

All right. This evening, as you guys are getting settled in, let me remind you that since not everyone can see the whopping 55 inch television that we have, here is an outdoor screen, you can go to our Parkland Chapel app. And then the slides for the teaching will be on there, and you can follow along. That leads me to make a service announcement announcement as it pertains to tonight, we're doing something a little bit different. So Wednesday nights work like this. We do a fall semester of ten weeks. And then we do like a turn of the year. Maybe you call it a winter semester of ten weeks and the fall semesters. by faith we do them out here in the beautiful fall weather that God normally gives us. And so what we do is we go through Genesis typically what we also do is build in a couple guest speakers, and then we have two prayer nights where we worship and pray. So next week is a prayer night. And then the week after that we'll go back into Genesis. But tonight we have a guest speaker. One other thing we're also going to do tonight is that after our time is over with the guest speaker, for those of you who have kids, when I get up to kind of conclude, you can go get the kids and if you need to go home, you can skedaddle or you can stay. And we're just going to worship for an extra 30 minutes till about 8:00. We're just going to hang out the pastors now be up front if you need prayer, but we're just going to worship. So if that suits your time schedule and that scratches your itch, you can do that. Or you can burn rubber out of the parking lot and fishtail towards Karsch Boulevard. okay. Now I want to introduce our guest speaker. And it is Becky Durbin. And Ben, her husband is the pastor at the bridge. And as Becky comes up, I want to make a few remarks. truly, it's been a blessing to get to have Ben and Becky as some of Lucinda and I's closest friends. We met them in 2011, when actually how God works. There was a man who left their church that was struggling, and he came to our church and struggled. And so Ben and I started trying to help this man. And, we became fast friends. And then as couples, we became fast friends. And so over the years, we've had the opportunity to pray with one another and cry with one another and cheer each other on and complain to one another and praise with one another. Now I have Becky here tonight to speak. not because of what? Unfortunately for her, right now, she is probably most well known for. And that she's battling cancer. and we have her on the prayer chain, and we're praying, like many churches all over the world, for her healing. And she believes in miracles that God still does them. And we believe that, too. But that's just a part of her story. What I want to convey to you before she speaks is this, there are things that happen in life that you often don't realize until later. Or maybe you don't see them at all. If you're not looking. And for our church, I want you guys to understand this. When you look around at all the youth that are being saved and baptized, and they have really been the catalyst for God to do something very special in our church, then I need to tell you this none of that would have happened without Ben and Becky and the bridge, because when we

had a little bitty, tiny youth group and we couldn't go on our own camp, they graciously invited us. They got nothing out of the deal except that they gave us the opportunity to be a part and youth camp and children's church camp, which we've done with them, and they oversee it all. And camp is their jam has changed the whole complexion of our church. And I would venture to say not just our church, but a big part of the parkland. What's going on with the youth in our area is nothing short of a revival. And had they not invited us, we wouldn't be a part of that. The way they are. Secondly, I hope Becky tells some of her story and the journey that she is walking with Christ faithfully through this very immense difficulty. But here's what I want you to know about Ben and Becky. And someday I'll wrangle Ben to come speak on a Sunday morning. I always give him two weeks notice and he's like, I can't. I'm like, come on, man, you act like you got something to do on Sundays. But I'll say this and then give this to Becky. Many of us are praying that we have this generation of kids raised where they walk with the Lord all the days of their life, and that is not always been the case in previous generations in our area. But if you want to see two people who have done it, it's been in. Becky. Ben came to Christ in his teenage years, but Becky is literally an example. If you want to imitate someone who's walked with the Lord all the days of her life, it's her and the light shines of the Holy Spirit in her eyes and what she will share is going to bless you. I love you guys. Thanks for coming.

Mike thanks for getting that going and giving me crying before I ever even start. I can echo all of that back to Mike and Lucinda. They are precious friends of ours who have kept us in the race and in ministry through all the ups and downs, and it is such a blessing to know them and to be friends with both of them and our church with yours. So it's a blessing to be here with you all. And, I pray that tonight can be a blessing to you as much as it is to me. I am from this area and if you wanted, I wore these tonight because this is my first pair of cowboy boots. Oddly enough, I grew up here and have lived here most of my life, and somehow I never had a pair of cowboy boots until now, so I thought I would wear them in unity with all of Saint Francis County tonight. like Mike said, my husband and I we pastor, he pastors at the bridge in Ludington. We have been married for 22 years, and we have four girls that are 10 to 20. our oldest is getting ready to get married, and our second oldest is a senior in high school. So lots of things are happening around our house, and we are blessed to be a part of that for sure. Well, you may be wondering why I'm here, and to which I would say Amen. I'm wondering that myself. And right now I'm really regretting all my life choices that I said yes. But but long story short it's been over a decade ago that I was praying, and I felt like God said to me, when are you going to stop telling me what I can do? Because I was really good at telling God all the ways he couldn't use me. And so I in that moment said, God, my

answer is yes. Whatever opportunity you give me to share about you, my answer is always going to be yes. And then I naively said this at our youth camp this summer, in which some of your leaders here heard me say that and seized on this opportunity, asked me if I would speak. And I said, well, of course I'm accountable to you and to the Lord that I have to say yes to this. So here I am. Tonight, like Mike said, I'm going to tell a little bit about my testimony, but I certainly don't want all the glory and honor to be on me. It's never my choice. So I want to draw our eyes to Jesus and to His word, and hopefully my story can somehow bring God more glory. We're going to be reading from Hebrews 12, and in the book of Hebrews, it's written to a bunch of Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and converted to Christianity. And while I'm sure that was super amazing when they first became believers, seeing lots of cool things that Jesus did it seems like things were a little hard. Probably their friends and family thought they were crazy and they were getting, you know, they were suffering from persecution, probably from both Jewish people and from the Roman government. And so this book is written to remind them of who Jesus is and why they accepted him in the first place. And keep to keep their eyes on the prize. And I don't know if you can identify, but I certainly can identify with feeling like the trouble and the chaos of this world keeps my eyes drifting, or I get distracted. My heart tends to wonder. So. What about you? Do you face any circumstances that are tempting you to drift from your faith? And I think it'd be best if we just pray and let the spirit maybe speak to you in this moment. Before we get started. And, if you would join me in this prayer with me. God, we come before you. And God, it is also always a blessing to be in your presence. God, I pray that you would just still our hearts and our minds, and that we would have our whole attention fixed on you and your word. God, I pray that you would, just. Yeah, by the power of your spirit, speak to us individually. Help us to identify maybe where we are prone to wonder where we're distracted. Maybe God, where we are in sin that is ensnared us. God, I just pray that you would speak to all of us now, and that you would get your glory. These things ask in your name. Amen. So our passage tonight compares life to running a race, and we're going to start in Hebrews 12. And I really aren't. I'm only doing two verses, so that should be quick, right? Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. This passage starts with the word therefore. So you always want to see what it's there for, and look back at the chapter before. So in chapter 11 is what's referred to as the Hall of Faith, and it's a list of people that God uses and that he does crazy things through and for. It's people like Enoch who was taken to

heaven without dying. And then he gave some really old people, Abraham and Sarah, a baby, and then he parted the Red Sea, and he overthrew kingdoms and his and led his people to victory on numerous occasions. And while that alone is impressive, the more you know about these people, the more impressive it becomes, because rather than them being perfect, they're people like David, who was an adulterer, and Rahab that was a prostitute who make it into this list that we get to read generations and generations later and out of their weaknesses, they were made strong somehow, which is something only God could do right? But while that's all really impressive and really cool, you keep reading in chapter 11 and it goes on to speak of other people who endured really, really horrible, challenging things. They were tortured. They were imprisoned, they were stoned and killed for their faith. And I'm pretty sure none of us are signing up for that. But it's an inspiration for us to look to when we encounter our own difficulties. Because the reality is that life is hard and we all encounter difficulties. And I think it's tempting for us to believe that if we become a Christian, maybe when you're a new Christian, you think, well, I'll just go to Jesus and everything will work out all right. And then life has a tendency to really teach us that that's not the case. And the Bible actually teaches us that's not the case either. The gospel actually just says Jesus is enough, and he will be there. It's not Jesus. Plus, your perfect life. It's Jesus in your imperfect life. Knowing the comfort and the peace of being surrounded by Jesus, even when things don't go our way. Can you still hear me? okay, okay. So Psalms 23 I don't know if you've noticed when you read that Psalm that's so familiar, but God and His presence is completely surrounding us, and I just want to read it over you as you picture the presence of God. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me. All the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. I don't know about you, but that does my soul, my soul, a whole lot of good. And that's how we can fear no evil is that we know we're completely surrounded by Jesus, and we look back to this cloud of witnesses and we're inspired, not because of how amazing these people were, but rather because God is so amazing. He provided for them. He sustained them. He overcame the obstacles, and he was the finisher of their faith. Believers, be reminded that God will never leave you nor forsake you, and we can fear no evil because we are surrounded by his presence. And if you're here and you're listening in disbelief to that, like, well, I don't know about that, you're in a safe place for that. Take that to God. He can handle that. But the good news is Jesus died for your sins. And I just am praying that you would feel the overwhelming presence of the spirit to help. You know he is calling you to a relationship, and that is how we are prepared to live this life and

to finish this race well. So Mike, like Mike said, I've been fighting stage four esophageal cancer for about two years and statistically, that means the odds are very much stacked against me. So the likelihood when I got diagnosed that I would be around in five years was 5%. So I don't know what that means. I've overcome so far, but I just told my doctor, it's all right. I don't need to know because I'm shooting for at least five years. And I would be lying if I said that that was easy. It's actually been very, very difficult. There's a lot of things I'm never going to understand, like how I was praising God on Good Friday and completely lost my voice while I was doing it. But God has sustained me, and I have so many stories I could tell of that one quick story. We have friends all over the world because we know people in ministry, and we've been so blessed by them. But one night when I first got diagnosed, I was up. I could not sleep, which is really weird for me. I love to sleep, but at like 4:00 in the morning I could not sleep. So I was googling all the doctors I was going to see in Houston and MD Anderson. And I don't know why. I just went down the trail of this and I just got so overwhelmed with all the what ifs. And I started crying hard enough that Ben woke up in like a room away. Two rooms away comes to me and says, what's wrong? I said, I don't know, I just have gone down the trail of all the things. And he's like, well, you can't do this. Let's go back to bed and pray. So he comes. We literally lay down and he says, Lord and his phone goes off. And it's our friend in South Africa because it's not 4 a.m. it's like two in the afternoon for them or whatever. And he's like, we're out on a prayer walk praying for Becky. Just wanted to let you know. God doesn't sleep. He's he will continue to sustain us through difficulty. But I also want to say that when I tell people I have stage four cancer, their whole countenance changes and I recognize that's empathy. And I recognize I've done that a lot to other people. As a nurse, but it feels a lot like pity to me, and it really bothered me in the beginning. It still bothers me, but I couldn't figure out why it bothered me. But I just I know it's a conviction in me that I do not want to be pitied. And it's not that I'm living in denial, I. I truly get that short of a miracle. My days are numbered. But I also know my future is bright. And I tell people, if I beat you to heaven, I'm man. I mean, why would I be pitied? It's going to be like this, and you'll be there with me. But you have to wait for me to see me again. There's a condition worse than stage four cancer or anything else you would encounter in this life. It's a heart that is not fully surrendered to Jesus. That's who I pity. It's people who think they have all the time in the world. It's people who are going fast and hard at trying to seek fame and money and all the other things that will never satisfy. That's who we pity, because a life without Jesus is the very worst thing that can happen to anyone. Because a life without Jesus and without surrendering to him, puts you in opposition to him. That means your subject is judgment, and the Bible says that that's all of us. We're all sinners. We all fall short of God's standard. And the payment for that is death.

But the good news is, God is so amazing. He gives the solution to that, and he gives us freedom, and he gives us forgiveness, joy, and life. And all he asks for is all of you, our mind and soul, to be surrendered to him. So that's how we run the race. Well, we trust in God and we find our whole identity in him, and we know who we are because of whose we are. But I'm kind of getting ahead of myself because that was we looked back and then we look up, we fix our eyes on Jesus. So let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus. So he's the verse tells us, tell us how to run the race and how it looks well to run is that we lay aside every weight and sin, and we look to Jesus and we cast off anything that stands between us and Jesus. So the opposite of that would be what it looks like to not run the race well, right? I have a real life example of this. Last time I ran was in fifth grade. Well, I mean, I've ran before since then, but not in a competition. This was a competition. So Farmington had this little track and field thing, and I signed up for all the sprinting events and the first two races. I won first place. I was really proud of myself. Things were going good. I am not athletic at all. So that was like, I think the last time I went, anything competition wise. So on the third race I'm sprinting and something different happened. I heard my mom yelling in the stands and she's like, rah, go fast. You know? She's being very encouraging. And I was much more feisty back then. I'm much more refined now. But I'm running and I hear my mom running, to which I'm like, I am running. And I yell at her in the stands as I'm trying to run. My focus got all off. I was in the wrong place. And that's how we get to the end of our life with regret. We get distracted and we take our eyes off of Jesus and we start to act. Even if we say that Jesus is all powerful and he's our Savior and all these wonderful things, we act as though he doesn't even exist. And so when stuff comes our way and the circumstance, maybe you were thinking about at the beginning, when that comes our way, rather than just go to God in prayer and dependance upon him. Maybe we just go to YouTube and TikTok and, you know, go down the rabbit trail of that. How to fix the big problem or worse, we numb out and try to fix the problem with, you know, a substance or people. But God has a better plan. And he says, fix your eyes on Jesus, and he's the one who, in Jude 24, says he's able to keep you from stumbling and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. And every time I sing about heaven now, it's a whole different experience. This is like one of those opportunities of cancer that's like, it's pretty amazing when you start singing about heaven and you think, you know, I don't know, short of God doing something cool, I could be there praising Jesus. I better get to practicing, which is all the more frustrating that my voice is not cooperating with this plan. I'm sorry. Is it okay? Can you still hear? okay. A few years ago, my father in law Roger said to me something to the effect of I'm. The longer I live, the more convinced I am. We can't really mess this thing

up as long as we're depending on God and seeking his will, being obedient to what he tells us, I don't really think we can mess it up. I think God will kind of do this and kind of keep us, you know, and it's like, okay, Roger. He was like so optimistic all the time. And I was like, I mean, I'm he's optimistic. I'm like a perfectionist. So I was like, I know all the ways I've messed this up. So that can't be true. But the more I go through life, the more I see the sense of what he was saying. Because if we slow down and we wait on God to direct our steps, he does guide us. But I think a lot of times he doesn't do things the way we would do them. And so we run ahead and we miss him completely. Or he only speaks in that still small voice and we can't quiet down our lives enough to hear it. So we take our eyes off of him and we miss him. I now have the perspective of like looking back over the last couple years, and I see how God was even preparing me for cancer. And we're not going down the rabbit trail of did God cause this blah blah blah. That's like theology. Like, that's Mike Harrison. And Ben Durbin level. That's not my. I know that God is a good father, and I know that he knows all things and that he can be trusted. And I know that five years before my diagnosis, God was speaking to me in ways that I was, like, not able to put the puzzle pieces together until now. I see things more clearly. But in November of 2019, I took this job and it really felt like God, like, put this job in my lap. But the job was such a mixed bag. It was on one hand, a huge financial blessing to us, and we had like insurance, like good insurance for the first time for a long time. And so it provided benefits and security, but it also was the hardest job I've ever had. And it felt super heavy and it felt like I was constantly uncovering spiritual warfare and landmines, of which I was not like. I would just like uncover them by accident. And then I'm in the middle of this and I would go home. For years, I felt like I went home one of two ways, ranting or crying. And if it was like, I'm not, I really am not a super emotional person. But it was years of me calling my mom and griping all the way home and then getting home and griping to bed. And I remember one night walking outside and I was just praying to God, doing this whole like, I don't know, God, I don't I can't make sense of this. It feels like I was supposed to do this, but maybe I didn't hear you right. And maybe. Am I being disobedient like the Israelites wandering around in the desert? What happened? Like I wanted so bad to spend more time with my family and my kids and be able to be more active doing things with the church and all of that, all at the same time, knowing the realities of raising four kids and like they needed us. And so I was like, torn, but also like God had always used me as a nurse to minister to people. And so like, it was super frustrating to me to feel like I was like ineffective and not fruitful. There. So I'm pleading with God like, God, can you just show me an answer how to make this all work? And. God didn't say a straight answer. He just said something to this. Like, I got this sense of this will all make sense in a little while. And I remember it feeling like one of those. The

presence of the Lord all around you. And it was so clear to me, and it felt so big that like, oddly enough, I'm not like a I don't get too far ahead. So I'm not a real big like end times kind of person. But I felt that big. Like it felt like God was saying, something big is coming and this will all make sense. So then when COVID came, I was like, oh, okay, well, I guess that was it. And, you know, people were losing their jobs and I had a job that was secure. And I was like, okay, well, that was probably it. Then I got on the other side of it and it was still like God was saying that. It's like, no, that wasn't it. I'm like, what? How can it get worse? How can it get bigger? But I also got kind of settled with like the work environment and culture shifted. I got to see God, actually, the work he the ground he plowed up for years that felt like was like so hard. And I was actually enjoying the company of my coworkers. And it was great. And in fact, we were sitting around one day talking about keeping each other accountable to make appointments because, you know, we're nurses, so we don't go to the doctor. And I was like, yeah, if you maybe somebody should keep me accountable because I keep getting my food stuck in my throat and the whole room is like. No, you're calling now. And I was like, I'll call. And they're like, no, no, no. Now I'm like, no, it's fine. I'm busy. And they're like, no, you're called now. So this is like on Thursday and I got my procedure to check it out on Tuesday and was completely blindsided when they said there was cancer there. I was so confident that that was not it. I even laughed at the doctor and I was like, oh, come on. And he's like, Becky, like, because we knew each other. So he's like, Becky. But that's when things started to like make some sense to me that God was kind enough to kind of start preparing me for that. And this is going to sound incredibly weird because I like, I would I would happily not have cancer, but God has also, in a weird way, answered those prayers of the desires of my heart. Like I get to be with my kids more now and we are super intentional with being with our kids. And we've made lots of memories with them. And I, I mean, I'm standing here and I would not have had the capacity to talk to anybody like a crowd about Jesus. And that was really that was not my heart to talk to a crowd, but I wanted to do more in ministry. And so, in a weird way, God has even given me the desires of my heart, despite some really bad circumstances. And I tried really hard to leave that job, but God kept me there. And because of that job, we will be okay. Like financially, but also benefits that will outlast me for my kids and my husband. So there's a lot of stories like this that I could tell you, but I said I was going to try to keep it short because there's only two verses. But another picture I got, this is so weird, but have you ever played Super Mario Brothers and you're running as fast as you can to the finish line, but it's chaos. It's like bullets and hammers and spiny eggs coming from the sky. It's a lot like running life, you know, like another appliance is breaking great. Or whatever it is. But in the midst of all that chaos, there's coins. And the coins are very good for Mario. They keep



Mario going. Like sometimes you get to play longer because of them, or sometimes they indicate the path that Mario is supposed to go. So stay with me. This isn't in the Bible, but. But the coins are like the blessings that God is still giving us, even though it's chaos out there. Keep looking for the coins, the place is God showing up. He's providing. I told Jesus at the beginning of this journey, God, I can handle a lot, but please God, don't let my kids get bitter. Don't let my kids hate you in the church. And they have like flourished. They love Jesus more now than they did two years ago. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Look back. Look up, and finally look forward. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. The sins is kind of weird, because it's like the joy and the cross are right there together. It's like, I don't know about that. That's that's the crucifixion. Seems like a no good, very bad day. Like things are bad, but it's not really about that. It's about Jesus knowing what the cross meant. And he knows that on the other side of it, there's so much joy. And he knows that after he, you know, died for us, he sat down. It is finished. Our sins nailed to the cross and paid in full. Our future is bright. And whatever it is that Satan wants you to believe, whatever your circumstances are tempting you to believe, the truest thing about you is not how you feel or what you've done, or what has been done to you. The truest thing about you is what has been done for you. And the good thing is, it doesn't depend on you and your ability to help yourself. Has everything to do with the object of our faith. Jesus, who counted it joy to pay the cost for our sin. So I'm almost done. I think I Mike I do. I have the ability to ask the worship team to come and get ready. Is that okay? okay, I'm new to this. I'm just a nurse. But how do we finish the race? Well, we look to the author and the finisher of our faith. We know the end, guys. Christians. We don't know the middle, but we know the end. And we can be confident of this for sure. That God knows the middle and he will be there to. He will get us to the end. He is our sustainer. He is with us. I've had the really the blessing of being with a lot of people as they die and go on to eternity. And I can tell you, Christians die different. God's presence is there to. So no matter what we're walking through in this life, be reminded of some scriptures that remind us of what we have to look forward to. Blessed be the God and the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled. It doesn't fade away. It is reserved. Other translations say it is kept in heaven for you. We for us who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. I mean, it's worth celebrating so. Should I keep going? I don't think you'll be able to hear me. Maybe I should end there. Oh, because of this, we press on, we endure. We patiently await the day that everything makes

sense. And we see as God sees. And we get to worship him fully together with exceeding joy. Parkland Chapel. Stay focused. Run with endurance. Depend on our Savior who sustains. Look back, look up and look forward and let's be able to say, like Paul in Second Timothy, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day. And not only to me, but to also to those who loved his appearing. God is good. He's our sustainer, and he will lead us on. Just pray as you respond that the spirit can do some work with you, whether that be that you've never accepted Jesus. Today is the day. Whether that be that you're running the race with a whole lot of distraction and a whole lot of other stuff that on the day will not make sense or make any difference. Matter. Whatever it is, you get a chance to worship Jesus fully and also just to be in his presence and listen and respond to what he's saying. Thank you guys.