

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the celebration! Sixty years ago, Green Acres Baptist Church was constituted as a New Testament congregation. I'm reminded of the old song that says, "You must have been a beautiful baby; 'cause baby, look at you now!" A few of you have been here for sixty years, and we honor your faith. Some of you have been here many years, and others only a few years. For some of you this may your first time to worship Green Acres. Our Discover Life Broadcast ministry put together a ten-minute video to highlight our history, so I hope you enjoy it.
<https://vimeo.com/126729625>

For your information, our first pastor, Cecil Johnson, went to heaven in 2010. He died one day before his 90th birthday. Ed Bowles died in 1993 at the age of 66. Lester Collins still looks great at 92 and teaches Sunday School every week. And Paul Powell is still going strong at four score and a little more.

I want to take a moment and test your knowledge about 1955. Here's a pop quiz. See how many you can answer.

1. These two men were President and Vice- President.
Dwight D. Eisenhower and Richard M. Nixon.
2. This movie won the Academy Award for best picture.
Marty starring Ernest Borgnine who also won the Academy Award for Best Actor.
3. This was the Billboard #1 song in May of 1955.
Unchained Melody by Les Baxter chorus and orchestra. This was mostly an instrumental song, ten years later, the Righteous Brothers recorded it and it soared back to #1.
4. This was the #1 television show.
The \$64,000 question (I Love Lucy was second). The champion of the \$64,000 question was an unknown psychologist from New York named Dr. Joyce Brothers. Her win propelled her to her own television career.
5. This lady was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus.
Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama. This dignified Christian lady has been called the First Lady of the Civil Rights movement.
6. Tappan introduced this new kind of oven, but it was a commercial failure.
The microwave oven sold for \$1,300. It was a huge contraption and \$1,300 in 1955 represents about \$11,000 today.
7. This team won the World Series.
The Brooklyn Dodgers beat their crosstown rivals the New York Yankees, and two years later moved to Los Angeles.
8. This team won the NFL championship.
The Cleveland Browns beat the Los Angeles Rams in what was the very first NFL game broadcast nationally on television.

9. This college football team finished ranked #1.
The Oklahoma Sooners finished the regular season 10-0. There were only seven bowl games played (compared to 39 this year). OU beat the only other undefeated team in the country, Maryland, in the Orange Bowl.
10. This was the price of a first class stamp.
Three cents.

In this message I want to focus on our heritage and our hope as a congregation. Our text is found in Ephesians 1:17-18.

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” (Ephesians 1:17-18)

That’s my prayer for each of you today, that you may know Christ better. You know Jesus, and you can know him better and better as you spend time with Him. This verse speaks of our INHERITANCE, we get the word heritage from that. And it also speaks of our hope.

I. OUR HERITAGE: IT’S TIME TO CELEBRATE OUR PAST

The word heritage means something that is handed down from previous generations. What were you doing sixty years ago? Here are some pictures of people in 1955 you might now. Here’s Ken Warren in 1955 when he was 7 years old, those are army patches on his sleeves. And this is Ken Brumley in 1955 when he was six years old. Who knew then he was destined for greatness? Here’s Cindy Dykes in 1955 when she was three years old; it appears that she’s not quite sure about Santa and he looks like he’s about ready to quit for the day.

And this is a picture of me in 1955, when I was two years old; everybody together now, aww. Actually, according to my mom I was a mischievous little brat. And let’s see a picture of Mike Parks in 1955. Oops, he wasn’t even born. In 1955 he was just a gleam in his daddy’s eye!

We have some people here, our charter members, who were doing something significant in 1955. They were part of a group of faithful believers who started a church on the southern edge of Tyler. Today, we honor the faith and sacrifice of the first generation of believers who launched Green Acres Baptist Church. The church was such a success that in the 1960s an entire television series adopted the same name! Green Acres is the place to be! It still is!

It is good for us to take a moment and recall the great things God has done in our past. The Psalmist wrote, “We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago.” (Psalm 44:1)

I’ve often been asked WHY has God blessed our congregation? There are many reasons, but let me suggest three.

A. God has blessed us because we have honored God's Word as our sole authority.

From the beginning this has been a Bible-teaching, a Bible-preaching, and a Bible-obeying church. Sixteen years ago when we were building this Worship Center, we stood at the opening of one of the deep holes dug to pour concrete in to provide the foundation. Several dozen people gathered and I took my first preaching Bible, a Schofield Reference Bible, and wrapped it in plastic and tied a rope to it. As we sang praises to God, we lowered the Bible into the hole that is closest to this pulpit. It was our way of symbolizing that our congregation is built upon the Word of God. Hundreds of children wrote scripture verses inside the walls and on the floor of the building before the sheetrock was hung and the carpeting was laid. The Bible says, "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the Word of our God remains forever." (Isaiah 40:8 HCSB)

B. God has blessed us because we have a heart for global missions.

I think it is significant that our first pastor, Cecil Johnson, was bilingual, having served as a missionary to Mexico. Most churches today send volunteer mission teams, but Green Acres was doing that back in the 1950s. He injected the Missions DNA into our church when it was born. Dale Pond is doing a fabulous job of mobilizing our people for missions. One of our core values is that we believe God wants everyone to be saved, and in order for that to happen, we have to take the good news that Jesus saves to every people group on the planet.

C. God has blessed us because we have demonstrated unselfish generosity.

You may not know this, but from the very first Sunday, May 1, 1955, Green Acres was self-supporting. Since those first members, this has been a church of generous givers.

Because of your generosity and the careful stewardship of our staff members, we've finished the last ten years with a budget surplus. And you've been faithful to give when we've been building new facilities. There is a church building program called "Together we build." It seems that our motto has been "Forever we build"! And we're not finished yet! And our church is generous as well. I don't know of any other churches that are giving 30% of their offerings to Missions but that's what we are doing. I'm proud of you for your generosity. To God be the glory, great things HE has done these past 60 years! But after a quick glance in the rearview mirror, I want us to look at the road ahead.

II. HOPE: WE MUST ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF THE FUTURE.

I sincerely believe the best and brightest days of Green Acres are in the future. Thousands of members who were a part of the first 60 years of Green Acres served and gave, and now they're in heaven. Whenever they took a step to buy property, or build a building, they were doing it for future generations. We must have the same kind of vision. The Psalmist wrote, "Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the LORD." (Psalm 102:18)

As we move into the future, there is a certain kind of church that God will bless, and we want to be that kind of church. So what are the characteristics of a future church that God can bless?

A. God will bless a church that uses innovative methods to accomplish the timeless mission

Churches that hang on to the way they have always done things will shrivel up and die. Experts predict that small and medium sized churches that refuse to change will close their doors in the next decade. The growing trend is toward mega-churches that offer innovative ministries and have multi-site campuses.

Our mission, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, will never change. But we must be willing to invent and experiment with new methods to accomplish the mission.

Let me give you an example from the business world. During the 20th Century one of the strongest companies in America was the Eastman Kodak Company. Their mission was photography. And their method was film-based, printed photography. Can you remember when you had to buy film and put it in your camera, then take the film to the drug store? And then you had to pay for all the pictures, even the terrible ones? Kodak hung onto that method into the 21st Century. Here's what's amazing. A Kodak engineer invented digital photography, but when he showed it to his bosses they said, "That's cute. But don't tell anybody about it." As late as 2007 Kodak insisted there was still going to be great demand for film-based photography. They refused to change methods. When you look at a chart of their stock prices, it looks like a ski-slope. The company declared bankruptcy in 2012.

So is there no longer a need for photography? Are we not taking pictures anymore? We're taking thousands and millions of pictures; it's just that we're taking them with our phones. When the first camera phone was invented in 2000 it took it awhile to catch on. But by 2010 there were 1 billion smartphones with a camera. By early next year there will be 2 billion smart phones. The mission never changed—photography. The methods have changed drastically.

Let's apply that to the church. We need creative thinking young people to invent and implement new methods and strategies to carry the gospel to our world. And that leads into the next characteristic.

B. God will bless a church that maximizes online presence

I'm talking about much more than having a website. The Internet and the availability of the Internet will expand exponentially. You won't have to search for a Wi-Fi signal, because there will be full coverage in every city at a speed that will make your fastest downloads now seem like dial-up.

We are a generation of screenagers. And in the future people will be watching television programs less and watching more media online or streamed from a device to a screen. Your digital device of choice will be about the size of a credit card which will unfold and become a touch screen. Consider this statistic. Last year Facebook had a billion video views per day, and YouTube was just behind that.

There will be new social media platforms that will continue to allow people to interact with one another. As much as we try to resist it, virtual relationships are going to continue to thrive.

Internet will never replace the church. The church will always gather together physically because the fellowship is a vital part of what a church is. But churches that thrive will use social media to build relationships to draw people to Christ. Being spiritually fed online with messages and music won't replace church, but it will supplement your walk with the Lord.

C. God will bless a church that focuses on fitness—body, soul, and spirit

There is a growing awareness of the need for whole life fitness. Churches have always preached spiritual fitness, but the need to minister in the area of physical fitness is a trend that we don't want to miss. A few years ago, our church adopted a master plan that included the construction of the Lighthouse and the Crosswalk Conference Center. A part of that master plan also included expanding and enlarging our Family Life Center. In 1976, Paul Powell led GABC to be one of the first churches in America to build a Family Life Center. He was first exposed to the concept by a church in Port Arthur through sports ministry. And in 1976 our Family Life Center was on the cutting edge. But it's almost 40 years old. And if you've ever been up there on Saturday during Upward basketball, there's hardly room enough to walk around. We have over 3,500 visitors per week, and that number increases to over 4,500 during basketball season.

After we finish the Green Acres South Construction, it will be time to go back to the drawing board and get serious about enlarging the building that has more daily traffic than any other building on our campus.

D. God will bless a church brave enough to be both counter-cultural yet loving

Unless God sends a spiritual awakening, Christians are going to become a smaller and smaller minority in America. We have already seen increasing attacks on our religious liberty. Our culture is changing and we are going to be labeled as intolerant, bigoted, old-fashioned prudes. In just a few weeks the Supreme Court is going to rule on same-sex marriage. Depending on how Justice Kennedy leans, don't be surprised if the court changes God's definition of marriage. Many churches will give into cultural pressure and agree with the Supreme Court. But the church of Jesus has always been counter-cultural. In a culture where there is decay and darkness the salt and light of the church becomes more and more valuable. But we must be sure that we never use the Bible as a hammer to condemn people. Instead we must show God's love to all people. We must speak the truth in love and realize that we are all sinners saved by grace.

CONCLUSION

Let's consider a question about our future: What will Green Acres look like in 2030? That's in fifteen years when we'll be celebrating our 75th Anniversary. Well, look how far we've come in the last fifteen years. In the year 2000 we had just come through the whole Y2K scare, and we were meeting in what is now the chapel. We had three morning worship services and our attendance was around 3,000. Most of our current leadership staff weren't on board yet. There was a Clinton in the White House, and we had never heard of Al Qaeda. There was no Twitter, Facebook, or Wikipedia. There weren't any iPhones or even iPods. The Dow was at 10,700 and George W. Bush was *Time Magazine's* Man of the Year.

In fifteen years GABC will be thriving. The FLC will be expanded. You'll have mostly new, younger staff leaders; some young, energetic, innovative pastor and a new worship leader. At age 77, I plan on being alive and sometimes scoring my age in golf. And I'll be thrilled to record a segment on the 75th Anniversary video, which will be shown not on a screen but as a holographic image. Our membership will be ethnically more diverse, which is a good thing. We will be offering services in several languages besides our current Spanish and Chinese churches. We will probably max out our attendance at the main campus at around 7,500. Green Acres South will be running almost a thousand in attendance. And we'll have at least three more satellite campuses in East Texas that will be thriving as well. We will have planted fifteen new churches in areas around the U.S. where people are starving for hope. And we will still be giving more to World Missions than any Baptist church in the nation.

At sixty years, Green Acres is just gathering steam. The challenge is great! The future is bright! But Green Acres has always risen to a challenge. Hang on. It's going to be exciting.

OUTLINE

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- B. A heart for global missions
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God will bless a church that:

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- B. Maximizes online presence
- C. Focuses on fitness—body, soul, and spirit
- D. Brave enough to be both counter-cultural yet loving

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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