

Closing Thoughts

Kevin Saxton, Brewster Baptist Church

I can still remember answering the telephone that warm May afternoon in Wilmore, Kentucky. I had graduated from seminary about a week before and Allison and I were considering where God was leading us next. The phone rang and I heard, "Hi this is Doug Scalise from Brewster Baptist Church on Cape Cod. . . ." Doug explained that the church was looking for an associate pastor to work with children and students and told me about this church. After our conversation was interrupted at least once by the sound of a freight train blasting its horn as it approached a crossing about 30 yards outside our apartment window, I said that I would love to learn more about this church.

I can remember how about two months later Allison and I boarded a flight from Lexington, Kentucky to Providence, Rhode Island, via Atlanta to experience Brewster Baptist Church firsthand. I vividly remember being stuck on an airplane sitting on the runway in Atlanta for three hours waiting to take off on a Friday night, and I remember that we didn't arrive at the Scalise's house (which little did we know would be where we would live for four and half years) until about 5 am on Saturday morning. I also remember discovering that I had am apparently allergic to clams that weekend - after eating quite a few of them. I remember that in spite of those two experiences, how impressed we were with this church and I can remember making the decision with Allison to come here, and uttering the words – words that you yourself might have said at one point, "well, even though Cape Cod isn't where our friends and family are, we know that they want to come and visit us."

There are so many things I remember and cherish from the last nine years. So many faces . . . so many people . . . so many events . . . so many things that we have celebrated together as well as things that we have grieved together. So many things that God did in us, around us, and through us. So many lives that were changed, so many friends inviting friends to come and experience Jesus for themselves in this church community.

And there are stories . . . lots of stories . . . Stories like the Christmas Program where I totally forgot my line . . . stories like the time we were at snow camp and all nine of our adult leaders spent a good portion of Saturday afternoon going down the tubing hill over and over again. . . linking all our tubes together to see how fast we could go and whether we could stay on the tubes.

And so many more stories about ski trips, snow camps, ultimate Frisbee games, trips to Boston, Providence, Chicago, and Pittsburgh. Stories about Sunday School, Sunday evenings, and Friday nights, volunteers and students. Stories about Vacation Bible School, Easter craft

parties, and countless children and volunteers. (Sugared sodas sink in water, artificially sweetened sodas float!)

Stories about Christmas parties, new member parties, work projects, bible studies, worship services, and just being in the office with the rest of the staff.

There are so many stories and so many pictures and images that come to mind that there is no where near enough time to share them all with you, as well as the fact that with so many of those stories, were things that you just had to be there for . . .

Our time here at Brewster Baptist Church has been wonderful. We have made so many amazing friends and we are grateful for all of the love and affection that has been showered on our family. Thank you so much for loving us and our children.

This has been a wonderful place to “work” (since we all know that associate pastors only work one hour a week when the senior pastor is on vacation.) I have truly enjoyed working with Doug, Mary, Cindy, Sandy, Jane, Bill. God has blessed us with lots of fun and laughter. I will definitely miss you.

We have the best sextons any church could ask for, thank you to Joanne, Glenn, and Jerry. I appreciate all your hard work and your tolerance of the clutter in my office.

I am so grateful for all of the wonderful volunteers I have had the privilege of serving with in ministry. I wish I could name all of you, but I fear I would forget someone. Your willingness and servant hearts have been a blessing and inspiration as we have served together with students, children, media or any of the other ministries that have allowed us to serve together.

Thank you also to all of our wonderful students. I am excited to see how you have grown and how God is leading you to serve and I am excited to see what you will become. It has been so exciting to see all the friends you have invited through the years, all of the friends who have had their lives changed because of your willingness to be invitational.

It has been such a blessing to spend the last nine years with you here in Brewster. We have enjoyed living here on Cape Cod. We have enjoyed the beach and the natural beauty. We have enjoyed the wonderful community that has been such a great place to raise our children.

Being here has been an opportunity to see what a church can be, what God can do through it when it seeks first and foremost to love God and love others.

We have seen people young and old come to know Jesus and seek to follow him. We have seen families changed for the better. We have seen people made whole – lives that have

changed direction because people in this church took an interest in them and connected them to our church family.

We have witnessed the incredible caring that this church routinely displays through visits, meals, cards, rides, phone calls, and prayers – not just for the people in the church but also in the community.

We have been amazed by the extravagant and astounding generosity of this congregation. Do you realize that from January 2000 through the end of November that you have given \$9.6 million dollars, of which just over 1 million dollars have been given away locally, nationally, or internationally? Your stewardship and generosity has been an inspiration.

We have witnessed big ideas and big dreams come to life: from a major addition to our own building to a building project halfway around the world in northeast India to funding Habitat for Humanity houses both in Brewster and in Haiti, to Holiday Fairs that have given away all the proceeds to meet needs in our community. Time and time again, the attitude of this church has been “You’ve got a problem? We’re going to figure out a way to solve it,” or maybe more contemporarily “Can we do it? Yes we can!” (can you tell that Brennan has us watching Bob the Builder videos at home?)

And yet through all this growth, through all these programs, through all the money that has been given, through all these big dreams, through everything, Brewster Baptist Church has remained remarkably unified. In spite of the fact that we come from so many different backgrounds and experiences, from so many different Christian traditions, this church has remained remarkably unified. In spite of so many situations and experiences that could have led to major conflicts and divisions, this church has remained strongly united and strongly devoted to God and to each other.

As I have reflected on these last nine years, I feel awed, humbled, grateful and blessed by God to be a part of this. Thank you for all you have done and are doing in Jesus’ name. You are and will continue to be a source of inspiration for me and for other churches, and a proof that the gospel is true, that Jesus’ love is powerful and redemptive, and that a local church can be a powerful force for good both in its community and in the world.

In a lecture to my freshman religion class on my first day of college, my professor shared that “All beginnings are hard.” He shared that all beginnings are hard because with the start of something new comes a need to adapt to something different. It means new situations, new

statuses, new relationships, and new locations. Beginnings require learning to do things in new ways and often levels of discomfort and uncertainty. Lastly, all beginnings are hard because all beginnings require an ending. They require a change - that things are no longer as they have been. Something that has been has drawn to a close, and it has been replaced by something new.

Beginnings may be hard, they may be difficult, but it is necessary to remember that while things may not be the same, they can still be good. And as believers who are seeking to love and serve Jesus, we know and can trust that God is faithful and that God makes all things work together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

As we leave Cape Cod, we are taking a part of you with us. Yes, we are taking some shells, some sand, and some t-shirts, but we are also taking a concrete example of what the church can be. As you have encouragement to other churches, on Cape Cod, in Massachusetts, New England, and in far away places like India and the Dominican Republic, you will also be an encouragement to churches throughout Western Pennsylvania as we begin serving in a camping ministry that seeks to resource and support the needs of dozens of churches.

For people who might wonder what kind of difference individual Christians and churches can make, we can tell them about you. We can tell them what God has done and is doing both in and through you. We can tell them we have not only seen a church that prevails makes a difference in the world, but that we have been a part of one.

As we prepare to leave this place and enter into a new ministry, I want to offer a few words of encouragement and exhortation to you.

First, keep seeking after and pursuing Jesus. The author of the book of Hebrews writes in chapter 12, *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.*

Jesus has told us and shown us how to run the race of life. In faith follow his example and continue to strip away all the things that would hold you back or prevent you from pursuing Jesus. And as the Jesus has modeled for us and the scripture on the wall above the welcome center reminds us: Love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and Love

your neighbor as yourself. *May Jesus' love fill your hearts and may you seek to pour out that love to those around you out of your love for God.*

Second: Keep dreaming big dreams. Keep looking at the world with eyes that see possibilities and opportunities - for the God we serve has unlimited resources. Keep looking for ways that you can share the love of Jesus in the world around you, whether its doing something small for a neighbor or family member, or seeing a problem or need somewhere in the community or the world. *May God give you the imagination and creativity you need to see the difference that you can make in the world around you.*

Third: Seek to be unified. In John 17, Jesus prays *"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me."*¹

Jesus prayed for all those who will ever believe in the gospel message – he prayed for you and for me, he prayed for this church. And of all the things that Jesus could have asked God, he prayed that his followers would be one. That they would be united together just as Jesus and the Father are one, and that by being one people would believe the gospel message, that the unity of the church would testify to the truth and power of the gospel.

Don't let differences divide you. Seek to resolve your conflicts in a loving fashion rather than avoiding them or running away from them. After all, you're going to be spending eternity with your fellow believers – forever. If you don't deal with those conflicts now, things might get a little awkward for you in heaven.

May you be so unified that people would be amazed by the love you have for God and for one another and come to believe in the gospel.

Last: Let us pray for each other. Paul writes these words in 2 Thessalonians:

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we ask you to pray for us. Pray that the Lord's message will spread rapidly and be honored wherever it goes, just as when it came to you. Pray, too, that we will be rescued from wicked and evil people, for not everyone is a believer. But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. And we are confident in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we commanded you. May the Lord

¹ John 17:20-21

lead your hearts into a full understanding and expression of the love of God and the patient endurance that comes from Christ.²

We will be praying for you, and we ask that you too would pray for us. You will always have friends in Pennsylvania you are welcome to visit, friends who love you, are praying for you, are cheering you on, and might be calling to say that they're coming to the Cape and wonder if they can see you, or even stay with you.

Finally, I want to leave you with one of my favorite scriptures, Colossians 3, which was ingrained in my mind by my friend and mentor, Ken Thompson, who I am succeeding at Camp Judson. One summer that I was a staff member, at every staff meeting for the entire summer, Ken would ask the whole staff to kneel and reflect as he read the following words from Colossians 3. Over the years this scripture has challenged me and shaped me as I find myself remembering and reflecting on it often. And now I share it with you, with the hope that it would continue to shape and guide you as you seek to follow Jesus.

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.³

² 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

³ Colossians 3:12-17