

Personal Testimony of Grace

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Date: 25 October 2015

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[0:00] I bring warm greetings from the Harbor Reformed Baptist Church in Holland, Michigan.! We see all of their blemishes and their imperfections, but we see their beauty, and we're so thankful for them.

And I'll just give a little personal testimony myself. I was telling John last night that, it wasn't this last summer, but the previous summer, we took a Midsummer Lord's Day break because, frankly, as a church, we were exhausted.

We've gone through some difficulties, and frankly, that year was a spiritually challenging, even discouraging one for me in many ways. And emotionally, I was down for the count that summer. But when it came to the second Sunday in August, these kids from Bremen showed up. We didn't have a Midsummer's Lord's Day, but they, like homing pigeons, came back.

And just to see them and the kindness and the enthusiasm that they had was like smelling salts to me. Got me up off the mat, back up to being willing to fight again.

[1:26] There's Ben back there. I see you put him to work. He's laboring for the kingdom. We love Ben. He's always a refreshing sight. So thank you. Thank you for ministering to us there in Holland, Michigan.

We are indebted to you, and hopefully I can give something that can in some way brighten your eyes as well. The Lord Jesus, when he was in the region of the Gatorines, and he had just cast out demons from a madman, sent them into pigs who the whole herd was drowned in the sea, when the man wanted to climb in the boat with the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus said in Mark 5, 19, Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you and how he's had mercy on you.

And that's what I want to do here. I just want to tell you what great things the Lord has done for me. I was a spiritual madman stampeding with my contemporaries toward a cliff that would have plunged me into the lake of fire.

But the Lord Jesus arrested my course. He saved me. In fact, I have in front of me here my testimony that I wrote to enter into the Reformed Baptist Church of Grand Rapids as a member. It's kind of frayed at the edges. It was written in 1981. You know how when stories are told again and again and again and again, they can morph into something different than they ever were?

[2:59] Well, I'm going back to like an original manuscript. And this is the way it really was, as I would tell it in 1981. So I'm trying to give you an accurate version.

So I'm going to read a little bit and I'll comment a little bit and hopefully I can tell you what great things the Lord has done for me. I was born in 1959 to a pair of loving parents who were deeply entrenched in the darkness of Roman Catholicism.

I realize here I'm in the orbit of South Bend and one of the gentlemen told me he's a Notre Dame football fan. I used to be. I'm not anymore. Now I like the University of Michigan. But I was very Roman Catholic in my perspective.

My mom was very committed to the Roman Catholic Church as expressed in the fact that she wrote in high school a paper that said, if I have any kids, I'm going to name them either Joseph or Mary, two of the most important saints in the Roman Catholic pantheon of saints to whom you would pray. Well, she had four sons. And first is Gregory, Joseph, Chansky, David, Joseph, Chansky, Mark, Joseph, Chansky, Christopher, Joseph, Chansky.

[4:16] And she had a baby daughter as a tail ender whose name is Mary Jo. So she kept her word. And this indicates and epitomizes how committed my mom and my dad were to the Roman Catholic Church.

And I can look back on that. And though I believe the Roman Catholic Church had black gloves on that blinded my eyes and plugged my ears, still there was a lot of common grace in this church. My dad understood what authority was. I learned what it was to honor my father. My dad was a mailman. He'd have this big black belt.

And that belt spoke eloquently to us. I can still remember as we would be sitting at the table and we had four guys who could be kind of testosterone filled and aggressive.

And there were times all my dad needed to do was lean back and loosen his belt and the table was quiet. And that's a benefit. I know nowadays we think of spanking as being something that's a negative in contemporary society.

[5 : 26] To me it was a great blessing because I learned about authority and my dad would spank me in a very principled way. And I thank God for the stable nuclear family that the Lord gave to me in my youth.

They sent me along with my brothers to a Catholic elementary school through the eighth grade. The nuns would teach us. I believe I got an excellent academic background.

These years were characterized by apathy toward the almighty God whom I well knew had created and continually sustained and who would inevitably judge me one day.

And frequent considerations of my eternal destiny were quickly settled on the basis of the percentages, which was I am better than most. You know, my theology was the tipping of the pan scales.

If I do more good deeds than bad deeds, then things on judgment day will tip in my favor and I will get into heaven. I thought I was a pretty good guy, certainly better than most.

[6 : 28] And even though I possessed a sharp temper and experienced outbursts of wicked actions, which I was unable to control, my conscience remained relatively unshaken because I thought I was, again, a pretty good guy.

But young people who are here, make no mistake, I was not a good guy. In fact, I can still remember on the way home from school in about fourth, maybe fifth grade, Mike Kurgis had a paper route and he always had money.

And Mike was walking home with a two-pound bag of jelly beans. And Mike was big. He was about six foot at that time. I was small, but I was fast.

I was really fast. And I ran alongside of Mike and I grabbed the two-pound bag and I ran off just a distance from him. And I loved the way that I was able to taunt Mike and the way that he stood there.

And I remember he began to weep because I was very cruelly treating him. And there was something in me that liked the power that I held over him.

[7 : 40] Now, you may say that's no big deal, but I'm telling you that if the Lord would have treated me according to justice, the earth would have opened up and swallowed me.

But God in mercy, many of my boyhood, childhood sins, far worse than that. Nate, you're here. Good to see you among us. Many of my boyhood and childhood sins, the Lord was so long-suffering.

The Lord, the Lord, the gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness. He didn't strike me down in my youth. Toward the end of these elementary years, my mother began attending a women's Bible study group.

By the way, my mother was a great benefit to me. My dad was the disciplinarian, and I had a really good relationship with my dad, and I did to the point when he died at age 71.

But my mom was the communicator. You know what that's like, young people, you know, mom's so good to be able to have a relationship. I would come home late at night, even high school years, where I had been, she didn't know, but she'd be sitting there in the living room, maybe reading the newspaper.

[8 : 57] That was back in the days of the Shag Company. And she had the ability, Josie, to take the beer, maybe drink a beer a night, and she'd sit the beer onto the Shag Carpon, it wouldn't fall over.

I would just talk back and forth with mom. And that open communication is really important, young people, if you're here. Remember, Samson had secrets that he wouldn't tell his mom and dad.

Remember, he went off and he touched a dead carcass of a lion that he tore open from the cross to the nostrils. He didn't tell his parents, he said. He didn't tell his parents.

It's a dangerous policy, not to have open lines of communication with your parents. God gave me great benefit, and a mom who had the ability to pick the lock of the safe of my heart, so I would open up and share with her.

And God was merciful to me in that way. She began attending a women's Bible study fellowship. You ever hear of that group? Women's Bible study fellowship. They really try to turn away from denominational concern.

[10:01] They just say, what does the Bible say? The Lord used that in converting my Roman Catholic works-oriented and focused mom, and she was saved.

And she began then to drop, she didn't understand fully the gospel, but light had dawned in, and she understood the Bible, and she began to drop bits and pieces of the gospel into the minds of her children.

And this process steadily produced in me an awakening toward the things of God. In the summer before my freshman year in high school, God delivered a bone-crushing blow to my father through an automobile accident.

This is back in 1973. Dad was on his way to go golfing in a foursome. He was sitting on driver's side, rear seat.

A lady was coming down the two-lane highway, had diabetes, forgot to take her insulin that day, blacked out. Earl Ursel turned the car to get away, slammed alongside my dad, just shattered the left side of my dad's body.

[11:08] A bayonet break in the tibia, fibula in the femur, five broken ribs, collapsed lung, ripped apart shoulder, fractured skull.

My dad lost his eye. He wore an eye patch for the rest of his life. But I can remember, as a 14-year-old kid, going to the hospital and seeing my dad in traction, they said, he's probably going to die tonight.

And he ended up living. But my strong, sturdy dad was now a broken individual. I can just remember myself being downstairs in the basement, pacing back and forth like a wild beast, shaking my fist at God, whom I hated, who did such a thing to my dad.

But my mom, who had been converted, here she's telling us how God is so good. And even in the valley, the shadow of death, he's a kind shepherd.

I just did not understand my mom's perspective on this. But again, this began to work on my heart. I viciously cursed God for his unfairness.

[12:15] But as my parents consistently praised him for his goodness, I began to call affectionately on his name. I still remember my dad. My dad was converted through this. My dad was a very capable, competent, pull yourself up by the bootstraps man in practical life and in his theological thinking.

I'll earn my merit before God. But God had broken him to the point where he said, I had to reach up to touch bottom. And God saved my dad through this.

Often the Lord has to break us physically, doesn't he? He has to shatter us providentially in order to bring us to himself. Well, from that time on, God worked on my heart.

And I would say my theology was this. The bottom line in my life was my relationship with God. And the Lord worked in my life. However, at times that bottom line became very obscure in the following years.

As now going into high school, I struggled with athletic idolatry, academic pride, and internal sexual impurity.

[13:31] Athletic idolatry. I said I was fast, and I would play football, and that was a big deal to me. By the way I understand, somebody in the church here almost broke Bo's local record for most yardage in a given game.

So he got stripped at the end. Is that right? Well, the Lord knew you need to be stripped. You didn't need to get that record. It's a humbling process. I was never that good in any sense.

But the basketball coach had come to me before my sophomore year and said, Hey, I want you to play varsity. Sophomores don't play varsity at my school.

So I chose to not play football that year, to focus my attention on basketball. And he even put me in a sixth hour, final hour, study hour.

So instead of being in the study hall, he pulled me out of the study hall covertly. And he let me practice with the big guys during that last hour. And life was really good for me.

[14:36] But then I went up for a layup during this pre-season practice session. I fell sideways on my ankle. I could hear the crack. And my athletic idol was shattered because when I got out of the x-ray procedure, he said, That ankle is so bad.

You can't run on that for one year. And I had surgery. And it was devastating to me. And for me, my life was destroyed. But just like with my dad, God was breaking something in me.

And it ended up being a great blessing to me. And I look at the railroad track I still have on my ankle here. I consider it to be a kind kiss from my heavenly father because he was using this to remove my madness and to put me in my right mind so I'd eventually be brought to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the eyes of the world and my peers, I was a righteous man. But within, during these high school years, raging feelings and desires which hinted to me that I was a whitewashed hypocrite.

I wasn't saved when I was a sophomore and God shattered my ankle. But God was doing heart work on me. A month prior to my senior year in high school then, our Fellowship of Christian Athletes group at school sent me and a number of my friends to a summer conference at Central Michigan University.

[16:01] And that's an athletic story in and of itself. I was on a baseball team. It was a summer league team. And our team was going to head to Florida to play. And it was actually a World Series tournament.

And life was really going good. I knew there was the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Anybody hear of Fellowship of Christian Athletes? I knew there was a Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp in July.

And I couldn't go because I was going to Florida. And while we were having batting practice just before our heading out to Florida, a guy threw me, which I thought was a curveball.

But it never curved. It came hard inside. And it caught my thumb between the ball and the bat. My thumb split open. I still have railroad tracks here, too, on my thumb. And I couldn't play.

I couldn't hold a bat. And so instead of going south to Florida for a baseball tournament, I ended up going north to Central Michigan University. And there, there was a guy.

[17:03] I met him. His name was Jim Snow. He was called our huddle leader. He took 12 obnoxious high school boys. And he, line on line, precept on precept, a little here and a little there, he taught us the Bible.

And he gave us the gospel for five days straight. His name is Jim Snow. Look, I haven't, this was back in 1976, I haven't heard hide nor hair of Jim Snow. Do you know who Jim Snow is?

Is he from Indiana? I don't know. If you find him, thank him. Because it was his ministry that God wonderfully used so that by the last day, I can still remember, Kent Benson, a big, tall center who played for the Hoosiers.

Anybody know who this is? Yeah. He was at this event. And he had spoken. And I can remember sitting and listening and God driving it home. So when I came from Rose Arena, which was the auditorium where the preaching was done, walking to my dormitory across campus, I couldn't catch my breath.

I was uncontrollably weeping. God had done work in me that affected my emotions. So that when I actually came home from Central Michigan University, walked into the kitchen of my home, my dad looked at me with his eye patch on, and he said, Well, superstar, how was your week?

[18:19] And I looked at him and I said, Dad, I became a Christian this week. Now I couldn't unpack and explain what in the world had happened to me, but God had done a work in my heart.

There's that passage in Matthew chapter 8 when the Lord Jesus took mud, spit, and put it on the eyes of the blind man, and he opened his eyes, and he says, He saw men as trees walking.

Not clearly. That's really what the Lord did. He opened my eyes. I couldn't clearly understand doctrine, but I saw. I was blind, and now I saw, and I saw that Jesus was my Savior.

And God had done a work, I believe, back in 1976 of July. I say here, I eagerly engaged that week in conversation about spiritual things and sincerely desired to spark interest in the hearts of my buddies in the Bible study groups.

But the final evening produced in me an emotional outburst of uncontrollable weeping as I was overcome by the testimonies of young men from the inner city of Chicago who had previously heard Christ's name only as a vicious slander word who now tearfully called him Lord.

[19:32] So I believe I was saved at that time. Well, my senior year in high school and my freshman year at Calvin College were characterized by a primitive yet strong trust in my Lord Jesus.

At that point, I began reading my Bible. I can remember I'd be sitting in that same room with the shag carpeting. And, well, it's the same color as these chairs, our lazy boy chair.

And I'd sit in that chair, and I'd just begin to read. And I'd read for an hour and two hours and two and a half hours. There was just an insatiable appetite to read the word of God.

The Lord brought about like a baby craving milk an interest in the word of God. By the way, my Bible letter read, which was given out at the Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp, was Good News for Modern Man.

Do you recommend that translation? God, it's kind of a transliteration. But God used it in my life to open up the wonders of the word of God to me.

[20:36] And as I was then desiring to use the word of God, I wanted to share with other people about it. So I thought professionally, what would I do? I wanted to be a Christian counselor.

And I thought I can maybe put up a shingle at a business park and have an office and have a clientele. And I could counsel them with this Bible that I had learned was life and light and truth. So I went to Calvin College up in Grand Rapids. And I began to take some Bible courses. I still remember there was a course given by Dr. Willis DeBoer, who was a capable New Testament scholar.

But back then at Calvin College, there was some higher criticism, some liberal thinking, some low views of the word of God. I still remember he was saying to me, and I'm this young guy who was reading the word of God, and I was convinced this is the word of God.

By the way, I'm still in the Roman Catholic Church, by the way. I do believe, I do believe Roman Catholics can be saved. As long as they don't believe what the Roman Catholic Church teaches.

[21:46] Because the Roman Catholic Church clearly teaches that Second Vatican Council. Let it be understood that if anyone believes that you're saved by faith alone, apart from works, meaning merit, let them be anathema.

So the idea of faith alone, no, the Roman Catholic theology basically is do more goods than bads and you'll be saved. You believe that, you'll be damned. But I do believe, I do believe, I was saved in the Roman Catholic Church.

And I believe that there are some people who still do attend the Roman Catholic Church who actually are saved because they don't believe what the Church teaches. I think it's like a splinter in the finger.

You know, you get a splinter, eventually it works its way out. I think basically, generally, if someone is in the Roman Catholic Church, God will work them out. And for me, I eventually came out of the Roman Catholic Church when I was between my, well, my sophomore year of college.

In fact, I switched from Calvin College because Willis DeBoer was saying, Paul never wrote these prison epistles. Like Colossians and Philemon and Ephesians.

[23:03] I said, what do you mean Paul never wrote them? He said, well, a redactor later on in the second century maybe wrote these epistles. He said, what are you talking about? You see, this was a little bit of a, yea, hath God said, serpent hissing into my ears at this point.

And I wondered if God wouldn't have worked me out of Calvin College and sent me down the belt line in Grand Rapids to what's now Cornerstone University, Grand Rapids Baptist College.

There I began to really study and learn the Bible. In fact, when I got to Cornerstone College, I sat with a counselor whose name is Larry Rowland, whom I eventually learned more about him.

But he sat with me on that first session. You know how when a counselor lays out a class course, a list of classes for a student for the upcoming semester?

Well, I sat in front of Larry Rowland and he said, you're going to want to take some, by the way, you don't have a pastor's recommendation? My pastor's recommendation was written by a Roman Catholic priest.

[24:09] Do you imagine what that counselor thought? Well, Larry Rowland thought, well, I got something on the line here as I'm reeling him in. This is a Roman Catholic kid who's come to our school. So he said, Mark, I think you should take an elementary doctrine course.

I said, I don't want doctrine. I want the Bible. He said, it's okay. It's okay. Take this course. So by the time I actually came the first day and sat down, guess who was behind the lectern?

Larry Rowland. He had something to say to me. And I still remember we got to soteriology. And he seemed to look at me a lot during the Doctrine of Salvation section.

And he talked about the Lord Jesus Christ and the way the Lord Jesus Christ had taken our sin, all of our sin, past, present.

And future. And the way that he died on the cross and he took the punishment that we deserved for our sins, past, present, and future. A lot of these Baptist kids who had heard this from the point when they were knee high up, they were nonplussed by what Larry Rowland was saying.

[25 : 18] But I was just on the edge of my chair. And again, walking out of his class, much like I had walked out of Rose Arena back at Central Michigan University. My Lord Jesus, justification by faith.

Righteousness of Christ imputed to my account. Glory be to God. I think here's where the Lord Jesus spit and he applied the mud to me the second time.

And now, now I saw things right side up. I think I was saved. You ever have that in your life where you say, how could I have been saved if I didn't understand this? And that's the way it was for me too.

So that's back in 1978, 1979, that I understood justification by faith and the Lord wonderfully opened my eyes.

So from then on, I went to Grand Rapids Baptist College and I thought, okay, what do I want to do? I still wanted to counsel people, but I considered that probably better than having a shingle on an office door in a business park.

[26 : 24] You know, the scriptures do talk about people who counsel according to the word of God. And they're generally not Christian psychologists. Generally, they're pastors. In fact, Pastor Heaney, he engages on a weekly basis in a group therapy session with y'all.

As he speaks the word of truth to you. And this is really the way that we are competent to counsel one another by teaching, instructing the word of God.

This is a recipe for psychological, emotional, and spiritual health as we gather together on the Lord's Day to speak the truth. And so I thought to myself, you know, I should probably pursue the pastorate instead of pursuing a role as a Christian counselor.

And so I began to look around and seek out a church. I did come out of Roman Catholicism. I was baptized at kind of a trendy church that met in a barn.

It was called Bella Vista Church. The pastor himself preached messages that echoed a lot of what John MacArthur said. In fact, it became evident after a while he was actually preaching exact messages of John MacArthur.

[27 : 37] And there was plagiarism going on. And there was pastoral turmoil. He was put out of the church. And I could have been damaged by that spiritually. But God kept me and sent me in a good direction.

In fact, there was a kid at Baptist College named Paul. And Paul would hand out these old newspapers called Sort and Trial. Remember those?

They were all Spurgeon sermons. And I began to read these Spurgeon sermons. And I just remember talking about Calvinism and the sovereignty of God and total depravity and unconditional election and limited atonement and irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints.

And I thought, who teaches this? That was a church called Reformed Baptist Church, Kalamazoo. And I went to Reformed Baptist Church in Kalamazoo. Remember the first time I came, the guy preached on Jonah chapter 2.

And I basically fell asleep because I'd been a security guard. And I'd been up to 2 a.m. But that was a bad first message. Bad stuff. But from then on in, the sermon struck like lightning and pounded like thunder in my conscience.

[28 : 45] And I just thought, this, this is the word of truth. There was a sense of urgency that came across. In many of the circles I was in at Grand Rapids Baptist College, there was an easy believism.

You know, if you raise your hand, pray a prayer. If you come forward, you're saved. But some of the guys on campus lived a real carnal life. And I thought, this idea of accepting Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, that seems to be counterfeit and not biblical.

It's about being a work in my heart at this time. In fact, even the issue of assurance of salvation. Am I really saved? God worked me over during that time as I began to examine myself.

There's a book called Distinguishing Traits of Christian Character by Gardner Spring. That's a book that I read during this time. It's a tough book.

It's a bare-knuckle book. It really makes you examine yourself. In fact, Spring later wrote on in his book, Power in the Pulpit. He said, when I was a young man, he said, I wrote a bit harshly back then.

[29:46] I'm more a son of consolation now. He says as an older man that I am as a son of thunder back when I was young. But that thunder was used in my life to really examine myself, to see whether I was in the faith, to test myself.

I still remember getting up in the morning. I was a mailman working during the summers and there was a thunderstorm. I wondered, am I going to face this God of wrath? But as I began to examine myself and run to the Lord Jesus Christ for comfort, there was an Abba Father that came to my heart and a sense of assurance came.

But I'm going to tell you this. You know, some people say that, oh, I have this sense of assurance that I never call into question whether or not I am saved. You know what? I think there are times that we ought to be examining ourselves, 2 Corinthians 13, to see whether we are in the faith, to test ourselves.

And there are times, if a heart is heart or where we're dabbling with sin, there will be a diminishing of a sense of assurance, right? So David forfeited his sense of assurance when he was playing around with immorality because he had to say, Lord, restore unto me the joy of my salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

But we flee to the Lord Jesus, don't we? And there we find refreshment and a sense of assurance. So I ended up going to the Reformed Baptist Church of Grand Rapids.

[31:09] I met a girl during this time, by the way. The ladies sometimes want to know about a wife and romance. Yeah, I had romance in there. God was so merciful to me. I met Diane.

I remember at the library of Baptist College, I was studying John Gill, his body of divinity. And I was highlighting with my marker, and this girl came to me, Josie, Diane.

She'll be here a little later this afternoon, this morning. And she tapped me on the shoulder, and she said, Could I borrow your highlighter? Now, ladies, I want to tell you, I know that sometimes women can be too aggressive in their interest in men nowadays, but I don't think there's anything wrong with a lady dropping a hanky.

Because we can be, listen, I'm a little secret about this matter, we can be such blockheads, and we can also be very insecure. Sure. But she just said, Can I? Isn't that what Ruth did in the threshing floor with Boaz?

Ruth chapter 3. So, just a little bit of subtle. And I looked up at her in those blue eyes, and we began to talk in the library, and my wife, well, Diane at this time, I used to always be very effusive in talking about my faith, and oftentimes ladies would say, Oh, that's so profound, Mark.

[32:28] But Diane would sit across the table, and I'd say something, and she was better instructed than I was. I had gotten into this higher life, let go and let God theology and stuff during this time, and I would say something, and I would say, I don't agree with that.

I thought, what? And I thought, This is not a little girl. This is a woman. This is a woman who could be iron sharpening iron. It was something that just instinctively drew me to a woman like that.

Now, I will admit, there are times now, when I would say, Honey, can I just have one day in a month when you're here with everything that I said? But the Lord knows what I need.

I think you have a girl like that too, John and Josie here. You share my pain. And my trust as well. So, ladies, young men, you want a woman who fears charm is deceptive, beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord, she is to be praying.

Don't just look for some cute, nicely figured woman who just tells you all you want to hear. You find a woman who will be iron sharpening iron benefit to you.

[33:42] So, Diane and I, we ended up pursuing marriage, and we got married. I went to seminary.

I graduated from seminary. And Kemp Road Baptist Church. Pastor Don Lindblad, I was going way back. Cedarville University, right in the orbit of Cedarville University is Kemp Road Baptist Church. My dean, Jim Greer, had said, Hey, I know, I have connections down there. So, I had candidated for the church, and upon graduating, I was just to go right down to Kemp Road Baptist Church to be the pastor down there and take my wife, Diane, and our two little boys, Calvin and Jared.

The rider-rent-a-truck was packed, and we were ready to roll on Monday morning. But before that, I was to preach a final message in Grand Rapids. And it was on Lamentations chapter 3.

And as I preached on Lamentations 3, I hadn't been able to prepare the way that I wanted to prepare. But you know, I think there was a sense of arrogance that I had as a young man coming out of seminary. I have all this knowledge.

[34 : 52] I know what I'm doing. I just received an award for preaching there in the seminary. And as I stood to preach this message, there was a thunderstorm, by the way, that morning. And all the power was out the church building.

I had to preach by candlelight. I couldn't see my notes very well. I hadn't prepared very well. I'm so proud I want to come across as being so smooth. It wasn't going well.

I perspired. I could feel the darkness coming in from the sides. And all there was a little tunnel vision of light, and I passed out. I passed out. You ever have, did John ever do that to you?

I passed out. Thud. My wife was in the nursery below. She heard the thud. There was an intercom where the sermon was, there was no more noise. She thought she had probably lost her husband. Well, all of this worked out so that I feared as I was heading down to Campro Baptist Church that I would be known as the fainting pastor. You didn't get a phobia about things like that.

[35 : 53] For me, it was so. So that when I actually stood to preach three weeks later for the first time, you know, get your house in order and get your sermon in order, and I'm standing in front of these people, you had no idea when I stood up how the perspiration, what, am I going to just pass out?

Am I going to be known as the fainting pastor who has to pack his ride and rent a truck and go back up? Well, the man who had prepared the liturgy for that day had selected a hymn, unbeknownst to me.

I think it's, what is it, 580 in the Trinity? Well, fear not, I am with thee. O be not dismayed. I am thy God and will still give thee aid.

I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand. Upheld by my righteous omnipotence. That was the hymn that was chosen just before I stood up and I was so afraid, but just a kiss on the cheek from my heavenly father.

He's going to help me. He's going to help me to stand. And, you know, all throughout that, that was a tough pastor at three and a half years there for me. And I was so foolish in so many things, but God was gracious and merciful.

[37 : 05] His power was made perfect in weakness. We never received any explosive growth. Arguably, the statistics went down while I was there. But God was working in my heart and he was beating out of me a sense of self-sufficiency and pride.

I went up to Grand Rapids in 1989 and they wanted another pastor up there because they were planting churches in Louisville, Kentucky and Minneapolis, Minnesota and working in Rochester, New York and Lethbridge, Alberta and there was a school of theology they were establishing. So we had four pastors at that time. After five years in Grand Rapids in 1993, we had some folks traveling from Holland and we planted churches elsewhere.

Hey, let's plant a church in Michigan. So we planted a church in Holland, Michigan. We had 11 glorious families that came from the big house in Grand Rapids to the little tent out in Holland and God established a glorious little church there which was the Reformed Baptist Church of Holland which is now Harbor Reformed Baptist Church and the Lord gave us this beautiful building.

It was probably in 1997 when we moved in it was probably worth maybe two and a half million dollars but we paid \$150,000 for it. Don't ask me well.

[38 : 34] The Lord just worked in a glorious way to give us this building. A very wealthy man who owned a big auto parts manufacturing company died.

He had purchased this building in the proper. I think he was going to bulldoze it one day but his death resulted in the family selling off the proceedings. It was the Prince family.

Elsa Prince, the bride sold it to us for \$150,000. God opened up the window of heaven. Some of you young people have been there. It's just a very delightful church that the Lord has used as a tool to serve him.

Pray for our church, would you? Pray for our church. The Lord, you know, I preached a sermon a while back about a dimly burning wick he does not snuff out.

We are not a raging bonfire at this time up in Holland. Churches have ebbs and flows. We're in an ebb stage and we really need the work of God in our church.

[39 : 36] And I would ask, could you please pray? Pray that the Lord Jesus would blow on this flickering little wick of a church, that God would have mercy on us and God would prosper us and that God would be glorified through us as a church.

church. Well, I've tried to tell you what the Lord has done for my soul. He's a gracious and a merciful Savior and may it be that you wouldn't leave this building apart from the Lord Jesus and maybe I have more to tell you in the upcoming hour.

Let's pray together. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus who brings his boat and he pulls it up on our beach and he does heart work on us.

And we ask that you would do this today here in Bremen, Indiana. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.