

Our Story, His Story
Pastor Carlos Sibley
Sunday, March 12, 2017

Over the next few minutes, I want to tell you the story of Watkinsville First Baptist Church. It's a different day for us in that we will not open our Bibles to a passage of Scripture and work through it verse-by-verse and word-by-word in some kind of expositional way. I want to take this time today to tell you the story of the fruit of us during that week after week after week. You may at some point hear a piece of the story and you may go right back into it and say, "I was there. I remember that. I know what was going on." You may think of some things that you wish should have been included in the story. There will certainly be things that I'll leave out or forget, and it may be different perhaps from what I shared in the first hour. We have a hope today that what you hear will lead to an overflowing of thanksgiving to the great things that God has done and will give us an encouraged faith in what we believe God would have us be a part of in the future.

In Psalm 44, there's a verse there that I believe gives support to exactly what we're doing today. Psalm 44 verse 1 says, "O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old." This morning, I want to give you an opportunity to hear with your ears what God has done in the days of old for His glory, for His fame, and for His praise.

Father, I bow before you right now and I pray that as I tell our story that ultimately it will be Your story, the story of Your glory. Lord, just bring it together in our hearts and minds and let our ears hear Your great deeds. I pray that we would overflow with thanksgiving. I pray that we would be strengthened in our faith. I pray that You would help us to see, Father that we are a part of something that stretches way beyond this life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Let's practice just a second. When you hear something that God ought to be praised for, one of the ways that we can respond to that is by using words. One of those words that we use in church is the word "amen." I want you to practice that out loud, okay? One, two, three. [Amen!] Another word that we use sometimes when we hear something that is just amazing that only God could do: we say, "That's awesome!" One, two, three. [That's awesome!] Y'all are sounding loud in the front. In the back, y'all need to come on now; you need to bring it from the back row! And another thing that we do when we know that God has done something great is that we clap, not for our performance; we clap for His performance. Let's practice. One, two, three- to God be the glory! Come on! Amen, amen! Well, you're ready now! This is going to be great; we may finish at 1 o'clock today; we got an amen that early. Y'all don't know! If y'all start talking back to me, it may get crazy here, all right?

Rutherford B. Hayes was president of the United States when Watkinsville Baptist Church met for the first time. It was 1880. In 1880, ten people met in the basement of the Methodist Church in downtown Watkinsville and formed Watkinsville Baptist

Church. Those ten people from 1880 to 1990 had grown to 70 people. In 1882, they bought their first piece of land and put the first structure on it. It was on Third Street in downtown Watkinsville. It was a half-acre of land, and they paid for that half-acre of land in 1882 ten dollars. Amen? That's awesome, isn't it? A few months passed, some time passed, and they bought another half-acre. They paid \$225 for it. Some time passed, and later they sold that for a little over \$800. They got a piece of land on Barnett Shoals Road just right there in downtown Watkinsville, and in 1908 they built what is still standing there- a white wooden church building. And in 1908 Watkinsville Baptist Church started meeting in that building. You can drive by there today and see that white wooden structure.

In 1908 to 1942 they met one time a month for what they called preaching services. In 1942 to 1958, the church met two times a month. In 1958, Watkinsville Baptist Church started meeting every Sunday of the month for preaching services and corporate worship. It was a church from the very beginning that was known for prayer, for missions, and a value on educating the next generation in the things of God. In 1959, something happened that was very much highlighted in the history of Watkinsville Baptist Church. It stands out boldly as you read back through the history, an event that was celebrated by the church and that was recorded, and you could tell a lot of rejoicing had gone on. What could it be? What it was is that in 1959, the very first person publicly answered the call to vocational ministry. And the church saw that as being something that just demonstrated the blessing of God and the fruit of God in their fellowship, that He would raise up out from among them an individual that would be trained and that would go somewhere else and also serve preaching and teaching the Word of God.

The pastor at that time was a pastor whose last name was Hayes, and it was his son in 1959. His name was Jay Spurgeon Hayes, and he was the very first person that publicly answered the call. Now I know it's time change Sunday, and somebody's going to wake up right now and tell somebody this week, "Did you know that Spurgeon was called to preach at Watkinsville First Baptist Church?" Listen, you're partly right, but it wasn't Charles Haddon Spurgeon of London, it was Spurgeon Hayes that was the very first person that answered the call to preach.

In 1968, they were still meeting there in that white wooden structure on Barnett Shoals in downtown Watkinsville. The Phil Campbell family gave to Watkinsville Baptist Church 6 acres of land. Those 6 acres of land were located on Simonton Bridge Road, and you and I are meeting on those 6 acres today. The church in 1970 moved to the present location, and they built the structure that we now refer to as the youth room, and that youth room was the original building on this property that was used for worship. Pastor Bobo was leading the church at that time, and in 1971 in a new location with a new building, the church was growing, and they began to meet for two morning services in that little room that will seat about 125 people. By 1976 and 1977, the church was talking about adding additional worship space. When you and I speak about the sanctuary on this property, that's the building that was built

and finished in 1977. The church came together prior to that, and they began to give money and they sought the input from local banks, and they secured a loan of \$310,000, and the church building project came in at \$286,000. Several people in the church family signed their name on notes to secure that loan of \$310,000.

In 1977, they started meeting in that worship center for worship, and a new pastor came to serve here by the name of Charles Stewart. Charles Stewart was here for eleven years. During those eleven years, God tremendously blessed this fellowship and this community. It was glory days. I've never met Charles; I've only heard of him. We share the same initials, and I don't know why that stands out to me; I just think it's funny. And Charles and Carlos are pretty similar names. ☺ Charles was here for eleven years and was a great Bible teacher. He was teaching the word and equipping people to do the work of ministry. He was serving on staff at Milledge Avenue at that time, and he came here to be the pastor. One of the big highlights of those eleven years as you read back through history was the church was celebration. You can identify about a dozen people during those years that publicly answered the call to vocational ministry, and many of those today are still serving around the globe. When you and I speak of Eric and Ellen Peters, Ellen Peters was a part of the fruit of that. During those days, individuals were called to ministry, went to seminary and trained, and now serve around the globe.

By 1990, Charles was gone and new pastors began to come. In the 1990s, our community was growing. Pastureland was being divided up into subdivisions, and old iron gates to fields were being turned into brick entrances. The community was growing. During the 90s it was a time of difficulty for Watkinsville Baptist Church. The church at the time when Charles Stewart was here had grown to a membership of 850, and the Sunday school average attendance of 350, and a lot of those were college students that were driving out here from the campus of UGA to come to worship. But in the 90s, there are a lot of different stories, and you could identify four, five, six different reasons that people came to the church, people left the church, people came to the church, people left church. By 1999, the church was in a time of small numbers with a core people still believing that God was up to something and wanted to do something with their future.

In the fall of 1999, I got a phone call from a guy whose first name was Buz. Buz Amason called and told me who he was and said, "I'm a part of a church in Watkinsville, Georgia right at the campus of University of Georgia." My only contact I ever had with this community and area was that I had been in seminary with some guys that had gone to church at a little church called Watkinsville First Baptist Church. A guy by the name of Shawn Buice had been here and been a part of Watkinsville, and he and I rode school together over and over again for three years and I just got to know him a little bit. Buz had gotten my name from another pastor in Alabama. Neil Carlisle had come to Cleveland, Tennessee where we were living where his daughter was in school at Lee University. A pastor at another church there mentioned my name to Neil when he found out that Neil was serving on a search

team for a new pastor. Buz and Neil and others came together in a search team meeting and had been out researching and looking for names and possibilities when they sat down in that meeting. Buz said, "I have one name, and that one name is Carlos Sibley." And Neil said, "That's funny. I went in a different direction, and I've got one name. It's Carlos Sibley." That was happening in the fall of '99.

Almost exactly one year later from that first phone call from Buz, Carla and I came here to be the pastor of Watkinsville First Baptist. It was in August of 2000. The church I believe on the Sunday that they heard me in view of a call there were about 250 people here. The Sunday that I started, I think there were around 225 or so. I'd been here couple weeks and we had about 175. A couple weeks later, we had about 150. When somebody asked me, "How's the church going?" I was like, "It's going awesome. It's like our church is dying faster than any church I've ever been a part of in all my life." We really were just loving each other, hugging each other, and preaching the word and praying for our community.

We began to look around and realized that as the community had grown, the church had been in a time of difficulty and hadn't been able to reach the community around them. We identified 12 neighborhoods that we were the closest Bible-preaching church to them, from the Oconee River into downtown Watkinsville- 12 different neighborhoods. We got real creative; we called it the 12 tribes of Simonton, and we would pray and talk out loud about the 12 tribes of Simonton. What we found was that they were only five of those 12 neighborhoods that we were closest to represented in our church family. And we began to pray and ride through those neighborhoods and meet people and ask that God would give us at least one family from every one of those neighborhoods, just those 12. "God, give us one family from every one of those neighborhoods." I remember the day where I was able to stand in front of the church and say, "12 for 12. There's one family from every one of our neighborhoods here." It was funny that the one neighborhood that just seemed like was the longest with us ever being able to reach anybody was the Briars. And I get excited today when I tell this story: Alex Clark is in our church now, and Alex Clark's the owner-operator for Chick-fil-A on Atlanta Highway. He and his wife Kami are here. Guess where Alex Clark grew up as a kid? The Briars. We were praying for him even though he didn't know it while he was a teenager growing up there in the Briars.

Well, we were just praying for our community, and the church had made some decisions to really be outreaching to the community. They said, "We've got to do something to say to the community that it's a new day here." And before I ever got here, I think when we started talking; the building itself was red brick. By the time I got here, the exterior had been painted a kind of a creamy color, a totally different look. When you drive down the road, you'd have to say, "Wow, something's different there." We started talking about it on the inside and we said, "You know what? Company's coming." And when I said that phrase one day, it was like all of us just connected to that, and it was like a God-moment, a God- gasp moment where

you're like, "You know what? That's right! Company has come to our community. It's time for us to be ready for company to come to our church."

And you know what you do when company comes. You clean up. You pick up. You put somebody at the window looking for the company when they arrive. You greet them when they get there. You feed them when they get there. You welcome them when they get there. You sit down, you get to know them, and talk to them. And that's our approach! Company's coming. We went into the sanctuary and it had been finished in '77, and now it's 2000. It had '77 colors and '77 furniture and you know the greens and the browns and all of that. We scraped together \$150,000. When I say scraped together, I mean we scraped together. We didn't have any money. We went in and we redid the sanctuary. We pulled up the carpet, took out the old pews, took out the plastic windows, we took out the old lights, took down the stage and it was just a concrete slab in there.

How many of you in this room right now were in the room that Sunday when we set up metal chairs on the concrete floor and wrote all over that floor with Sharpie markers? Raise your hand-how many of you? All over that concrete floor in the sanctuary we wrote promises of God and prayers of God and hopes that we had of what He would do in that room to continue the ministry to this community with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We put the carpet down, put the pews in, hung new lights, put in a new stage and put in new windows. Everything in that room you'd see change except that big massive cross that hangs in the baptistery and the one that you see on the front of your Sunday paper today. And in that room we were saying in our minds and our hearts, "company's coming."

In that time in 2001, we added additional staff. When I got here, Ms. Nancy Parks was a full-time secretary; Deborah Shepherd was a part-time financial secretary. Jeffrey Patrick was a part-time music guy, and we wanted to start doing something with teenagers. There was a guy here named Michael Brock that was a SigEp at UGA, and he was working with teenagers a little bit. The church had just hired a young girl from Kentucky that was a student at UGA to play piano here at Watkinsville. Her name was Nancy Riley. Nancy Riley is still here today. That's awesome. Let the records show that she got a handclap and the preacher got one "amen!" I'll never hear the end of that. She's been here 17 years and is still just serving us in such a beautiful, beautiful way.

Well, in 2001, a guy who's a legend around here now by the name of Vic Doss came to be a part of our church family working with teenagers. He now works with college students, and he and Cynthia have been with us for the whole journey. Well as we just keep walking through this story, Carla and I were doing everything that we could to help grow the church. We had three children when we moved here. In 2001, Cheney was born, and in 2003 Wilson was born. And y'all caught on and started drinking the water around here, and kids just started showing up all over this place. And that just became so much of who we were as a church- just kids and kids and

kids and kids, and we're ministering to kids.

When I think about us paying \$150,000 to remodel that sanctuary and saying, "We don't have any money," I'm telling you the truth. Right now as a plan, we try to keep one month's budget needs in the bank. It just works better for us to at least have one month's budget money there as we go forward. In those days, we were just like, "If we could just get one day in the bank." Deborah walked in my office in early 2000, and she said, "Carlos, we don't have enough money to pay the electric bill." And that got my attention. And then she said, "Not only that, we don't have enough money to make payroll." And that really got my attention, because I work here and I've got hungry kids and y'all are paying me! So I said, "Let's pray." Deborah and I both got down on her knees in my office right over here and we said, "God, we need you to provide." Deborah left and she went by the post office, and then she stopped by Bell's. She got back to the church and she said, "Carlos, at the post office I got a check there that was two dollars over our electric bill. And at the Bell's grocery store in the produce aisle, somebody came up to me and said, 'I'm so so sorry. I didn't put my offering in yesterday. Here's the check; can you please take it?'" And she said, "Carlos, it's enough to make payroll." Isn't that awesome? I mean that's amazing! That's a God-thing. We had just prayed, "God would You provide?" It's a God-thing.

Well, time just rocked along and in 2003, we were trying to figure out what to do with our space and what we were going to do with the future, and we were contacted by Southwire, the manufacturing plant that's on the backside of our property that faces Barnett Shoals Road. There's a railroad track between us. They contacted us and said, "We've got a little over 2 acres of land that's on the other side of the railroad track from us that adjoins your property, and we wondered if you'd be interested. And if you're interested in it, we would like to give it to you." So the Southwire Company over a period of weeks and conversations gave to us the property that we now park on behind the shed. And it was something that God used in our story at that time to say, "I'm not finished here. I'm not done here. I've got big plans." And we thought, if God would give us two more acres, it must mean that He's got plans for us in the future that we don't even know about.

And we started thinking about it and praying about it and then we were going to multiple services in the sanctuary. In 2004, we were ready to build what we would later call the Life Building, and it's where we are meeting today. We were getting ready to add education space. There was kind of a two-phase plan that we were going to build a two-story education building that would cover -when you walk out here and you see the grassy area- that was going to be a two-story education, fireside fellowship kind of room. And then later we would come back and add the head of that "T" and that would be what you see right here. We were coming to that church conference to make decisions about future space needs, much like the church conference we will have tonight.

The weekend that we were going to do that, Carla and I had to go to Cleveland,

Tennessee where I had pastored before for some engagement there. When we left our house and turned on to 316 coming through Ocone Connector, as much as I've ever known before, God spoke to my heart and said, "Build the Life Building first." I don't think we were calling it "Life Building" at that time, but it was, "Build the other piece first." And all the way to Cleveland, it was on my mind, on my heart. And I'm thinking and Carla says, "What's wrong with you? What's going on? Why are you pacing the floor? What's on your mind?" I told her and I got on the phone I called the guys that were on the building planning team at that time and I said, "I think God wants us to build the other phase first." And they said, "We meet Sunday night, Pastor." And I said, "I know, but I had to tell you."

We called a special meeting on Sunday afternoon before that meeting. I got together with the deacons and that building team. We sat in my office and we prayed and we talked about it, and we said, "We're going out in that room tonight to say we're not going to build that two-story education building. We're going to build this building first." We walked in that room; we made that decision, the church voted for that, and we're sitting in that building today. If you've been here over these years since 2004, you know that God uses it in a multitude of different ways as our church has continued to grow. One of the things that was happening was that we said, "If we continue to grow, we're not going to be able to have a place to worship. We're in multiple services already in the sanctuary. We need at least an option of a bigger room if we need to move to that." By the time the building was completed, we were already seeing we were going to have to come into this room at least for one service. But we didn't have any money. The building itself cost 1.2 million; we had given about 600,000; we owed about 600,000. Then we played about three full-court basketball games in this room and we realized that God had a different plan for it.

We decided we would come in here for worship services, and we would do one in here and one in the sanctuary. And then it just kept changing and morphing to whatever our space needs were. And when we were getting ready to do worship in this building, we were like what we are going to do? How are we going to do it? How are we going to set it up? And a family in our church came to me and said, "Pastor, we've never given a gift like this before, but if we're going into that building, we're going to have to have the resources to be able to set it up." And that family handed me a check for \$100,000. They said, "Use this to furnish that building for worship." We took that gift and we bought chairs and curtains and lights and sound equipment and staging, and we set this room up. And much of what we're using today goes all the way back to that gift of \$100,000 that we've been worshipping with in this room for a number of years.

We're in here for worship, and we named the building the "Life Building" because it really captured what we were believing about our church. We had this phrase "Company's coming," but also we began to say this statement: "It's all about life." If someone said, "Tell me about your church," you'd say, "It's all about life."

"Tell me what's God doing there."

"It's all about life."

This building is life. It's every age, every area of our life. Things are going to happen here, and it's all about life. I mentioned to you we owed about 600,000 on this building. We were working that debt down and giving toward that. We began to think about additional space because our church was growing and thinking about our community and how it was growing, especially in the area of children. We brought together a group in 2006, and it was called "Caleb's Eyes." It was based on the book of Numbers. It was where the spies went and they looked at the land to see what God would do in the future with the Promised Land and they came back and gave a report. We said to 12 people in the church, "Be Caleb's eyes. Go look into the future and come back to our church and tell us what you think we ought to do." Caleb was blessed by God because it says, "he follows Me wholeheartedly." And we said we want to have those kind of eyes for the future.

So we came back to the church, and we said, "Here's what we believe we ought to do. We think we ought to build a children's building." Later we began to refer to that project as "Watkidsville." One day, I was sitting around and looking at the word "Watkinsville" thinking about the kids everywhere, and I was just staring at it. And I was like, "You know what? If you take the N out of Watkinsville and put in a D, you get "Watkidsville." That's what we need to build right there; we need to build a kids village. And we were thinking about that and talking about that, but we had debt still on this building, and it would come up in conversations. One night when we were having these conversations about the building in the future that we now call Watkidsville-it was a Saturday night- I got a phone call. I took the call at seven or eight o'clock I believe on that night. And a gentleman told me who he was, and he said, "Carlos, I want talk to you about something." He said, " I want to share with you that we've got that debt on the Life Building. If we're going to work on building in the future, we need to deal with that debt. It's going to just keep hindering us. It keeps coming up and we just need to get that behind us so we can talk totally, fully about that."

And he said, "Here's what God's put on my heart. I want to give half of what we owe if the church would match the other half." I remember just getting down on my knees beside the table, still on the phone and just putting it on my ear and saying, "You're a lot smarter than me, and I don't want to offend you. I know you know a lot about what's going on in our church. But I just want to be clear."

I think I had my eyes closed, and I said, "We owe \$480,000." And the guy just started laughing, and he said, "Carlos I know what we owe on the building, and I'm telling you that I want to give \$240,000 if the church will match the other 240."

Now two things happened as a result of that. The first thing is that we need to see that God will provide. The second thing is that I want you to know that you can call me on any Saturday night you want to call me. That's awesome. 255-3504. 255-3504. If God moves on your heart like that, just be obedient to Him. Now I laugh, and we laugh, and it's because it's amazing what God does. That's what that laughter's for. It's amazing what God does. Just a few weeks later on the first Sunday of October, we shared it with the church and challenged the church, and we gave on the first Sunday of October. We went to Harris Shoals Park for our annual church picnic that year, and in the park that night I was able to announce that our church had given and committed \$265,000. And just in a matter of hours, the additional money was written and given and we were debt free. God was just continuing to write His story.

Well, we built the children's building. We call it Watkidsville. It was a project that was between \$3.2- \$3.4 million. We built that building in 2008, and we made commitments toward that building- two-year commitments. Our church family committed a little over \$1.6 million to that project. The weekend that we made those commitments in 2008 was the week that the stock market dropped 800 points in one day. We looked at that and we said, "Oh, Lord what do you want us to do?" And we kept praying, and we kept giving, we kept moving, and we believed that He was in it. That was in 2008, and we used Watkidsville for the first time in 2010. We owed about \$1.8 million on it. Just a couple years ago, we were able to announce out loud that we had completely paid off that project through generosity and just giving over our budget needs every month. We put that toward the debt to the point where we saw that \$3.4 million project completely covered.

In 2012, God began to do something among us in the area of church planting and sending people out. We had a sermon series, and I never had any idea about how God would use it, but many people still today talk about that season when we talked about living sent. When we talked about living sent, we talked about how God would use us beyond ourselves in other places, and we really believed for a number of years that God wanted to maximize the use of this property and use us to plant other churches. And that's been our plan. That's what we continue to do- maximize the use of this property, be strong at the home base, and assist others in planting new churches. In 2012, we were working with Cornerstone Church in Brooklyn, New York. Cornerstone at Bay Ridge with Nate Tubbs -we were sending Vacation Bible School offerings there, and we were sending people up there to help at times.

In 2012, Trey Eitel and Caitlin were part of our church and God got ahold of their heart. They believed that God was calling them to New York. In 2012 Trey and Caitlin- y'all stand up, let us see you this morning. They're here; stand up and let us see you. Trey and Caitlin left here; Caitlin had grown up in our church. She's the daughter Jim and Kathy Griffin. You know Jim; he plays a mandolin here every Sunday here in worship and with the Hog Mountain Boys playing in that band. He's famous; he's a legend. Caitlin and Trey moved to New York, and he leads worship at Cornerstone Church and is a train conductor for the train system in New York.

In 2012, we partnered up with Thomas Settles. We sent Thomas Settles and Scott Shepherd and a dozen other people to begin Calvary Bible Church on Milledge Avenue. In one day, we gave an offering of \$50,000 to go with them to help them get started. In 2013, on a Sunday morning we gave \$30,000 to David Holt and the new church plant, Living Hope Church that would meet on Lexington Road. And right over here in this corner, a couple of dozen people huddled up and we laid hands on them and commissioned them and sent them out in 2013 to be a part of this new church plant at Living Hope.

I was looking around as a pastor, and I was like, "We're sending people and we're sending people; God's still working here." And I knew we were supposed to be sending people, but still you go home and see people leaving and you think, "Well God, what are you doing?" And that very night that we commissioned those people to that new church we had a membership meeting. I walked into that membership meeting, and I noted it in my books that there were three times as many people joining the church in that membership meeting as we had sent out that morning to Living Hope. That's awesome. It's like God was saying to me, "You can't out-give me even when it comes to people."

Well, that next week, the best I remember is that it was on Monday following that. Deborah stopped me in the hall and she said, "Carlos, I think you'd want to know this." We had just commissioned this church. We had just given that offering and we had just sent people out, and she said, "I think you ought to know this. We received a check today from someone that is not designated. This is just a general budget gift to the church." It was the largest one-time gift that our church had ever received. It was a check just over \$70,000. And I said, "Do I know this person?"

And she said, "I don't know."

And I just didn't know who it was, and it was God saying to us, "You can't out-give me when it comes to people, and you can't out-give me when it comes to money. If I've got a plan; if I'm doing something, I'll provide for what I want to do."

Well, the story goes on and we knew that God wanted us to stay here. We'd made that decision all the way back in 2006. We'd explored moving to other parts of the county, other parts of town. Did God want us to pick up and relocate? That was something that churches were talking about and considering in those days, and we looked and said, "We really believe that this is a strategic location." When you look right out of our church property, you see a college community. When you look left out of our church property, you see a community of families and children. And God has strategically placed us right here on the border of Oconee County and Clarke County to have an impact for years to come. So we said, "We will stay and maximize this property and plant churches."

We were able to acquire the last two pieces of land that would be in this little landlocked piece with the railroad track behind us, a road this direction, road this direction, a neighborhood in that direction. The neighbors right beside us with that land and property- they wouldn't sell it to us. We went to them directly, and they said, "Yeah, we'll sell it." They offered it to us for 600,000, and we said, "Never mind, we'll just keep working and praying about it." But a few weeks later, I was driving by the other property on my way home- the second lot down. And I said, "We never have asked them." So I pulled in the driveway that day and knocked on the door, and nobody came to the door. I took a business card and wrote on the back of it, "If you'd ever be interested in talking to your neighbors at Watkinsville First Baptist about selling your property to us, I'd love to hear from you." That night, I got a phone call from the homeowner, a single lady with children living there. And she said, "I can't believe this. I was going to list the property Monday with a realtor." And I said, "Would you wait?"

And she said, "Yes, I'll wait."

We began to talk to her, and we were able to do the deal with her and purchase that property. Eventually we paid it off and it was no longer a debt that we were carrying. And then just a little over a year ago, Matt Bowden- he was kind to us, gracious to us, sat down with us, and he said, "I want to sell the property." And he sold that property to us for \$285,000, and you know that in February because of your giving generously, the overage of what we gave in 2016 allowed us to completely pay off and cover that piece of property. It's renovated, we're using it and it's done, and when it comes to land, we know what we have here. This is what we're doing.

Well last year, 2016, we got that house, we paid off the property, we renovated it, we added the 225 spaces of parking around the children's building in front of the sanctuary. We began to develop conceptual plans for future facilities. Tonight, we'll meet in conference and we will take a vote. That vote tonight is on whether or not we're going to move ahead with developing construction plans for future facilities here on this property. The vote would be for us to establish a line of credit to develop these construction plans so that we can know exactly what the price would be before we ever broke ground so we could share that with the church. The plan would be that we bring together a construction advisory team from our church and bring together a financial advisory team from our church. We'd come together with groups of people in our church and sit down at the table and talk about what their needs are in every area of ministry. We would share with each other that we have a money budget and we have a space budget, and taking those needs and the priorities of those needs we'll fit that in to what our money budget is and what our space budget is, and that's the plan moving forward if we vote. And then at some point, when those construction plans are developed, we would come back as a church and say, "Yes, now is the time to go. Let's build."

I mentioned these things about space because the story throughout Scripture is that

God marks things according to where people were meeting and where people were getting together. It's true in our story: from the basement of the Methodist Church to a half-acre on Third Street, to the wooden building on Barnett Shoals to the new building here that's now the youth room, to a sanctuary to a Life Building to a children's building. In the Old Testament, you had the tabernacle and the Temple, and the New Testament talked about synagogue and meeting in people's homes. What's God going to do with us in the future? What I've just told you is a story. If you look inside your Sunday paper, this is the structure of the story. For some of you, you love talking about the structure. I love telling the story. In many way, I could tell you that story and have no idea that what I've just described to you is actually what's on this page, but when you put on paper what's been happening over these years of our church history, here's the structure what God's been doing and here's the structure of what I believe God would do in the future with us.

Our purpose is to glorify God. It comes out of a longer statement that we landed on in 2006 that says, "Inspired by God's love, our purpose is to reflect His glory by presenting Jesus Christ to all people and leading those who believe to be wholehearted followers of Him." So our purpose is to glorify God in everything that we do as a church. Our mission is right there. To fulfill our purpose, we have to accomplish our mission, and our mission is to make wholehearted followers of Christ. It flows out of the reoccurring word of "wholehearted" throughout Scripture like God blessed Caleb for following him wholeheartedly, and like Jesus said in Matthew 28 when He says, "Make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe everything that I've commanded them."

What does it mean to be wholehearted? How do you know that you're following the Lord wholeheartedly? In a sentence, I think it's this: a person who is wholeheartedly following Christ is a person who has a heart that pursues Christ first. It is a heart that pursues Christ first in every area of life. In your work life, in your relationships, in your recreation, in your eating, in your school, in your retirement, in your dreams and your thoughts- you're pursuing Christ first. It's Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," and all these other things, they'll fall into place. That's the "Carlos version" right there, the rest of that verse.

Our values: we come to four things. We say if the ship is sinking, we going to make sure we have these four things with us: the word of God. Everything we're doing- it's guided, it's led by, it's built on a foundation of the inspired, inerrant, infallible word of God, and we believe that the preaching and teaching and application of the word of God is what transforms lives. It's not my preaching, it's not Jason's music; it's the word of God being sung or preached or taught or applied. That's what's alive.

Relationships: we value people being connected to one another in meaningful relationships. Generations: we're a people of all generations with a passion for reaching the next generation, and we live on mission. Every day going out of here, we're on a mission. We're going in our community taking the life of Jesus to the

world. That's our vision. In one word, if you asked me, "Carlos, what's the vision for our church?" Life. 134 times in the New Testament, the Greek word "zoi" is used, and it is a word for the life that Christ gives, that abundant life, that eternal life, that new life that comes because of Christ. We live in a world that is fixated on death and is paralyzed by the thoughts of death. You and I have a story of life where people because of Jesus Christ who died for us and came back to life, they can know abundant life and eternal life. And that's the vision. I just want to introduce people to that over and over and over and over again.

Our strategy. Four words: gather, encourage, equip, and send. It's like a big aircraft carrier. We gather in here on this aircraft carrier, and we come together. The very word "church" is a Greek word. "Ecclesia" means to gather. It's who the church is. We come together. And when we come together, we encourage, we fuel up our faith, we equip, we train, and we get ready. And then we send, we launch- we go back out into the community and our world with the life of Jesus Christ. We use tools- lot of different tools- but three major tools we use are space, staff, and funding. We use staff to lead, we use space to meet, and we use funding to support. When you and I give, we don't give to buildings. We don't give to lights. We don't give to a property; we give to a vision. We give to a strategy. We give to a dream of introducing people to the life of Jesus Christ. We support that mission.

Our objectives. I'm not going to have time to go through all of these; you're just not listening fast enough this morning, but the objectives that we talk about are from 2010. I said to you, here are 10 things that if we get to 2020 we would look back and we would say God's done what He wanted to do. Those objectives had to do with a clear message that people would know that we were about the gospel. High expectations: every person in our church connected to a small group, serving in an area of ministry, equipped and engaged in sharing the gospel. Community impact and corporate worship: we prayed and hope that by 2020 we would have the specific space built for us to corporately worship together. My dream is that would be able to do that in no more than two morning worship services. Next generation: that every student, whether it's grade school, middle school, high school, or college students- when they come to this area for school or college, they would have a personal contact with the gospel of Jesus Christ and receive an invitation to live that out through the body of Watkinsville. Multiplication: we said that by 2020, we believe that God would use us to plant 20 new churches locally, nationally, and globally. Personal involvement: we want to see 200 people a year doing short-term mission projects. Financial freedom: we wanted to be debt-free by 2020 having these objectives accomplished. Ministry discovery and development: we want to be a church that helps people to discover and discern their call to a vocational ministry.

Let me give you an update with a few wins here in 2017. When it comes to the word, the best I can tell in the years I've been here is that since 2000 we've journeyed together through 33 of the 66 books of the Bible. Since 2000, we've baptized right at 650 people. Life Groups- I'm not talking about Sunday morning classes right now,

but Life Groups where people meet in groups outside of Sunday morning to come together. In 2014, Robbie joined our staff as a minister of discipleship, and we had 14 Life Groups that were meeting. I'm told today in 2017 that there are 46 Life Groups that are meeting. Amen? 46! Amen. Can I tell you that since 2000, that we have met our budget and exceeded our budget every single year for 16 years? Ministry calling: a conservative count allows us to put about 50 names of people that have been called to ministry and are currently in the pipeline or training or they are already on the field serving in para-church ministries on staff with churches, or on the mission field on five different continents of our world.

Missions: in 2000, in what was equivalent to our Acts 1:8 offering, we went after a big, big, big goal of \$10,000. We did it by the grace of God. In 2001 we gave \$10,000. Last year our goal in 2016 was \$150,000. Last year in 2016 with the goal of 150,000, did you know that we gave 151,000 to that Acts 1:8 offering? This year we stood before you- Chris and I stood before you- and said our goal for 2017 is \$200,000. I want to tell you this morning that the update that I have as of today is on the screen in front of you right now. I can't even say it; it's too big! \$208,008.84. You're among a church family that has said to the world: we're giving our resources for Christ to reach others. I tried to find a family that tells the story with their life. Probably so many of you could plug your life in this story- a single mom with kids, senior adults in retirement, a young couple with the first child.

Let's stand together. And as we stand together, I think of one other win we've been a part of. I mentioned 20 churches by 2020. Today, I can tell you that we've been a part of helping 16 new churches be planted. Three locally, seven internationally in Uganda, and whatever it takes to get the 16 of them in Washington, New York, and Boston. I pray today that this story would cause our hearts to overflow with thanksgiving and praise to what God has done what He's doing.

Lord, it's a God thing. We celebrate You, we give You praise and glory and thanksgiving for allowing us to be a part of life that stretches beyond temporary life. Thank you for being so good to us in these days. We submit ourselves again to You for Your Spirit's leadership. In your name, amen.