the senior team and lead forward as the senior pastor as it had been for so many years before. But I just wasn't comfortable with that. I didn't think that was consistent with the value; I didn't think that's the way we wanted to go. To me it felt like a step backwards instead of forward. So we continued to discuss it.

One of the options I put on the table with both the senior team and the Elder Board was: If it would kind of break this stalemate and free things up to move forward—Patti and I had talked about it—and we were willing to be done, to move on. I felt like if I got out of the way, perhaps it would open up whatever needed to be to move forward. But neither the senior team nor the Elder Board were interested in that. They felt like it would be more detrimental to the congregation. So we continued in conversation and, at some point, I offered that even though I'm the senior pastor, I would be willing to submit myself to the directional team, to where I would be under their authority, and then there wouldn't be any confusion about who's actually making the decisions, and who's leading the church. So, after some discussion, we decided to go with that.

The decision was made, and about a month after that, COVID hit. Everything shut down, and everything's just been a little bit weird since then. But over the last 18 months, that is how we've been functioning. Last summer, about a year ago, one of the discussions we began to have as an Elder Board, is the senior team, the directional team, is making lots of good and necessary changes. But if we go out and bring in a new senior pastor, that pastor is certainly going to want to change things again. So, what sense did it make to go through all these changes, and then go back through changes again? It would be very disruptive, both to our staff, and to the congregation. So we began to enter into the conversation that maybe God was leading us to an internal transition. What if my role was divided among the three senior leaders, and each of them took a part of that, so it would look different going into the future, but it would be an internal transition?

So the Elder Board was open to that possibility. At that point, Tim Bohlke led the Elder Board in the process, in the conversations, in the interviews. We also added two ladies to the interview team, who had a lifetime experience in HR, to help us with the process, help us with the interviews, help us with personality tests, all the things that we wanted to look at to see if this was the direction we wanted to go. I would say, without question, the Elder Board did its due diligence, and at the end of that process, voted unanimously to go forward with an internal transition. So, at that time, it was decided, based on all that information, that Ryan Harmon would be the lead pastor; Josh and Jeff would be the associate lead pastors, and we'd move forward accordingly.

So, just to be clear on a couple of things: As of this weekend, this is my last weekend, officially, as the senior pastor of Lincoln Berean Church. But it's important to understand, we're not introducing something radically new. In practical terms, this is how we've been functioning for the last 18 months, and we'll just continue to function this way, moving forward. One of the questions I know I'm going to get asked is, "Are you supportive of this? Do you agree with this?" So I want to be really, really clear. I would answer that without hesitation: "One hundred percent!" I'm part of the Elder Board. I was part of the process; I was part of the decision making, and I'm 100% behind this. I love these guys! They are men of integrity. They're godly men. They're men that love Jesus. They love this congregation. They love the church, and I'm willing to do whatever is necessary, whatever I can do, to help them be successful as we move forward as a church. My prayer would be: that would be true of all of us. It is a significant time in our history. It is change. But change is necessary, and I think this is a positive change. And my prayer would be that we would all come together as the people of God and get behind this. Let's be the church moving forward, faithfully forward, in the years to come. So, at this time, I want to invite Ryan and Jeff and Josh to come and explain a little bit more about how this is going to look moving forward.

Ryan: Let me address the question that I'm sure is on everyone's mind at this moment. Where is Bryan going? Let me just answer that: He's going nowhere. Bryan is not leaving our staff; Bryan is not retiring. He actually is somewhat allergic to that word. So, fair warning, if you say, "Are you retiring?" He's not retiring. But as he just expressed, his role is changing, and we wanted to unpack what that means for us as we move forward. As we, as a directional team, were in conversation with Bryan about the transition. The role that we proposed, and the title that we proposed for him would be to take on the title *Senior Pastor Emeritus*. Emeritus is simply an honorific title that recognizes decades and decades of faithful service to this body, to the work of God in this place. And that's precisely what Bryan has provided, so our opinion was, that was the only proper way to recognize who he is. And so, from this moment forward, Bryan is our Senior Pastor Emeritus. So, what does that mean going forward, practically, for him? Well, the first thing is that he is going to continue as a member of our staff, shepherding and pastoring us, the people of Lincoln Berean Church. He loves to do that, whether that be over coffee, or at lunch in his office, working with couples and individuals, to continue to be a shepherd and a pastor. But secondly, we'd all acknowledge Bryan is uniquely gifted as a teacher. So Bryan is going to continue to be a member of our teaching ministry on our teaching team. In fact, when we relaunch our series in Acts here in a few weeks, Bryan will be leading off with the first message, and throughout the fall, about 50% of those messages will be given by Bryan. We are so thankful that his gifts and his skills—the way God has wired him—are going to continue to have application here for us as a church. *(Clapping)* I've got to tell you, as we've had these conversations, as we prayed, as we've talked, this was our prayer, that it would look something like this, that we'd be able to walk in partnership with Bryan through this moment. The worst thing that we could see for this church

would be for Bryan to get on his horse and ride into the sunset. It is exactly what we were praying it would look like, and we are thankful that we have a faithful God that provided a pathway for it to occur. But not just that. It takes a massive dose of humility and character for Bryan to be willing, at this moment, to say that's going to be the way we move forward. And even over the past 18 months, that's required a massive amount of humility to say, "I'm going to let this directional team lead." And so we are so thankful for that.

Now, what's it going to mean for us as a directional team? I don't know if you've noticed, but Bryan and I are a little different. Slightly! One of the things that we thought is we need to make it clear that we are not saying this is a one for one exchange that Bryan is now Ryan, or Ryan is stepping into Bryan's shoes. That's the last thing I would want. In fact, the reason we have changed the title and we're saying that I'll be the *lead pastor* is because we want to signify that difference. Because Bryan has unique gifts and talents, and he has fulfilled the role of senior pastor and leader of this church in a way that fit who he was, and the way God was calling him. But as a different person, just like each of us is different in God's gifting, He has given each of us unique talents. There's going to be a way that I lead that's going to look different. It's not going to be different in terms of the core DNA of what we are always going to be about, but just the way that it is expressed.

The second thing is that we are saying that *we* are leading the church, and I am so thankful for these two guys—for Jeff and for Josh. And our job as a directional team will be to do what we have always done at this church. The directional team's job is to think about the vision that God is leading us to. And we, as a directional team, have been called by God and then selected by the elders, to dream and pray and think about where God wants us to go as a church. And then move us forward in that direction, casting vision, dreaming about what is coming. That's precisely what we'll do together. And my role as lead pastor is to work with these guys and help make sure that our focus is on where God wants us to go at a vision level. This will be one of my main responsibilities.

The second thing that I'll do, and I'm so thankful for it, is I get to continue to be part of the teaching ministry of the church. Now, I won't preach as often as Bryan has in the past. But one of the things that I love to do with this church is to open God's word and discover what He has to say to us, and then to figure out how we apply it to our lives. And it's such a pleasure, because you are a people that want to know what God says; you want to know His Word. And so it is a joy to do that together. And I look forward to doing that here and throughout the fall, when we dig back into Acts.

The final thing that I'll be doing, and it will take up a lot of my time is leading our staff. We have an amazing staff. We have a staff that loves you, and they love Jesus, and they want to think and dream together about how do we take the vision that the directional team has arrived at and then figure out how do we execute that? That's one of my main responsibilities. And in order to do that, I'll be working with a new team that we've created called a *church management team*. I'm going to introduce that team to you in just a few minutes. Now, in just a moment, I want to have Jeff and Josh kind of unpack their roles a little because, as we said, this is going to look slightly different.

But before we do that, I just want to acknowledge what a blessing, what an exciting thing, what a humbling thing this is for us as a directional team. Partly because of what God has done, what a

pleasure it is to step in and look at what God has done throughout the history of this church. In that timeline that you have, look at what God has done, the way He has faithfully blessed this church and, as the people of this church have faithfully responded to the way He's blessed us, stretching all the way back to Curt and Claudine. And then through with Bryan's leadership, and then the directional team with Jeff and Tim Bohlke and Mark Kremer leading us over these past two decades, stepping out in faith. And what a blessing it is to step into a calling of leadership, building on the very foundation of faithfulness that has taken place over these past six decades. But it's not just that. That is a pleasure; that is a joy, but it's also a joy to be called to humbly pray and lead you, Lincoln Berean Church. I think about what Curt said in that video. He said, "In you I see all the marks of potential to accomplish the mission that God has called us to."

And when I look at you, at Lincoln Berean Church, I see a people that loves God's word. You love to dig into God's word. You want to know what He says to us as people, and you value the Scriptures. And that is a joy to be a part of! You're also people who have been willing, over time, to take risks and step out in faith. And I think about all the things that have occurred over the history of this church. Missionaries being sent, City Impact being launched, North Pointe being launched, Harbor Ministries, Hope Venture...all of that coming from within the people of Lincoln Berean stepping out in faith, trusting God. And you're a generous people. Time and time again, giving of your time and your talent and your treasure. Giving back to God, acknowledging He is the One that is blessed, and wanting to have a faithful response. It is a pleasure, because you are a people that have been shaped after God's image. Now, in the weeks to come, over the next three weeks, we want to unpack a little bit of what it means for us moving forward, and we want to highlight to you different ways this movement is going to take expression. But today, we thought it was really critical that you understand the way that we, as a team, are going to work together. So, we're going to have Josh come and just tell us a little bit more about his role and give us some clarity on that.

Josh: Thank you, Ryan. You know, as Ryan was talking, I can't help but think of the way that God is so incredible in the way he wires us uniquely, and gifts us with different tasks that we can use to serve this body. And I think Ryan is uniquely wired to lead this team, and I'm really excited to work with him in that. And I'm excited for the opportunities that I'm going to get to step into with this as well.

Our church has had a rich legacy of expositional preaching, that has been one of the trademarks of our church, that we want to continue to walk forward in. And even over this past year, Bryan's been gracious to let me join with him in mapping out the series that we've been doing through Acts and through Judges and do the planning in that. And I'm excited, as I step into this role, that one of my primary roles will be to lead our preaching team, to lead the opportunities for us to continue to move forward as we open Scripture and study, that we get the chance to continue to work to develop younger teachers and preachers as well. And I'm excited about that. And I'll get to do some preaching as well, myself, and I'm really excited about that.

Another thing that I'm going to get the opportunity to do is to be a pastor. And I *love* to be a pastor. One of the things that has been really unique for us as a church is, as we've grown, Bryan has continued to have his time available for us as a church, and it has blessed us well. One of the things this role will allow me to do is to have the time margin to be able to shepherd and walk beside you, our church, to be there for weddings and funerals and to walk through joyful times and difficult

times, and to work with our pastors on staff and our ministry team here as we serve, and shepherd you. And I'm really looking forward to that.

Another thing I get a chance to do is just continue to keep the vision in front of us as a church. We have continued to take risks, to take leaps into these giant things that God calls us into. And no doubt, there are more things ahead. And I cannot wait to see what those are and I continue to invite us all, as a church, to jump into those. But each of us plays various different parts, and I'm going to ask Jeff to come up and share a little bit about his role, too.

Jeff : Thanks, Josh. You know, it was about 35 years ago that I first stepped into this church. And as I sat down in what was the original auditorium on this site, over in A wing, pastor Curt Lehman opened the Word of God, and began to teach what it said. I had never experienced anything like that, and as I began attending this church, God began changing my life. And about three years later, I was baptized in that same old A wing auditorium. So I have roots that go very far back in this church. Later, after 10 years of serving in other ministries, God called our family back to Lincoln Berean and, over the last 21 years, I have had the privilege of helping give leadership to this church. So, it's kind of an interesting moment for me; in some ways this moment isn't all that different. I've been on the senior leadership team for the past two decades, and now God's calling me to be on the senior leadership team in the days to come. And yet this moment is actually significantly different when we think of how our team will function, and what my role will actually look like. I want to tell you a little bit about my role, specifically, but first, I just want to say a word about our new team. As the one person who's been on the senior leadership team through all of this process of transition, I cannot tell you how excited I am, about what God has done, how much I love and believe in these guys, and how thankful I am for God's faithfulness to this church.

You know, I was actually the one who led the search process, so I looked at hundreds and hundreds of candidates. And I'm so glad God closed that door, because God needed to work through that process to bring us to the point of understanding that the right people were right here all along. And let me just tell all of you that I have the highest respect for Ryan, and for Josh. They are godly men, and they are great leaders, and I am absolutely thrilled to have them as senior leaders for this church. I wonder, "Would you just join me in thanking God for what He's done and officially welcome them as senior leaders for Lincoln Berean?" (*Clapping*) Amen! God's got great things ahead.

Regarding my role, you know, it was a few years ago that I began to sense that God might want us to change a little bit about how we were leading. Because, as we were growing as a church in size, and our staff and our ministries were all growing in size, we were also growing in complexity. And I began to sense that an ever-increasing amount of leadership time and attention was going to what some leaders call the whirlwind, the day-to-day issues faced in any organization. And that's important, but the more time leaders spend in the whirlwind, the less time they have available to focus on big picture vision. Let me give you an illustration.

This last weekend, my wife Cynci and I were at a wedding out in Oregon, which by the way, is a beautiful state. We were driving along through this forested canyon, and Cynci was looking out the window. And as she was looking back into these woods, she began to just marvel at what all was in those woods. And we talked about what it would be like to be in those woods, deep in them and trying to find your way. For a while they were beautiful, but then they were also a tangled and

entrapping mess. At another point, we were up on the edge, at the base of Mount Hood, and from that vantage point, we could look out across the valleys, and we could see the expanse and the breadth of the beauty. We could also see so much farther, and with much greater clarity. For a lot of years, many of my roles have been in the trees, but we have come to a point where we believe that if we're going to continue to be the church God wants us to be, someone needs to lead us all back up to 40,000 feet on a regular basis and keep the big picture in mind. And I have the privilege of getting to be that someone in the days ahead. So the first major area of my role will be to lead out in the conversation of, "Where are we going?" And also, "How are we doing? Is it actually accomplishing the mission that God has given to us?"

A second aspect will be actually trying to assess what our progress looks like. In 31 years of full-time ministry, I have come to see that ministry is almost never measured. And if it is, it's typically anecdotal, or maybe sometimes to a degree, it is *quantitatively* measured, but almost never is ministry *qualitatively* measured. We want to experiment, as God leads, in trying to figure out some things about, "What does it look like for us to do a better job of helping us all understand what *complete in Christ* even means, and how are we progressing towards the ends that God has called us to? And how is it that we actually *know Jesus more, become more like Him and help others do the same*? So I'll get to lead out in that.

Third is, I will be leading the conversation regarding innovation and development. You know, we want to continue to be a church that God is going to be able to use in an ever-changing world. We want every person who is a part of this church to be here experiencing significant life transformation. But we also want to be a group through whom God is bringing about extensive multiplication, and thus, we want to innovate as we seek to develop people and laborers for the kingdom. So, in the coming days, you're going to begin to hear more about things such as a ministry residency program for recent college graduates, and a school of discipleship for anyone who's interested. These are the first of the innovation experiments on the horizon.

The fourth aspect of my role will be to continue to lead in our church planting in Asia. We have 40 full-time staff actively leading church planting movements among 258 unreached people groups, and 24 unengaged, unreached people groups. And I'm going to get to continue to work with our leaders and our teams in Asia. So that's a bit about my role. But most of all, I would just say to all of you, "No matter what seat I sit in, I am just so thankful to get to be known and loved by such a great God. And to call us all together to continue to pursue Him, that we might actually become more like Him, as we together continue to get to be a part of a church that is committed to Christ, to His word, and to advancing His mission here in Lincoln, and all around the world."

Ryan: The driving passion of this church has always been to glorify God and to make Jesus Christ known, to watch Him come into someone's life and change their story, bring about transformation in them, and they will never look the same as a result. Jesus is the hope of the world, and it's an audacious claim, but I just want to say that there's no problem in the world so great that Jesus and His people following after Him, in submission, cannot be part of the solution. Jesus is what the world needs, is what this church has always been about, and it will be what we remain about. In time, that driving passion came to be expressed in Lincoln Berean Church's mission statement. That Lincoln Berean exists *to glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ*. Every person! How many does that leave out? That's a big task! Last summer, then, we took that mission statement and we expressed it in a vision statement that Josh and Jeff and I unpacked week

by week. And we really we're just taking that mission statement and saying, "What does the progression of becoming complete in Christ look like?" And we said we want to be *a people that are coming together to know Jesus, become more like Him, and help others do the same*. That is a big mission! That is a large vision! And I have just got to tell you that if that is contingent or reliant upon the three of us, and our shoulders and our muscle and our strength, then we are done. We can't do it. We have to have God supply the power. But more than that, we also have to have the people of God come together and partner in the work that He is doing. It will take all of us, Church. It will take all of us to be engaged. No one else has been placed right where you've been placed, in your neighborhood, in your workplace. No one else has the proximity to the lives that God has brought into your world—and they need to know Jesus. That is a transcendent mission and is what we are passionate about.

Over these past eight months or so, we've been thinking together about, how do we restructure a bit as a staff, because if the directional team's job is to think about vision, and really keep our eyes focused on where we're headed, it is then the staff's job to figure out how do we execute that vision? And I just mentioned a few minutes ago that one of the things that we've done is we've formed what we're calling a *church management team*, because we know it can't just be three leaders. It needs to be multiple people leading out, and so this is our church management team (photo), and those seven people are working directly with me and with the directional team. And my job is to help make sure that those two teams are on the same page together, because we have to be pulling in the same direction in terms of vision, and then, how do we execute the vision? But you know what, it's not just them. Each one of these people is leading a team, and so we have what we're calling *ministry directional teams*, and here's a picture of all of them (photo). All of those people represent the broad scope of ministry in all the individual ministries, and they're thinking, "How do we execute this vision? How do we align so that we are prepped and are measured and are ready to accomplish the mission God's called us to?" But again, it's not just them. We have a large staff, and so here's our entire staff (photo). Look at that crew! That team loves you, and they love Jesus. And they are excited and passionate about figuring out, "How do we best come together to equip the people of Lincoln Berean to accomplish the mission that God has called us to?" I'm missing one picture, though, and it's a critical picture. And it's a picture of *you*. Because it's not that God has called the directional team or the management team, or the staff to this work. He's called *all of us* to this work. Each one of us is called to be engaged in the work that Jesus is doing in the world, to make Him known, to see Him come in and change lives. It's going to take all of us. For six decades, God has faithfully poured out blessing upon this church. And then as people like you and me, all those that have come before us, have responded in faithfulness to God, we have seen lives transformed over and over and over again. That's precisely what happened in Heidi's story. And our prayer is that, as we watch Heidi's video, we will start to gain a vision for what God could do as He comes and transforms life after life after life, as we faithfully move forward. Let's watch Heidi's story:

(Video):

Yes, almost 20 years ago, there was a group of us going to a very works-based church, and several of those folks had started to come to Lincoln Berean on Saturday nights. And they said, "Heidi, you need to come to Lincoln Berean, because they study the Scriptures and they actually open their Bibles, and you can hear the pages turning." And the first Saturday night I came here, into this auditorium, and you were doing "State of the Church". It gives me chills when I talk about it now. So I grew up in a very rural area in the western side of South Dakota. Every little girl, we grew up

and we just wanted to be approved of, and we wanted to be told we're beautiful! And as much as I knew that my daddy loved me, he never actually said that to me. That was never really communicated. It was all about work. And so you know, really what I wanted more than anything else was acceptance, and approval, and someone to tell me that I'm beautiful.

Bryan was right in the midst of Galatians. Everything about my worldview was being challenged, everything I'd grown up with. And God just spoke to me. He said, "Heidi, I have your heart! You can't keep a law, you can't keep a Sabbath, you can't do any of that. But I love you!" And it was right there, in that moment, that I knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that God loved me and Jesus Christ had died for me. Every weight just fell off of me. Galatians changed my life. Jesus changed my life, but Galatians made it real. So, for the last, it's been over 15 years now, this church and the people in this church have completely changed my life. Bryan invested in a group of us, meeting with us weekly, working through the concepts of the Bible that we had so misunderstood. I was going then, on Tuesday nights, to Titus at night. What a blessing and an honor to be with those beautiful women and to walk with them. And then besides that, there was also the singles group. My best friend, Mary, we found each other in the singles group through another friend. I don't even know how to really express how much I love this place. But it's not just the place. It's the people; it's the spirit.

So, I'm heavily involved with equestrian pursuits, and about five years ago, a gal started to come to the barn where I had my horse. And she was listening to a few of us talking about Jesus, and how much we loved Him. We would talk about doctrine, about theology, and as I got to know her, I sensed that she really wanted to know. She had a lot of questions, so I would ask her to come to church...and ask her to come to church...and ask her to come to church. And finally, on a Saturday night—we were just finishing up John—she came to church with me. Oh, Heidi; I didn't know you were going to show up! (Mary appeared on the set).

Mary: I remember you asking me to come to church. Some of the things that we had talked about at dinner were said during the sermon. And then when Bryan had asked for anybody who is willing to raise your hand or come up and surrender, I remember whispering to you, "I feel like I need to go up." And you were like, "Let's go up now." Like, "Whoa, wait a minute." So, you just took my hand and up we went, and I can't adequately express the words of that feeling in my gratitude for you, and for God, pushing me, shoving me, kicking me in your direction, into Berean's direction. So, thank you!

So, we come together, to know Jesus, to become more like Jesus, and then to help others experience the same. From the time I entered the doors of this chapel, until right now, in 2021, God has radically altered my life from being so alone, and feeling so alone, to grabbing my heart, breaking off my shackles, bringing me into the body of believers, people investing in me, teaching me mentoring me, so that I can take that now to other people. That it's going out in my hometown, out in western South Dakota, and God has been behind the scenes creating a Berean Church. It's been so beautiful, because my dad is a completely different person than the man that raised me. And he has had the most beautiful transformation as Jesus has held on to his heart. This church ripples. It ripples across the world, all for His glory. It's a beautiful thing!