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[*Introductory video*: Puffy clouds in the sky are the backdrop for the written message ushered in by a streaking star with a shimmery comet-like tail accompanied by gently paced music with a boom-chicka-boom beat:]

WE ALL WANT *to make changes*
SO WE MAKE NEW *year resolutions*
BECAUSE WE THINK WE *will find happiness*
IN ACCOMPLISHING *them*
BUT WHAT IF WE *got this all wrong*
AND YOUR SUCCESS DIDN'T *bring you happiness*
BUT INSTEAD YOUR HAPPINESS *brought you great success?*
HOW WOULD THAT CHANGE *the way you approach life?*
HAPPINESS MATTERS
Find joy even when life hides it

[*When the lights come back up at the video's end, Lead Pastor Sal Sberna begins.*]

Well good morning, everybody. I'm so excited to be able to speak to you today for a couple of reasons:

1. There's no video feed going to *Cypress* and I can preach as long as I want today.
2. Secondly (and the real reason behind that) is that I've waited seven years to share with you what I'm going to share with you today.
 - I am just about ready to explode.
 - I'm as giddy as a school girl who's been asked to her first dance. Not that I know how that feels, but Bryan [Rose, *Cypress Campus Pastor*] has told me about that. So...

Hey, have you ever had a then-is-now moment? You know, one of those moments that if you'd done something different *then*, things would be different *now*. It's a (you know) positive and a negative thing.

I've got (kind of) a negative thing to share a now-and-then moment with you. Several years ago—back in 2005 in September (2005)—I was thinking about New Year's series and how to kick off the new year. So I was throwing around some ideas and then (you know) as I was thinking about stuff, I said: *Man! This iPod thing is really taking off*. So I started looking into it and seeing the craze behind it and (kind of) get behind the philosophy of *Apple*. I thought: *Man, let's do a series called: The Theology of the iPod*. Man! It took off. I mean I was on national news; got interviewed by *Fox & Friends* [feature of the Fox News Channel].

It was like that one moment that if I would have known then what I know now.

- Because I looked at the stock price of *Apple* back then and I thought: *Man! I ought to invest*. But it was like 58 bucks a share. I thought: *Man! That's really expensive*. We were in a building program at the time—some of you know where I'm going with this—and I thought: *I don't know if we can afford that. It'd be kind of risky*.
- Do you know what *Apple* stock closed at Friday?—how about \$459 a share. If I would have known then what I know now, I'd have taken that 750 percent increase on my money. And you wouldn't even have to pay me now. Don't get too excited about that one though. (All right?)

You know that's kind of a: *Gosh! If I knew then what I know now.*

There're (kind of) positive ones though, because I recently ran across a scripture that reminded me of these then-is-now (these now-is-then) moments. It's *Revelation, chapter 3, verses 7 and 8*. In fact, this is the scripture that God confirmed in my heart and in Kristi's heart that this is where we needed to be; I need to become the pastor of this church. God spoke to me through this scripture here and made me some incredible promises—some of which this *day* is all about.

Revelation, chapter 3, verses 7 and 8:

"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write {these things}:
These are the words of him who is holy and true, {This is Jesus
Christ, the Son of God} who holds the key of David. {He has all
authority and all power.} What {does He do with those keys?} he opens
{what} no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

Revelation 3:7 (NIV)

Do you know what this verse teaches us?—that doors of opportunity are opened by God and they can be closed.

DOORS ARE OPENED BY GOD AND CAN BE CLOSED

There was an open door of opportunity for me to come to The MET and I resisted it for several months, along with my family members. But then that door wouldn't close and it wouldn't go away. So finally we discerned: *This is an open door of opportunity from God*. I couldn't shut it no matter what I wanted to do, and so we walked through it. That was almost 17 years ago.

Back in 2005, God opened up a door for us, as well, as a church. After we had done a lot of months (if not almost a year or more) of just thinking about the future of our church—back then I had a long-range planning team that I was working with—we looked at: *What is the potential for our church on this site [Jones Road]? Unless we invested (like) \$52+ million to totally redo everything that was on this site, the most we could ever reach would be a little bit over 5000 people on this site. So we said: Okay, what is a better use of the money?*

As we prayed through it and God began to speak to my heart, He began to open up my eyes to where He wanted the next campus of our church. So I began to talk to land developers and I said: *Where is the next area that Houston is going to grow through? He said: It's right in your back door, right down [U.S.] 290.*

So I started driving up and down [U.S.] 290 and looked at places (you know) wondering what the heck's going on. There was no Fry Road, but [U.S.] 290 infrastructure was going in. So I turned off on House Hahl Road; that's the only way you could actually get back to Blackhorse [Ranch area of Cypress, Texas] back then. I meandered around and House Hahl [Road] opened up. Back where [there] used to be a rice farm and cattle ranch, now big dirt movers and cement trucks—

- They were pouring streets.
- They were making bridges.
- There were no lakes back there.

I'm thinking: *What is this?* So I did some research and it was the beginning of the infrastructure of the Bridgeland [community]. It dawned on me: *People are putting in hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure to build homes, because they know that these people are going to be moving out here; and they're going to need a place to live.* I thought to myself: *Lord, their payoff isn't going to be till probably the last 10-15 percent of the houses that they sell.* So I thought: *We need to make an investment here as well.*

So I loaded up a bus-load of people; all of our leadership. We went on the magic bus tour. How many of you were on the magic bus tours with me years ago? Raise your hand up high. These are the folks that did the things I'm getting ready to tell you about.

- We'd go out there; there was not a house there.
- We'd take the bus that's usually parked across the street now—the shuttle bus that we use—we parked it.
- We stood on a hill. I (kind of) shared the vision God was putting on my heart for our church being like The MET Net—a series of MET-like churches—the first one being right out there in the Bridgeland.
- We prayed...
 - Held hands
 - Prayed together
 - Asked God to give us 100 acres of land somewhere in this area

Then I would close every prayer by saying:

Lord, memorialize this spot so people knew—when they came here to buy a house—that there are already believers here that wanted to see whoever was in that house be a home under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Let them know somebody cared for them long before they ever thought about coming here.

Do you know what happened?—

- They took that hill of dirt we stood on, and they made a park out of it.
- Right where we parked the bus, on the other side of the street, were their first model homes.

As Paul Harvey used to say: *And that's*—what did he used to say? (I don't know)—*the rest of the story.* (Right?) [ABC radio commentator well known for his daily radio series, *The Rest of the Story*, which aired for 33 years from 1976 until his death in 2009.]

Fast-forward—

- Fry Road's in now.
- There is a middle school/high school complex going in (already up and in).
- Bridgeland [planned community] is bustling.
- All of the subdivisions around there are beginning to bustle (once again) as home sales begin to increase.

So we went out there and then...

- Three years ago opened up at Hopper Middle School with the pioneers that went out there to say: *We believe that this is where God wants us to be.*
- They have been reaching people.

- Folks have been baptized there, just like they're baptized here.
- Families have been put together.
- Folks have come to Christ.

We have made an eternal impact, because we went through an open door that God had opened for us.

(Now) doors can be closed as well. There're opportunities in moments of time where we have to walk through them.

I had to chuckle. A couple weeks ago (you probably heard this on the news) a lady bought a lotto scratch-off ticket. The way that you play these (Bryan told me) was you scratch off the blanks and numbers come up. Well, she was scratching off and she didn't think she had a winner; so before she scratched them all off, she threw it away.

Well, there is a lady, who is a professional dumpster-diver. (I didn't know that these professions existed, but she did this.) She dove in the dumpster and she's been doing it ever since they had a lotto. She'd get all the lotto tickets that were thrown away and she'd turn them back in to the lotto people. (I guess) and they'd give her some type of remuneration for it. So she finds this one and notices that it's not all scratched off. So she scratches it off and goes and looks at the number. She has a \$1-million-winner lotto ticket. Now—it's her ticket now—the door of the opportunity for the woman who originally had it had been closed.

What do you think? The woman who originally owned it—if she knew *now*...she wouldn't back *then* have thrown that away. She would go: *Oh! I missed my opportunity.*

We have an opportunity that God's opened for us that we don't need to miss.

Many of you have heard—speaking about blown opportunities—my redfish story. To this day (to this day) I lose sleep at night. (Any time someone brings it up to me, I just want to punch them because it's just...) If you don't know, I enter a contest every year. Part of the contest is: If you catch a tagged redfish...

- You win a brand-new, 4-door, 4-wheel-drive truck—Ford F-150 (4-wheel drive truck)—totally tricked out.
- You win a trailer.
- You win a 21-foot, center console, bay boat with a 150 [horsepower motor] on the back of it.

We're talking about a minimum—back then about \$60 grand—probably about \$75 [grand] by now. Right?

So I'm fishing one day and I catch this redfish. I notice it's got a stick coming out of it; it has moss all on it. It (kind of) looked like—when I showed it to Bryan he said: *Oh, that looks like a swizzle stick.* I said: *What's that?* He told me what it was. And so, it kind of looked like that. So I took it home, put it in my freezer, and about a month later someone told me: *Man! You better really get that checked out. You may have won a tagged redfish.* I got so pumped that I went to the freezer, took it out, cleaned off the swizzle stick, and it said: *You have won a truck, and you have won a trailer and a boat.* But then when I went to turn it in, it says: *But you're an idiot. You have to turn it in 24 hours—no later than 24 hours—after you catch it.* I only waited 30 days! Ugh! It still hurts when I think about that. That was a door. The opportunity's gone; it's over!

Then there are some times you try to open up a door that's never meant for you.

When I first went into the ministry—right after I became a believer—I fancied myself as the next Billy Graham. [*Impersonating his voice:*] Billy Graham; that's right. I said that. The busses will wait. Your friends will wait. (I really) because you know he was getting old and I thought:

- He's going to need a replacement.
- I can talk like that. I look pretty good.
- I can whoop my hair—I even whooped my hair back.

I tried so hard to be the next Billy Graham.

There was one point in the first church I served in as staff evangelist—because that was my goal: I'm just going to evangelize the world—that I got together enough money that I sent out a brochure. The title of the brochure is: *Who Is Sal Sberna?* Because they didn't know I was going to be the next Billy Graham, so I had to tell them. (Right?) I sent it out to every Southern Baptist Church in the Convention—thousands. I mean it was like 30,000 churches (near abouts). And I got one phone call. The dude told me: *Hey, I think you misspelled your last name.* But that did not deter me. I said: *These folks just don't know.* I kept trying to go through a door that was closed.

Back in the day when I was a flat-belly and my hair was still blond and not gray, I was doing a lot of youth camps. We did this one particular youth camp where everybody in the camp got saved or got right...(I mean) imitation—everybody would come forward. There were no counselors or anything. Everybody just came forward. It was like a movement of God. We had a guy videotaping all of it.

I went: Sweet! I'm going to put together a little montage of what happened this week, and I'm going to send it out. Then they'll know who Sal Sberna is. He's the next Billy Graham.

So the guy said: Here's what I'll do. I'll take these home. I'll stick them in my garage. I'll edit them. I'll call you when they're ready.

We went home on a Saturday. On Saturday night he put the tapes inside of his garage. Saturday night around 2:00 in the morning, his garage burned down! So finally I said: *I don't think you want me to be Billy Graham do you, Lord? I think I'll be Sal Sberna that misses a vowel between the "S" and the "B."*

So when you grow, you learn: God opens doors that no one could open and He closes doors that nobody can open. When He shuts a door, it's over. The opportunity isn't there for you.

Right after I said that—I'm telling you, almost the next day—I get a call and they said: *We want you to come down and consider being the pastor of our church.* That was Florida. We went to Florida from Houston to be the pastor of a church. When I said and I told God this—watch what you tell God, because He's got a way of turning the tables and laughing, I think.

I told God: I'll never be a pastor. I'm going to be Billy Graham.

And He went: [Stifles a snickering laugh behind his clenched fist] Watch what I do to those tapes.

(Right?) There was an open door for me to pastor and I walked through it.

You know, let me tell you why we don't go through our open doors sometimes. Because...

- We think we know better than God.
- Maybe there's something in your past that tells you: *You can't go through that door...*
 - *You've had a divorce.*
 - *You've had a bankruptcy.*
 - *You've tried and failed before and ...the opportunity is over.*

I'm telling you, God keeps a door open for you. He wants you to open and walk through that door. Nobody can shut it but God Himself.

- Not your parents
- Not your spouse
- Not your inferiority

Nothing can stop the work and the will of God when He opens up a door for you. Never say *no* to open doors. Now, what are they?

OPEN DOORS ARE OPPORTUNITIES TO CHANGE

I had to change. I couldn't be Billy Graham anymore. I had to be Sal Sberna. And that means I had to change...

- The way I thought about God
- The way I thought about ministry
- How God wanted to use me

I went through a process of change—my whole family did.

What happens if we're not careful:

- We see the obstacles that are with these opportunities of open doors, because we don't see the opportunities.
- We see the obstacles, because we know this is going to be at a personal cost to us to make a change.

Now, I love the book of *Esther*. *Esther* is all about a beautiful Jewish woman named Esther. When the king wanted a new queen, he said: *Alright, I want the most beautiful woman that is out there*. He searched his entire kingdom—he was a pagan—and he found Esther, or they found Esther and brought her to him. He said: *You're right. She's definitely an 11 on a scale of 1-10; she's mine*.

(Now) she's Jewish. He's Gentile. He's a heathen unbeliever. And one of his close advisers said: *We need to get rid of these Jews, because they're going to do us damage*. So behind the scenes this guy is trying to exterminate all the Jews. Esther is the queen. She can intercede and have an opportunity to get before the king and stop this thing. But she knows: *Gosh! If I go before the king and he doesn't like what I have to say, it's over for me. I am going to die*.

- *It's a great obstacle, my physical death.*
- *It's a great opportunity though, the lives of many being saved.*

So her uncle Mordecai sends her a note and says this to her:

¹³...Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. {Now, here's the kicker. Ready?} And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Esther 4:13-14 (NIV)

You never know until you walk through the door, and there *is* change always. But if you don't change, ultimately you're going to die.

So we walk through this open door as a church and we started the *Cypress Campus*. It changed the way those people do church.

- They watch me on video (not right now), but they watch me on video nearly every Sunday.
- They don't have a church.
- They meet in a middle school.
- They get up at 5:00 a.m. to be at that church at 6:00 a.m.
 - Driving trailers to unload everything
 - Set up church
- They drop their kids off—not at *The Zone* or *The Blast*.
 - They drop them off in a gymnasium
 - That even has a portable floor that they have to roll out.
- They don't have live Sal.
 - They have live Bryan (which is a livewire to begin with, but...)
 - They don't get to touch the pastor
- They then have to...
 - break everything down
 - roll it all up
 - store it so they can get ready again.

But because of their commitment, people have been saved and lives have been changed.

We've had to change the way that we do church here. No longer are we one church in one location; we're one church in two locations. We cannot think about: That's *them*, and this is *us*. No, this is *us*. This is the ministry that God has given us.

In my personal experience, here's what I know about change and when God opens up a door of opportunity: Unless we are willing to put everything on the table, you cannot see God's open door. Any time that you go in with any hesitancy and you're not willing to say: *Lord, I'm in a position of neutral. Whatever You want is what I want to do*—you can't see God's open door (how He wants to do something).

So back in April of 2011 (last year), I put together a Cypress Campus Development Team. I said: *Guys, let's get neutral before God. Let's put it all on the table and say, "God, what do You want done with this 100 acres that we in faith purchased back in 2006? How do You want to proceed next?"*

Let me tell you: God changed everybody's heart in there and opened up our eyes to the great opportunity that He is going to give us. We came to the conclusion: If we don't change and do something, then we're going to miss our opportunity. Let me tell you: If you don't change—a church doesn't change, it declines. Only change brings growth—only people's lives changing so that they can share their changed lives with other people. We've made changes here because God is moving.

FAITHFULNESS LEADS TO GOD-SIZED OPPORTUNITIES

Faithfulness! How do you get bigger opportunities?—you're faithful in the opportunities God gives you. If you bellyache, moan and gripe about what He has you doing, do you think He wants to promote you so He can hear bellyaching, moaning and griping more?—no! Look what He says in *verse 8*:

I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door
that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you
have kept my word and you have not denied my name.

Revelation 3:8 (NIV)

Here's what He said: "I know your deeds." You know what we say?—oh, I know His heart. No! God says: *I know what you're doing. I know exactly what you're doing. And I know you have this little strength that you've been faithful with. Because you have been faithful and you have endured, I'm going to put before you a door that no one can shut.*

Let me tell you something: Nobody (nobody)—nothing seen or unseen—stops the work and the will of God from moving forward. It is those of us who live in this tiny/little bit of time that have the opportunity to engage in an eternal work from God that cannot be stopped. I'm telling you we are here today for such a time as this.

Last week as I was preaching at *Cypress* (this message that you are hearing this week) a man came up to me afterwards with one of the *Cypress Campus* members, one of the deacons over there—big smile on his face, big smile on the deacon's face. The deacon introduced me to him and told me his name and the fact that he gave his life to Christ that Sunday (been going to their small group). Do you know what his story is?

- He's a widower.
- He is now a single dad still grieving the loss of his wife.
- Has a child.

They reached out to him. Because of them reaching out, they have changed forever his eternity and that little girl's eternity. That man realized that Sunday that this is his now moment.

Do you know what our conclusion was at the Cypress Campus Development Team [meeting]? Our conclusion is we are going to move forward into a God-size opportunity. You ask God to do something big, He's going to do something big. With every big thing God does, it feels like big risk, but it is a guaranteed proposition.

OPEN DOORS FACE OPPOSITION FROM THE OUTSIDE AND THE INSIDE

Later on in that text that we just read, it says that Jesus is going to expose the “synagogue of Satan” that was hassling them. [*Revelation 3:9* (paraphrased)]

Here’s what the apostle Paul says about opposition: *In the meantime, I’m going to stay on at Ephesus...* [*1 Corinthians 16:8* (paraphrased)] Why did he stay there? Because people—I mean it was like a revival...

- People were being saved.
- Folks were turning from witchcraft and the worship of false gods.
- They were burning all of their old stuff that held them in bondage.

At the same time he had lots of opposition. Look what he says:

There is a wide-open door for a great work here, although many oppose me.

1 Corinthians 16:9 (New Living Translation)

Now here’s what I know for sure...I feel a sermon coming on and I’m starting to break a sweat. [*Removes his jacket and hands it to his wife on the front row, saying:*] Here, baby. Thank you. [*Man in the congregation says: Take your time, Pastor.*] Come on. I need a few more votes than that, though; thank you. [*Congregation responds with light applause.*]

Open doors face opposition from within and from without. Any time God opens up this door and you’re going to walk through it, I guarantee you Satan is going to stand right in front of you and say:

- *I dare you. (I dare you.)*
- *Don’t go through there.*
- *Don’t! People aren’t going to understand you.*
- *Don’t! Don’t walk through that door.*
- *People are going to look at you and say: Are you crazy?*
- *There couldn’t be any worse timing than this.*

When we started that campus we had just...

- Gotten out of Hurricane Ike
- The stock market had just crashed
- Recession had set in

...and people were telling me: *Are you crazy? There couldn’t be any worse timing.* I’m telling you: There couldn’t have been any better timing, to get out there with a message of hope for that community.

- *Are you crazy? Do you think people are going to come out there and watch video messages? Yes, they did.*
- *Are you crazy? Do you think people are going to drop their kids off in a make-shift preschool for children? Yes! We’re crazy enough to believe it and they do!*
- *Are you crazy? Are you demon-possessed? No! But I’m spirit-possessed by the right Spirit. When we do what God wants us to do, God moves.*

Look, they thought Jesus was crazy, didn't they?

- They thought He was crazy. They said: *You think You're Who? The Son of God?* Here's what they said: *You're crazy! You have a demon.* They thought Jesus was demon-possessed. [John 7:20; John 8:48; John 10:20 (paraphrased)]
- Satan tried to oppose Him out there in the wilderness. What did he say? *Just bow down to me. Just don't do this open door of opportunity Your Father has given You. I will give You everything if You don't do this one thing.* [Matthew 4:9 (paraphrased)]
- Peter even told Him: *Lord!*
 - After Jesus said—[confessed to Peter] to be the Christ—He said: *Now I'm going to go to the cross.*
 - Peter comes to Him and said: *I can't let You do that.*
 - Do you know what Jesus said? *Get thee behind me, Satan, because you are not savoring the things of God.* [Matthew 16:23 (paraphrased)]

So, every time you want to do something, there'll be people in your family that think you are crazy.

- My dad thought I was crazy when I became a [Christian]. Literally! He thought I had lost my mind. He wrote me a letter and I've told you before. He said: *Stand on your own two feet. Don't hide behind a cross and religion. Be a man.*
- About 25 years after that when my dad was 75 years old and I led him to Jesus Christ, don't you think he was glad that I did what was right *then*, so he could experience Jesus *now*? I think so.

I had people come to me when we were getting ready to purchase that land and sit in my office. (I mean) good people that would tell me:

- *Are you crazy?*
- *Why do we have to do this?*
- *Why can't you let Second [Baptist Church] do that?*
- *Why can't you let Champion [Forest Baptist Church] do that?*
- *Why can't you let Fellowship [Baptist Church] do that?*

I said: *Because God is opening up the door for us to do that! We're not Champions and we're not Second and we're not Fellowship. We are The MET, the church of Jesus Christ that calls itself Metropolitan. I'm its pastor. God's spoken! This is what we're going to do.*

Do you know what they said? *You're crazy!* A lot of them left and a lot of different ones came.

- Do you know why people leave?—because the ones that leave could not stay.
- Do you know why people stay?—because the ones that stay could not leave. They see the open door of opportunity.

Do you know ultimately why I didn't turn that redfish in? Because I had a good friend with me that day. (That) when I pulled it up he was standing right next to me. I was whooping and hollering because I caught a redfish that had a swizzle stick out of its back.

Here's what he said to me (he said): *Sal, that's a tracking stick from Texas Park and Wildlife. Just take that thing home. Put it in the freezer. When you have some time, take it out, wash this thing off and go on the internet. It'll have a number on this stick. Then type it in and then you can tell them where you caught the fish.*

Here's what I did: I listened to somebody else rather than listening to my heart and turning that fish in. I let somebody I cared about (and was my friend) tell me: You're crazy if you think that's a tagged redfish! He and I don't talk much anymore (by the way).

Crazy people change the world. Jesus, the crazy demon-possessed person that they thought He was, has changed the world.

Apple had a commercial out several years ago—right when they were starting out—and I loved the wording of the commercial. I want to read it to you. It's called: *Here's to the Crazy Ones.*

Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones [who] do.

Apple Computer, part of the *Think Different* advertising campaign, 1997

Those 120 people that watched Jesus on that hillside ascend into heaven and hear His great commission were crazy enough to believe Him. Then on the day of the Pentecost when the Spirit of God fell on their lives:

- They began preaching in different languages to everybody who had gathered there for that festival.
- They were giving their lives to Christ.
- A tremendous outpouring of the Spirit of God.
- There were those there that said: *You people are crazy and you're drunk on wine.*

Well, I'm a crazy drunk if that's what it takes. (All right?) But this is what happens when you walk through open doors. People are going to say you're crazy. Then you're going to look at yourself and you're going to think: *I'm crazy. (I'm crazy.) There's no way I can do this.* Do you know what?—you're right. You can't. God never said you could. He can and He promised that He would.

Here's what I believe—here's how I recognize an open door for God—unless someone (including myself) thinks it couldn't or shouldn't be done, that's probably from God. Because people are going to say: *Man, we can't.* Great! Because if we could, we don't need God. Let's just close up shop and go play golf or fish. Because it's not worth doing unless God has to come through and do it.

So do you know how you defeat the inner opposition? You shift your focus from:

- What's going to happen to us?
- How are we going to afford it?
- What are people going to think?

...to: God is going to do something great through us!

We have to die to ourselves and take up our cross and follow Him.

- I have to die to myself to what people think about me.
- I have to die to myself if folks think I'm crazy.

If people...

- Leave
- Misunderstand
- Think I don't love them
- That I'm out of my mind

...it doesn't matter to me. I want to follow God. And I want to lead the people who want to follow God into opportunities that are so overwhelming that God must be in it. God is in every open door. (Alright, we need to hurry up and finish up, alright?)

OPPORTUNITY SEIZED BRINGS GREAT REWARD

Verses 11 through 13—"I am coming soon..." [Revelation 3:11a (NIV)]

Oh my gosh! Do you realize Jesus is coming back? All of the opportunity that we have to preach the Gospel is going to be over! And any opportunity God's ever given us, it's done. Door closed!

- No more church
- No more preaching the Gospel through the church that's down here
- That age of grace is over with
- Great tribulation is going to settle in

Now is the opportunity. He says:

I am coming soon. {Look what He says;} Hold on to what you have,
so that no one will take your crown.

Revelation 3:11 (NIV)

[Last sentence repeated for emphasis.]

- Do you remember He said: You've got a little strength. "Hold on."
- Do you know the key to success in life in anything is: "Hold on." (Hold on.)
- Do you know how I got through my first rollercoaster ride? I held on, screamed like a little girl all the way through it.
 - But do you know what? I got addicted to it.
 - I still hold on and it's a heck of a ride.
- Do you know how I learned to swim? I held on to the side of that pool until I was so embarrassed I had to let go.

All it takes to get through life and get the reward that God has for you is to hang on to the vision and the promises of God that He's given you...

- For your marriage
- For your business
- For your family

...whatever it is, just hold on!

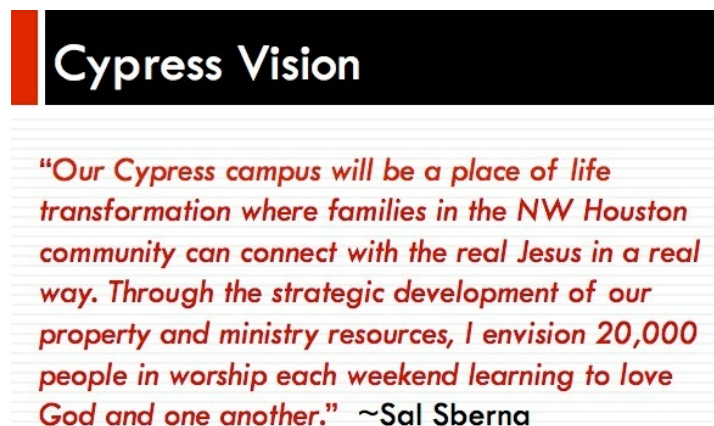
Someone asked me, a couple of weeks ago: *Man! How have you made it that long at one church?* I said: *Well, I've never been asked by any other church—number one—to do anything else.* Which either means: I'm really, really bad or this is where God wants me to be. I told him: *I choose to believe this is where God wants me to be.* He said: *Well, what was your strategy?*

"Hold on" was my strategy!

- "Hold on" to the promises of God.
- "Hold on" in the difficult times.
- "Hold on" when God's moving real fast.

Hold on tightly to the promises of God and the open doors of opportunity will become a reality.

So let me show you the open door that God is inviting us to walk through again—Stage II of His vision for us. We bought the land. So I want you to put up on that board what I believe is going to happen on that land over time. This is what I believe God is telling us. Put up on the screen the first one, the vision statement:



I believe there are going to be 20,000 people worshipping on that property over time.

- I believe it as much as I believed that we would go from one service to three services here on this campus.
- I believe it as much as I believed the day I saw my wife—yeah, she is my wife—that she was going to be my wife.
 - That was an open door of opportunity.
 - I had to convince her not to close it, but it was an open door of opportunity.

I believe that. That means we're going to have over 25,000 people on any weekend on both of our campuses, worshipping God over time. Next slide:

Recommendation

The recommendation of the Cypress Development Team is that we immediately move forward with the development of a permanent 30,000 to 35,000 square foot worship facility on the 100 acres owned in Cypress.

This is the recommendation from the Cypress Campus Development Team—that immediately we move toward the development of a 30-35,000 square foot worship facility on the 100 acres. It's going to be a little bit bigger than the *Truth Building* across the way (if you want to know how big that is). It's going to end up being like 36[000 square feet] and change, now that some of the plans are done.

What's it going to look like—the property—over time? Here's what it's going to look like.

Cypress Campus Master Plan



See all that. See that big ol' building on the right? That's not Phase I, so don't get freaked out. (All right?) That's going to be the big worship center—that ultimately we are going to build—that's going to allow us to worship [with] about 20,000 people on any given weekend. You see water features there. You see parking lots, green belts, soccer fields—a sport complex ultimately is going to be there—and in the corner you see Phase I.

Phase I

WORK™

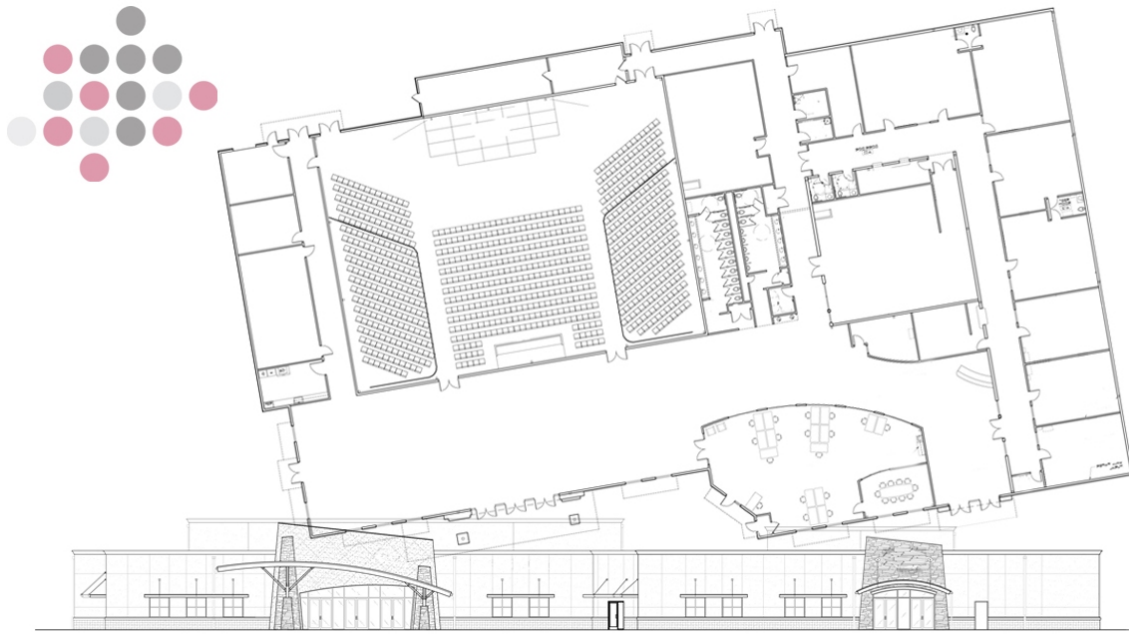


Now you ask: *Why all that water there?* Well, that's private fishing stock. You too—for about \$150,000 pledge—can fish in that pond. Okay, that's Phase I. That's what we're in the process right now of designing and getting all the numbers on.

You see a little 10-acre slot cut out there because we said: *Lord, we want to stay open. If somebody would like to buy a little 10 acres of this.* We'll be glad to sell it [to] them at a premium price. So if you have several million dollars, I would like to see you right afterwards and you too can buy that and then donate it back to the church. Okay?

So, this is what it's going to look like. Now, why the soccer fields and stuff? Because way back when we did this, I said: *The key to growing our church is grabbing the children when they're young.* Everybody that I know that has young children has a minivan. They are always driving them to practices and to soccer practices and Little League practice and all that. Well, we want to be the place—not only where you come on Sunday—but every day of the week when you drop your kids off. We're going to have a *Lamb School* there just like we have a *Lamb School* here. We're going to continue to reach out to these people.

Next slide please.



That's (kind of) a concept of what it's going to look like on the inside—kind of a little bit what it looks like over there. Don't hold us to it; it's still being done.

Now, several of you want to know: *How much is all of that?* Well, we set a budget—at a real high budget—what we believe is going to come *under* budget. We're going to be able then to finish up *re:PLACE* on this campus and be able to redo the U-shaped building.

Do you know why that U-shaped building is so important? Because that Fellowship Hall (over there) was the first building that was built by the pioneers who came to *Jones Road*—much like we came to *Cypress*—and we are following in their footsteps. As God memorialized the spot for us, I want to memorialize that U-shaped building and turn it over for the next 40 years of use that we're going to be here at this campus, if Jesus doesn't tarry.

Now the entire price tag is going to be a little over \$7 million, which is nothing. Believe me, it's nothing. You folks gave \$1.6 in a matter of two months a year ago (\$1.6). Not only that, where God guides, God provides. We've even got miraculous stories of the interim financing that's available for us. If you have questions on any of this, we'd love to tell you all the stories and all the details:

- This afternoon [February 5] at 3:00 we're going to have a question-and-answer time. If you have a question and you can't make it at 3:00...
- Next Wednesday [February 8] at 6:30 [p.m.]
- Then the next Sunday [February 12] at 3:00 [p.m.] again we will have another question-and-answer time.
- If you can't make it to any of those, go to **myquestion@TheMETonline.org**. Write your question in and we will get you an answer. We'll compile a FAQ sheet out of that.

Let me end by saying this: I am so excited because if I hadn't said *yes* to the opportunity that God opened up for my family and I to be here, I would not have the opportunity to tell you what I'm telling today.

Now listen to me. When we take advantage of this opportunity, a couple years from now we'll be standing at the doors of another opportunity that God is giving us. This is our then-is-now moment, Church. This is what we're going to do with that land.

- God's going to do great things through you.
- God's going to open up the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing you can't contain.

Why?—because we're walking through God's door of opportunity.

- Where God guides, He provides.
- Where He leads, He feeds.

He can be trusted. He holds the keys, not anybody else. He holds the keys.

So I'm asking you: On the 19th [of February] when we vote as a church, say *yes* we're walking through the door. When we bought that land, I think it was like a 96-97 percent *yes* and *amen*. We voted and we bought the land. I want to see the same thing. Then when we start raising money for this in a capital campaign right after Easter, I want to see 2000 families saying: *Yes! We're going to contribute to this.*

We don't have millionaires here; I don't even think we have any thousandaires (actually). But we have people that love Jesus and trust Him. If everybody did a little bit, we won't even have to use financing from the bank. We could raise the \$7 million. But because...

- We're on a timeline and we have to be out of the school in February of next year—we can get an extension till May—we've got to get out of the school.
- We couldn't build thus far, because there were no utilities out there.
 - Now the utilities are there.
 - Now Tuckerton Road has been cut through.

You need to go to—how many of you have not been by that 100 acres? Obviously, you're not poachers or you'd have been dove hunting there already.

- You need to go by and walk on the land that we walked and we prayed over.
- You need to sense the power and the Presence of God there.

Then after Easter we'll go on a public time of commitment. Starting next week I am preaching a series called: *The Nehemiah Project: Rise Together*. We're going to be rallying ourselves to all to get on the wall and to make the promises of God a reality amongst us.

Now for some of you, it's a different now-is-then moment. Here's what you don't want to have. You don't want to get in the future sometime and die and wake up in hell going: *Oh my gosh! If I knew then what I know now, I would have changed my destination*. Guess what?—you know. This is your now-is-then moment. You can give your life to Christ...

- Just like that widowed father gave his life to Christ last week.
- Just like all these people who've been baptized and given their life to Christ—

They've realized: *This is my now-is-then moment. What I do now determines what's going to happen then*. You need to give your life to Christ. So I'm going to ask us to pray this morning. Let's bow our heads and close our eyes. Let's pray. If you've never given your life to Christ, I'm going to ask you to say this prayer with me. It goes like this:

Dear Jesus, I want to give my life to You. I realize this is my now-is-then moment. What I do now determines what You do with me then. Save me now. Take me to heaven with You.

If you just prayed that prayer (no one's looking around), put your hand up high in the air. Let me see. Good! Anybody else?—up high in the air, unashamed—good. Anybody else?—good! Anybody else?—all the way up! (All the way up.) Let me see. Good! In a moment, Pastor Bryan's going to come out here and he's going to give you some *Next Steps*. Listen very carefully to him.

Church—everyone of us that calls ourselves members of The MET, followers of Christ that go to The Metropolitan Baptist Church—this is our prayer of commitment.

Dear God, please do not allow us to allow anything to stop us from walking through this door of opportunity. Lord, we know we'll have pressure from the outside and pressure from the inside, but what we want to feel is Your Holy Spirit inside of us leading us through this open door of opportunity. May Your hand of favor and blessing continue to rest on us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Lead Pastor: Dr. Sal Sberna

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The hopes of the godly result in happiness, but the expectations of the wicked come to nothing.

Proverbs 10:28 (New Living Translation)

Legend:

(**words in parentheses**) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[**words in square brackets**] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{**words in curly brackets within indented quote**} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*