

15 Years At One Harbor: Looking Back and Forward

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Preacher: Donnie Griggs

[0:00] Hey, what's up, One Harbor? Donnie here. So this morning is going to be a little bit different. You may know this, but we celebrated 15 years as a church back on February 1st. That's right, February 1st, 2009 is when our church started.

And so, again, this morning is going to be a little different. It's going to be a bit of a family morning. We're going to celebrate what God's done over the last 15 years, and then we're going to consider what does that mean as we look forward.

We're also trying to do a better job as a church of kind of reminding all of us of things that are happening, helping the whole church stay in the loop, all the amazing things that God's doing here at One Harbor.

And so you're going to see some more videos from time to time of me, and it'll include updates. There'll be opportunities for me to communicate to you guys, help everyone kind of stay aware of, man, what is God up to in our church?

So I hope those videos will be a source of encouragement to you, getting those updates, maybe things that you hear, like, I didn't know we did that. You're like, man, I want to be part of that. And so I'm really excited about that as we kind of lean on that a little bit more in the next season.

[1:02] If you're brand new or if you're just checking out Christianity, I am so glad you're with us this morning. We started this church for folks just like you, just like you. Our hope was that folks just like you would come, and we'd be able to help you just see and understand how amazing Jesus was.

So we're really, really glad you're here. All right, obviously, as a church, normally what we do is we preach through passages of the Bible or we go through books of the Bible. So this morning is going to be a little bit different as we look about history.

I think it's worth just asking, is there even any merit to this? Like taking a whole Sunday and spending it looking at our history as a church and thinking about these kinds of things. And I would say it's a good question.

I certainly don't think it's a good thing to do all the time, but I think it's a good thing to do sometimes. Here's just a couple reasons why. History is important. It's important. You know, when you don't know history, you fail to really understand the present.

You fail to really anticipate the future. And the Bible is actually, it's not just history, but it's full of history. It's full of historical accounts, real accounts of what God did and how he acted and how people responded.

[2:13] Also, some dates are important. Like if you're married, you know this. You know, like there's just regular old dinner nights, and then there's 20th anniversary dinner nights.

And if you get those two mixed up, you're in trouble, right? The Bible says the same thing. The Bible points out certain dates. There were like moments where there was like, you know, an Ebenezer is the word for, like a stone of remembrance, a moment in time where God's people would look back and go, man, our God showed up.

Our God delivered us. Our God was faithful. Our God provided, right? And so I feel like this moment is kind of that moment for us as a church. It's one of those moments where we can look back and remember history.

We can look back at the faithfulness of God, and it will help position us as we look forward as a church together. So I hope this morning as we reflect on the last 15 years, you will be encouraged and strengthened, maybe even challenged.

But let's go for it. The first big idea here is just this understanding how God works in history helps us to understand how God works with us, right?

[3:18] This is just basic. It doesn't have anything to do with One Harbor, right? This is just basic Christianity. When you understand how God works in history, it is so helpful in helping you understand how is God working right now?

How is God working in me? Sometimes people ask the question like, why even read the Old Testament? Let's just start in the New Testament. Let's just read about Jesus. That's where it gets good, and that's silly on a bunch of different levels.

But one of those levels is you miss the history. The Old Testament is full of these origin stories, these stories of how God created the world, how he engaged mankind, how he acted on behalf of his people, and those stories matter.

Those stories matter. If you grew up in Sunday school, you might have grown up even hearing some of these stories and thinking they were just kind of random, some inspirational tales to help you stand up to bullies, you know, dare to be a David or something like that.

But something we've talked about a lot as a church through the years is how the whole Bible is actually a bunch of these little stories telling one big story. One big story. From front to back, the Bible is the story of God's work.

[4:23] It's not about random people. It's about God. It's a God who created. A God who was there when mankind fell into sin. A God who had a plan of redemption. And a God who promises to come back and restore all things.

And every little character on every page of the Bible is contributing to that big story. And there's a hero in the story. And it's not David. And it's not, you know, Samson. And it's not Daniel.

It's Jesus. Jesus is the hero of the whole story. Jesus said the same thing multiple times in his teachings. He said this whole Bible is about me. Those heroes in the Old Testament look forward to me. Right?

And so why do I sell that? Because it helps us. It helps us. When we reckon with what God has done in history, it helps us to consider how is God moving in us now?

What is God doing? And what could God do? Right? As the people of God journeyed through the Old Testament, they learned lots of things. But three of those things over those thousands of years, they learned who their God was.

[5:22] They learned who they were in light of who their God was. And they learned what he had called them to do. So who their God was, who they were, and what he had called them to do.

And when God's people remembered those things, they thrived. But they didn't just thrive. They were a blessing to everyone around them. When they remembered those things, they thrived and they were a blessing.

But when they forgot, as they did over and over again, when they forgot all those things, or any number of those things, chaos ensued at every level. And they weren't a blessing, they were a curse.

We're no different than them, aside from indoor plumbing and the internet and all the rest. We're also followers of this God. And we're at our best when we're remembering these three things, who our God is, who we are, what he's called us to.

And friends, we're at our worst when we forget them. So I want to take this morning and just sort of like look back, use that as a framework, and look back as we look forward.

[6:22] The first thing kind of as we think about who our God is, there's so much to be said here, but let me just say one harbor. We serve the God of the gospel. We serve the God of the gospel.

Martin Luther famously said this, the gospel is the principal article of all Christian doctrine, all Christian truth, wherein the knowledge of all godliness consists.

It's like the gospel is like the hub and everything else are like spokes, right? Most necessary is that therefore that we should know this article, the gospel, well, we should teach it to others.

And I love this. We should beat it into their heads continually. We've spent the last 15 years as a church beating it into each other's heads continually. Nearly 800 sermons.

That is crazy to think about. Nearly 800 sermons. Some of them longer than others. You know who you are, right? But nearly 800 sermons where we've heard about the gospel, the good news of what Jesus has done for us.

[7:18] The God who, the God who promised in Genesis three to send a savior, to crush the power of Satan, the God who so loved the world that he gave his only son, the God who sent the spirit and acts to, to empower the church.

That same God is our God. The God who was faithful throughout the ages is our God. The God who never sleeps or slumbers is our God. The God who split the red seed, the God who then walked on water.

That's our God. And the God who spoke the whole universe into existence out of nothing, caused a few friends in a living room with nothing but faith in his ability to do the impossible, to do all that's happened over the last 15 years.

That is our God. And we will read about what God's done in the Old Testament, in the Bible. It's not just a history lesson for us. It's a roadmap for us, friends. We serve a God who does not change. He who is, he's always been, he will always be, right? He is, he is this unchanging God of the gospel and we serve him. And when we remember that, we are full of faith in our God.

[8:22] When we are remembering who our God is, and friends, we need to remember, man, if you flip the news on, it's like you get sucked into fear and worry and anxiety, and you turn on the TV or social media, you get pulled into distraction.

We forget who our God is. But when we remember, man, we get full of faith. You probably even walk out of Sunday services, hopefully feeling like full of faith. You may walk out of community group feeling full of faith because you've been reminded who your God is.

When we remember who our God is, we look at the Pharaohs and the Red Seas and the Goliaths and the fiery furnaces, and we look at them with confidence that our God is in complete control. So that's the first big thing. We have learned who our God is. He is the God of the gospel. And that's who our God is. Who are we in light of that? One Harbor, we are a gospel formed community. To say that we started with humble beginnings is an understatement. My first sermon was in a living room with a handful of friends, and I literally begged them to not invite anybody for at least six months.

[9:26] I was terrified. I didn't know what I was doing. We had no idea what we were doing. I was like, guys, please don't invite anyone. Give me some time to figure this out. Right away, second Sunday, people broke the rules and started inviting people, right?

You know, that's a good thing. But it was pretty challenging and frustrating at the time. We started with these humble beginnings. We would gather in this living room. We had, there was a toy poodle that lived at this house, and they had a little toy basket.

It was like this big, and that was our offering basket, and it was too big. Let me just tell you. It was too big. We'd pass it around, and I'd be like, please God, please God. We just started with such humble beginnings.

I remember one Sunday, you know, back then, I kind of did like everything. You know, I designed the website. I printed the flyer. I did all the stuff, you know, and it was all terrible, but I, it was like a one-man band, you know, and I remember one Sunday, we didn't have a lot of money, you know, slash any money, and so I went to Walmart to buy communion bread, and there was a piece of like pumpernickel bread that was on sale because it was like stale.

I was like, well, this fits our budget, and I remember that Sunday very clearly. I can remember where I was sitting in the living room. Everyone's taking communion, and I happened to like look up, you know, you're not supposed to probably look around, but I was looking around, and everyone looked like they were eating the literal body of Christ.

[10:43] I mean, that's probably as close as we've ever come to a church to like experiencing that. It felt like, it was, it was, it was brutal. It was brutal, right? We went from a living room into a gas station, not really the traditional path.

Gas station was horrible. I could tell you lots of stories. It was, it was beautiful and horrible all at the same time. What God was doing was amazing, but man, the facility was, was just, but it was free, and that's what we could afford.

We didn't have working toilets, so there's a guy in our church, his nickname is Beaver, and I've known him since we were kids, and literally on Sundays, I'd, we'd pop the septic tank lid open, and I'd hold Beaver by the legs while he used his arm to clear out the pipes.

I'm not making this up, right? This was, this is how we started. Then we, we, we made it to another facility. A family in the church had a restaurant called Shooters over on the beach, and there was a

hookah lounge that had been abandoned next door and we moved into the, the, the restaurant and we were doing our sunny mornings on the dance floor.

It was like a, a kind of a, like a nightclub kind of vibe. And then we had our kids in this hookah lounge room next door and smelled amazing. Then we finally made it big. We made it across to Moorhead.

[11:52] We were over on the beach for those, the gas station and for Shooters and we finally got working toilets and we sometimes had air conditioning. And we were like, we had arrived, you know? Then we planted into Beaufort.

Then we got this Moorhead building. Then we planted into Swansboro. Then we planted into Havelock. And, and it's just, it's been a crazy ride ever since. Swansboro is about to move into the first ever ground up building One Harbor's ever had.

It is incredible. I've been there for all the buildings of One Harbor and Swansboro, you win, okay? Yours is the best, okay? You finally did it. Havelock ended up moving to New Bern.

Beaufort ended up moving out of a small chapel into a facility further east. Really with this like desire to not just bless and serve Beaufort but to bless and serve Otway and Marshallburg and Davis and Cedar Island and Atlantic.

It's like, just to like to be a blessing as far east as we could be. Moorhead continues to grow by God's grace. We've got a video overflow room now. This is just scratching the surface, guys. It's some of our origin story here but there's countless stories along the way of God's faithfulness, God's provision, baptisms, salvations, miracles, people's lives being restored, people being set free from addiction and those stories as we look over our history, that history, they remind us of who we are and these are important things to know but the most important things to know about us don't have anything with our buildings.

[13:20] The most important thing is to think about our history and who we are in light of the gospel. That's what the first disciples needed to remember again and again and so do we. In 1 Peter, Peter says it like this, chapter 2, verse 9, you are a chosen race.

You're a royal priesthood. You're a holy nation. You're a people for his own possession. Yes, we're winners and then he chases that down by saying, but once you were not a people. You're a chosen race.

You're a holy nation. You're a people for his own possession but you didn't used to be that way but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, now you have received mercy.

Peter's wanting these new disciples to know who they are in light of what Jesus has done and when they remembered that, when they remembered who they were in the gospel, a community that was formed by the gospel, that was united because of the gospel.

When they remembered that, friends, they could face any hardship and they did. Brutal persecution, all kinds of stuff, cultural divisions, they faced it all and they managed to like, to stand firm and to keep moving forward when they were remembering the gospel and friends, when we remember, when we remember like that we are a gospel formed community, we become humble disciples of Jesus.

[14:40] Like we act like humble disciples of Jesus. That word mercy essentially means pity. You know, it's like, it sounds more Christian-y to say, yeah, you know, thank you for your mercy, Lord, you know, he's been so merciful but like the word pity actually really gets to the heart of it.

Like it stings a little bit more, right? Because to admit that you received mercy or pity is to admit that you needed pity, right? Essentially to admit that you're pitiful and it's a humbling thing to realize but if we're all like that, if like what gets us in the room, like if what makes us part of the team is that we have all received grace and mercy, we've all received pity, man, it causes us to act different towards one another.

Those who have received grace give grace, right? We are just thankful that Jesus would be kind enough to save us and forgive us and it positions us with humility and grace towards one another. A people who were chosen by God's rich mercy. Friends, we are who we are because Jesus did what Jesus did. We are a gospel-formed community.

That's what the gospel means. We are who we are because Jesus did what Jesus did. And we are a lot like the original disciples in so many ways. They didn't really make sense as a group.

[16:02] I mean, it's hard if you don't kind of know some of the context but disciples were the elite. Like they were the smartest of the smart. They climbed the ladder to the very top. Culturally, that's what a disciple was when Jesus came along and called his disciples.

If you've read John Mark Homer's new book, *Practicing the Way*, he gets at some of this. He describes how, you know, in that moment when Jesus showed up to call his disciples, there were other rabbis calling disciples.

And there was a culture of education that's just sometimes lost on us, right? By the age of 12 or 13, most of the kids, you know, most of the Jewish kids would have, check this out, memorized the whole Torah by the age of 12 or 13, right?

They would have memorized the whole Torah. Then some kids would stay in school. They were like the really smart ones and they would go into a secondary school and by the time they were 17, they would have memorized the entire Old Testament.

Like, how smart are these kids? They had memorized the entire Old Testament by the time they were 17. And then, the best of the best of the best would go on to seek out apprenticeship or discipleship under a rabbi with the, like, dream, like, career of being a rabbi.

[17 : 18] That was, like, everyone's dream, right? But along the way, you know, at 12 or 13, some would step out because they just didn't have what it took to keep going. At, you know, 17, others would step out because they didn't have what it took to keep going.

Only the few, the smartest, the most elite would ever make it like the Ivy League would be a disciple of a rabbi with a view of becoming a rabbi eventually. Just think about that when you think about who Jesus called to be disciples.

That is crazy. John Mark Homer says in his book, he says, Simon and Andrew were fishermen. They weren't the best of the best. And I don't mean that as any slight on a fisherman. I'm a fisherman, right?

There's a lot of great smart, intelligent. I mean, some of the most intelligent people I know in our area are people who are commercial fishermen or who raise oysters. I mean, the ingenuity, the intelligence is profound.

But like, let's just follow this, right? They were fishermen. They weren't, in their culture, they weren't the best of the best. They weren't the ones who got, they were the ones, he says, who were sent home to, quote, make babies and pray that their babies could maybe grow up to be smart enough to be rabbis one day.

[18 : 26] But Jesus invited them to be his disciples. That is a humbling thing to think about. And it reminds me a lot of the scripture that we clung to in the early days at One Harbor.

We, man, we held tightly to this and we're better when we think about this verse, I think. Acts 4, 13. Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, now you've got the context now. So this, the religious elite, they see the boldness of Peter and John.

It says, they perceived they were uneducated, common men. You guys, you're not the smartest of the smart. You're not the brightest of the bright. You're not the ones who got to, like, climb the ladder and get all the way to the top and be disciples of some prestigious rabbi.

You're uneducated. You're just regular guys. You're just fishermen who have babies and pray. They become rabbis, right? He says, they were astonished and they recognized they had been with Jesus.

Friends, I don't mean to insult anyone's intelligence, but that's us. That's us. We're regular. We're ordinary, but we have been with Jesus. The only reason that we're in this room together, the only reason that we're in this church together is because of the gospel.

[19 : 35] We are a gospel-formed, a gospel-formed community. So we have this one true God, the God of the gospel. We are a community formed and fashioned by the gospel. That speaks at who God is and who we are.

But there's this other thing, right, which was what they were called to, how they should live in light of that. And one harbor, we have a role to play in God's kingdom. We have a role to play. If that's who our God is and that's who we are, man, it stands to reason we have a role to play.

And this is all over the New Testament, right? God's people didn't just need to know that they were, you know, who their God was and they were fashioned by the gospel. Those things were always followed by these imperatives, these things you must do because of this, these implications, you know, if you will, of what it meant to be someone whose God was that God who had been saved and forgiven by the gospel, right?

And we see that just in that 1 Peter 2 passage. I'll just pick up a couple verses there. He says, all of this is so that you may proclaim, so that you may proclaim, not just a guy on stage, so that you, God's people, may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his

marvelous light.

Beloved, I urge you, and he says, you're sojourners, you're exiles, you don't fit in this world, you're on your way to another world, you're part of another kingdom, but right now, you're living here. So abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

[21:00] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable. He's saying, look, you've got to act and live differently. You should act and live according to the gospel. And one of the ways the Bible says is in a manner, you know, in a manner worthy of the gospel.

He says, do this so that when they speak of you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Even back then, there were people who were hating on Christians, right?

And what, you know, Christians were charged to do, what disciples were charged to do was to, was to actually live such good lives, live such good lives that their good deeds would put God on display and would cause people to go, oh, man, there is a real God.

We were called to, they were called to proclaim the gospel, to live like exiles, to abstain from things, to watch the conduct of their lives, to do these good deeds, all this stuff, it speaks to purpose, right? And we have a role to play. We have a purpose. We're not everything. There's so many great churches around, right? But we have a role to play and we have a role to play that, you know, like every other good church, we want to make disciples.

[22:05] What does that mean? It means not just going to meetings, although going to meetings is part of it. The Bible speaks about that. No, it's, it's about getting, each one of us, getting the gospel, getting it down deep inside of us and growing up in the gospel and learning to say no to sin and yes to Jesus and all those kinds of, it's gathering around the gospel in small groups and little discipleship groups and big groups.

It's like we gather around and we go out with the gospel. We take it everywhere we go. We want to make disciples. We also want to, we say push back darkness. We're people who shine light into darkness, right?

He says, he says that. He says, this God called you out of darkness so you go proclaim the excellencies. It's like shine, shine into the darkness wherever or whatever the darkness may be. For us, it's been lots of different things. It's been addiction. It's been sadness and tragedy and human trafficking and poverty and all kinds of stuff. We've had so many opportunities as we look over our shoulder.

We have a role to play. We're not everything, but man, we have a role to play. We don't do more than just host Sunday morning and Wednesday night events. We want our towns to be better, to be different because of who our God is and who we are and he's put us here with a purpose.

[23:23] And when we remember this, when we remember this, we are really hopeful. We're really hopeful 2 Corinthians 3 says, since we have such a hope, we're very bold.

I love that. It shows how hope is connected to boldness and boldness is connected to hope. We're bold because of our hope. And when we remember all these things, we get really hopeful as we think about our future.

Our boldness for our future is rooted in this, like in who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. In 1 Samuel 17, David conquers Goliath, cuts his head off and then the Israelites who had been shaking in their boots took off running and killing Philistines for miles before coming back and plundering their camp.

Hope is powerful stuff. It is powerful stuff. Hope produces incredible boldness. And so as we look at like all that God's done, it causes hope to stir inside of us as we lean into the future and we think, man, God, come on, do it again.

Do it more, Lord. We want to see more. We've seen God do so much through us over these last years. We started a handful of friends in a living room and now on average there's 2,500 people across our four locations on Sunday mornings hearing about the gospel, loving each other, encouraging one another, praying together.

[24:43] It's incredible. We wanted to show kids Jesus was amazing. We started with no kids ministry. Our first one, there was only one kid in the living room. He's now like 19 or 20 years old so that's how old we are as a church but we didn't have kids ministry so I would tell this kid, his name's John Michael, I would say, I will give you chocolate if you stay quiet for 40 minutes and I would try to preach for 40 minutes and if I went over he would literally raise his hand in the living room and go, chocolate like in the middle of the sermon.

That's where we started and now there's like 350 or so kids across the four sites every Sunday, little kids hearing about how amazing Jesus is. It's incredible. We wanted to help with addiction and we wanted to be a blessing when tragedy hit and we've, God's used us in incredible ways. Incredible ways. All of this is, isn't just past, it's a glimpse into our future. It gives us great hope. It leads us to great boldness.

It's what causes us to say our God is with us. Let's keep going. Let's keep going. That's why we dream of, man, God, help us plant more churches. I mean, Moorhead and East and New Bern and Swansboro.

God, do it more. Lord, please. I mean, we've been, as a leadership team, praying for the last over 10 years about like, you know, 15 towns across eastern North Carolina.

[26:11] These are little towns that, you know, I have the opportunity. I've written a couple books on doing ministry in small towns and it's lended me the chance to go and speak at, you know, kind of conferences and stuff like that around.

And I mean, I guarantee that, you know, church planners, you know, people, they don't know about these little towns. They're not on anyone's like top, top list. You know, I can't wait to go to whatever. They, you know, they're looking for a little bit more hip town, a little more suburban at least, you know, some better restaurants maybe or Target or whatever the case may be. But man, these little towns need what we've got.

We want to see them get what we've got. We want to see them get the gospel like we've got it. We want to see darkness be pushed back there like we've seen it pushed back here. We've got this, I mean, this dream could result in thousands and thousands of people hearing the gospel every single week and countless thousands of people across our whole region being impacted by people living out the gospel.

It's what keeps us wanting to, as Jeremiah says, seek the welfare of the city, to look for everywhere we can, to, man, God, help us be a blessing and to pray to the Lord on our city's behalf.

[27:22] God's shown himself faithful to save, to heal, to deliver, to act, to restore. And so, man, it sends us chasing down the darkness because he's with us.

We remember that. We stay hopeful, but we also, in kind of tying all this together, we stay faithful, we stay humble, we stay hopeful. Just one more I want to throw in. I think it'd be good for us just to stay flexible.

I've been telling the staff and the elders that this is a good kind of time to sort of put on our stretchy pants like Nacho Libre, right? Put on our stretchy pants, be flexible, man, because, you know, this church is, there's a lot of change and transition and all kinds of things happening.

It's just good to stay flexible. It's good to position ourselves like my friend John Murphy says. He calls it, you know, putting your yes on the table. It's just good to kind of put your yes on the table.

That's what I'm doing all the time. You know, if my role shifts a little bit or if I need to be, you know, if I need to do this more or do this less, I just put my yes on the table, right?

Jesus is worth it. I'm just here to serve, to be part of this. I'm so thankful for it. So that's all that can look, you know, it can look like when we remember. However, God's people didn't always remember.

[28:31] They often forgot. And when they forgot, it went bad. And I just want to take a second and think about that because there's serious consequences when we don't remember these things.

When we don't remember who God is, who we are, and what he's called us to, there are consequences.

The story of God's people, if you read through the Old Testament, even the New Testament, study, study, you know, church history, it's not, it's not all roses. It's a lot of pain. It's a lot of suffering. And it's because of this.

God would, would step in. He would rescue them. They'd swear they'd never do it again. They'd swear they'd be a blessing. They'd swear all this stuff and then they'd either get comfortable and forget him or under pressure, they would abandon him for another God, for something else.

And it was always devastating. Speaking to this kind of general concept, although this is more about like adhering to the law, Proverbs 29 says this, where there's no prophetic vision, a sense of who God, who God is, who we are, who he's called us to, when we lose that, the people, God's people, cast off restraint.

We cut the anchor line. We start drifting. But blessed is he who keeps the law. What are some of the things that happen to us when we forget? Just a few here.

[29:42] When we forget, we hope in ourselves instead of God. When we forget who God is, we start hoping in ourselves. Instead of putting our faith in God, we put our faith in ourselves. We become like Saul in the Old Testament who counted his army because he trusted in the numbers.

It's not bad to count. There's a whole book called Numbers. But it's bad to count if what you're counting for is to say, I can actually do this. We can do this. And that's what he did. Friends, we do good to remember that our only hope is in him.

It's in him. No matter what the numbers are, our hope is in him. Isaiah 31, woe to those who go down to Egypt, who go to the world, who go to the culture for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots.

You know, there are many in horsemen because they're very strong. They don't look to the Holy One of Israel. Woe to them. They're cursed. Psalm 27, this is what we should be like.

Some trust in chariots and some trust in horses, but we, we trust in the name of the Lord our God. When we forget, we start hoping in ourselves. We need to remember our hope is in him.

[30:44] Also, when we forget, we start acting with pride towards one another. Pride is like an umbrella for all kinds of other sins. Instead of acting as humble recipients of grace and mercy toward one another, we treat each other with contempt.

We stir up divisions and we participate in gossip and slander and we're hurtful and we're lazy and we're selfish and we're all these things. We become the swampy end of what Christianity has become.

We become what the church was never meant to be. The opposite of chapters of the Bible like Romans 12 where we're called to be hospitable and to outdo one another and showing honor and to love one another like with brotherly affection and to pray for each other and to earnestly care for one another.

We become the opposite of that when we forget. Lastly, when we forget, we partner with darkness. Instead of pushing back darkness, instead of living to shine light into darkness, we embrace it.

And darkness, by the way, it's not just outside, it's inside. It's inside us, right? And God, this God who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, this marvelous light that people need when we forget who God is, who we are, what he's called us to, we become partners with darkness.

[31:58] We're in some ways like those bored soldiers after Hitler had died and Nazi Germany had been defeated but they were still left behind. Bored soldiers are dangerous soldiers.

And when we forget these things, we're like those bored soldiers. We get sloppy, we get lazy, or we hurt one another. We look the other way at suffering and darkness instead of engaging it and fighting back on it.

We make deals with our own sin or excuses for our own sin instead of fighting to push back the darkness inside of us. Those are not the behaviors that look like people who have a God like ours. My friend Rigby Wallace says this, he says, we want to see the gospel advance to the outermost parts of the earth and the innermost parts of our hearts. Let's not forget these things, friends, and cast off restraint.

Let's not be like that. But there is something we can cast off or as the scripture says, lay aside.

Hebrews 12 says this, therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, thousands upon thousands of years of witnesses, we are surrounded.

[33:05] Fifteen years of witnesses here in this church. Let us also, those of us listening to this, in this church, lay aside or cast off every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that's set before us, looking to Jesus.

That's what we're supposed to do. Cast off everything that would keep us from running this race and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, considering him. The one who endured the cross, who endured from sinners' hostility, we look to him, we consider him.

We've got thousands of years of witnesses, 15 years of our own. Let's not cast off restraint, let's cast off whatever holds us back from running the race that God has put before us.

And most importantly, let's look to Jesus. Let's consider him. Those two words don't mean the same thing. It's like the focus is getting tighter and tighter. Let's look at him, let's consider him. Let's fix our gaze on him.

We can't see anything else but him. That's what scripture calls us to. If we're going to run this race, we have to look at Jesus like no one else matters like him. Every single sermon that I'm aware of at One Harbor, we've ended with the gospel.

[34:22] Why? Because from the very beginning, we haven't wanted to ever have a Sunday that felt like, okay, hands in the middle, go One Harbor on three. This is not a rah-rah session for us. Our hope isn't in our remembering.

Our hope is in his faithfulness. We often sing a song, Be Thou My Vision. And the origins of the song are nearly 1,500 years old.

That's pretty helpful to remember when you consider that we're 15 years old and you think that's a long time. You know? God has been faithful through history when the church has been faithless. 2 Timothy 3 says, if we're faithless, he remains faithful because he can't deny himself. The big story of the Bible was not Israel's faithfulness. It was really a story of what a mess they were over and over again.

It was really a story of how God was relentless in his love and his mercy. It was really a story of how God saved despite them, not because of them. And friends, that's our story.

[35:21] That's our story and that's our great hope. Our God who is mighty to save. Hey, if you're here or watching this this morning and you're not yet a follower of Jesus, this same God can be your God today.

It can be your God today. We'd love to talk with you and pray with you about that. If you're here, you're watching this and already a follower of Jesus, as we look over our shoulder, man, we're amazed at God's goodness.

We're so thankful for each other. We're so excited about the future. But I know that there are areas where you and me have forgotten some of these things along the way. And maybe that's just kind of a dominant sort of thought in your mind right now.

It's like, man, I've gotten a little bit like that. I've forgotten that. I've drifted here. I've drifted there.

What do we do? Do we just try harder and do better?

No, that's not what we do. We come to Jesus. We come to the gospel. Let's take a moment now if you've forgotten to remember. And what's the best way to remember?

[36:23] Well, there's actually a meal of remembrance. There's a meal that's set before us that we're going to participate in now together where we look back at God's faithfulness.

We look forward that one day he will return. and we consider that right now this God is with us. He is present with us. He's acting right now with us. As you watch this, as you think about your own self and your own, this God is right now present with you.

This is a moment to do business with him, to consider these things and to participate in this meal with the one who spoke the world into existence, came to call us to follow him, us to follow him, ransomed us with his precious blood, sent his spirit to empower us and will one day return for us. God, be with us now as we respond to your word. We thank you, Jesus, for all that you are, all that you're doing, all that you will do. Help us, God. Keep us. Keep us faithful.

Keep us humble. Keep us hopeful and flexible. Keep our eyes fixed on you. In Jesus' name, Amen.