

The Journey
Enlarge your Tent
August 30, 2009
Pastor David Brown

Our journey's beginning. What an exciting journey it is. Listen, our journey's to bring glory to God, that's what we're about. We want to show the world that we have a glorious God. It was 10 years ago and a few months that about 150 people stood on this piece of raw land for our ground breaking day. We were excited about it, it was an exciting day. It was the 1st of May 1999. We were praying this prayer, this is the prayer that we prayed this day; it was out of Isaiah 54:2, Says the Lord, enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide and do not hold back. Lengthen your cords; strengthen your stakes for you will spread out to the right and to the left. On that day we prayed that God would take this ministry and do incredible things in our community. We prayed that God would open the doors of this new facility and people would come and find the grace of God and find something exciting that no one could explain and no one could give man credit for but God would receive the glory. Ten years later with over 800 people and three services, we're ready to do it again. God has increased our numbers, he's widened our tent and it's been an exciting ride but I want you to know, it's just beginning and I want you to be part of it. It's going to be exciting. Before we dive into the scriptures today I want to show you something though from the book of Acts. I want to give you a little history lesson about the church and what I want to do is help you with some misconceptions about church. We all grow up and know about church, we've seen church whether we grew up around church we have some ideas about what church is supposed to be and what church is supposed to look like. But the word of God has the perfect picture of God so if we really want to know what the church is about, we don't look at our traditions, we don't look at our past, we look at the word of God. You take the book of Acts and that's when the church began, remember Jesus himself gave his life for his church. Jesus gave his life and said the church was going to be his bride and so I want to warn you today if you're sitting out there today saying you know I really love God, but the church thing I can do without. Be careful with that. That's like saying, boy I really like David but I can't stand Dawn and you may feel that way, several of you probably do but that's not good information to bring to me. That's not a conversation you and I need to have that you don't like my wife. God's not pleased when you tell people I really love you God, but the church, take it or leave it. God loves the church, in fact Jesus died so that we could band together and be his hands and feet. We see in the books of Acts, chapter 2 the first church beginning. Jesus has gone on to be with the father and he told the church to meet in a place and wait until he gave him a sign. Boy what a sign. He's going to send a holy spirit into that place and when the Holy Spirit enters that church I'm telling you it

breaks loose and we're going to look at that for a minute. What an exciting day. That first group that gathered together, 120 people; do you realize that's larger than the typical church? The typical church runs 70. 70 people in a typical church. My wife and I went to Jasper Texas to do a marriage conference. Has anybody been to Jasper Texas? Does anybody even know where Jasper Texas even is? You go right to the end of the world and take a left. It's not the end of the world but you can see it from there. We rode the motorcycle down there and after about three hours on the bike I was regretting. I have stood up all day today, it's been rough. We were driving through these little towns and some of the towns; our church is larger than the town. We got to drive through Palestine and for those of you, who know, Palestine is where I came from and as I drove I saw churches that thirty years ago were meeting in the same place, in the same buildings. I looked at that and thought wow, in thirty years these churches have not had a need to grow one time. Well, why is that? It's because they are very comfortable with being a small church and there are some of you out there today saying yeah, I love a small church. I want to be part of a small church, when the church gets big I've got to find someplace else because church is supposed to be a place where everybody knows everybody and we all work together and it's supposed to be little, that's what the church is meant to be. That's sounds good, it's just not biblical. It's nowhere in the Bible. In fact, the Bible commands the church to carry the gospel of Christ to the world and if the church is doing its job, it has to grow, it cannot stay the same. It cannot stay small. It has to be large if it's got the Holy Spirit moving inside of it. Now, those of you that want to know everybody, guess what? On average you know 39 people in your church. 39 people you know and can name in your church most of the time. That's why all those churches in East Texas and Palestine where I'm from, that's why there are church splits. Because there are about 70 to 80 people and you can only belong to one side or the other side. So when a problem comes up with the church, and when something comes up in the church you have this side verse this side and guess what? Somebody leaves. In the city limits of Palestine there are 72 churches. We drive into Jasper and I'm passing church after church and I talked to a guy in Jasper and I said man there are a lot of churches. Population is 8000 and 52 churches in Jasper. Why...because they believe the church is supposed to be small and when the church reaches a conflict, this side and this side are split so they start churches and I'm telling you, that is not found anywhere in the word of God. This first church that ran 120, the Holy Spirit came upon it and they went out proclaiming the gospel. Peter preached the first sermon and three thousand people got saved that day. 3000 people got saved and baptized. That means within the first Sunday the first church ran 3121 people. You continue to read on and just one chapter later about 5 to 6 months later the number of men attending church was 5000. That means the first church ran between 15 and 20,000 people in the first few months that it existed. Listen, the First Baptist Church of Jerusalem was the first mega church. I'm kidding it wasn't First Baptist Church Jerusalem. The first church was a mega church. Saddleback was not the first mega church; Willow Creek was

not the first mega church. The book in Acts, the book that we're reading, the New Testament church was a mega church. How did they keep up with it? They met in homes, they met in small groups, they did life together; they read the word of God together, they studied together, they ate together. They broke up into small groups and they gathered into large groups and God had an impact. In chapter 16 of Acts it says the church has turned the world upside down. Let me tell you something, we serve the same God today that was alive and well in the New Testament. The same power that did that in the New Testament is available today and God is searching. It says in Chronicles, he is searching to and fro looking for someone to strengthen. Looking for a church to pour out his spirit, looking for a place he can do these things. The only thing that limits a church is its amount of faith and its willingness to step out and let God do incredible things through its midst. This is a special place. We chose many years ago to be a New Testament church. We chose many years ago to read the bible and see what God was doing and how God designed the church then. We did everything we could to design the church the same way the word of God designed it in the book of Acts and I'm telling you if we live the book of Acts we're going to see the power of the book of Acts in this community and that's what we're excited about. When are we big enough? When every person in Ellis County is saved; job done; we're done. That is going to be a ways to go so we've got to continue to hold on to God. We've got to continue to help people in our community find Jesus. We've got to call to help people connect to God and to others. We've got to want people in this church to know God. We've got to help them grow together and we want to teach them how to serve the world. That's what a fully devoted follower is; going out and finding people and sharing the gospel and sharing what the world needs and listen, the world needs what we have. One of the first verses I memorized when I began my Christian walk was 2 Corinthians 5:17. It said if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old is gone. The new has come. That's an exciting thing to hear. The world needs something new, the world needs to know that Jesus is out there and he needs to take his power and do something in their lives. There are marriages today that are dead and dying. There are marriages today that are falling apart. All around us we see marriages that are struggling and suffering and one out of every two marriages is failing and it's leaving a wake of disaster behind it and our church wants to be the church that stands up to the community and says listen your marriage can be healed. Your marriage can be whole and even though you feel like you're trapped in a dead end marriage and you feel like there is no hope, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you today to take that marriage and make it new. All things become new, the old is gone. This community needs a church that will proclaim the family is important and we want to support the family and help the family and encourage the family to stay together and to grow together and serve together and be what God wants them to be. We want to speak out for the families in this community and say there is hope for you. You can make it. I am going to show you a video of one of the families that God has used this church to really help stay together and bless the church.

“My name is Olivia Smith. I have two kids and one on the way. I have been married almost eight years. I lived with my dad until I was 12. I am from a divorced family. I moved in with my mom in Houston. She struggled with alcoholism. There was no discipline and lack of guidance, lack of love at times so I started drinking and doing drugs and living a really bad life. I became really depressed and my mom bought me a horse to keep me occupied which is where I met my husband and the day I got saved they had a horse race and a church service going on and I listened to the preacher preach I accepted God that day. After the high wore off I was back to reality a couple weeks later doing the same old thing. Three years later at the age of 18 I was married and my husband went into the Navy and so I followed him to Nevada which is where we were stationed. I was really depressed and on medicines and couldn't work and had suicidal thoughts all the time. It was really bad. I was looking for something to fill this void that I had and turned outside of my marriage and I really don't know what I was looking for, maybe something different. They always say it looks better on the other side and it never is. So, after that I had my daughter and moved back to Texas to Waxahachie, that's where my husband's job was. One day I just didn't want to live like that anymore and we starting trying new churches and none of them really grabbed us so Dennis's coworker told us about Ferris Avenue so we tried it and loved it and one day David preached on honesty and it wasn't long after that God was just really working on my heart and I needed to confess before I could move forward in my relationship so one night I told my husband that I had an affair and he confessed that he had done the same thing so we both just cried and asked for forgiveness and it was a very shameful time for us. The next day was Easter Sunday and we went to church and decided that we would both ask for forgiveness together and we did that and changed our lives from there. What is so different about today is that we go to church every single Sunday. We want to get as much information we can from God. We would pray every single night together with our kids and with each other, that's a must and we read the bible together. We read it to our children. These things were not in our lives before we just didn't do that. If you asked us if we believed in God, we did but that's about as far as it went. Our marriage is a lot stronger today because we have God in the middle and without him we wouldn't be together. “

Did you see those beautiful kids? That's why we want God to enlarge our ministry so we can have impact on more and more families and help them understand that no matter where you are today in your marriage, there is hope. God can take a dead marriage and make it new and alive. I know some of you are sitting out there today and you're saying you know what? It's too late for me, I've already divorced. In the traditional churches when you become a divorced person you pretty much exclude yourself from ministry. You're pretty much done; you're not allowed to serve as a deacon, not allowed to serve as a Sunday school teacher. In fact once you divorce it's like you have a scarlet letter on your shirt that says that you're not good enough. In our church, we wanted a church that looked at people in the eye and said you know what; God's a god of second chances. God's a god of mercy, a god of love; in fact God's

not just a god of second chances, he's a god of third and fourth chances, and fifth chances and it's okay in this place to not be okay. It's okay to be honest and say I have some problems. It's okay to be honest and say I have some doubts, I have some questions. It's okay to be authentic and real. That's what we want in this place. We want a place where you can come in and you don't put up a façade you don't pretend to be something. You don't have to wear a certain kind of clothes, you don't have to have a certain kind of job, and you don't have to know so much about the bible. You can come right in and say I'm messed up. We will put our arms around you and say we're messed up too, let's do this together. A God of second chances; I want to tell you a story about a lady I knew along time ago in Ennis when I was serving as a youth minister at Tabernacle. She was at another church in town and God was using her to do amazing things in that church. She served alongside the youth ministers and we did youth camps together, but she'd always take it a step further. She wanted to work with kids that were drug and alcohol addicted and she would gather those kids together and minister to them and she would do retreats with them and would bring these favorite Christian singers in and it was just amazing the ministry she had and then one day she made a very bad mistake. She messed up and that decision cost her family. She left the church in shame and she told God she would never drag his name through the mud again by serving him and she was so sorry. For thirteen years she attended church but never plugged in. She attended church but she never wanted to minister because she was so ashamed. A lot of that, the church has helped her with, helped her feel that shame. One day Jesus got a hold of her and said listen I love you and I've loved you from the beginning and I chose you to serve me even though I knew you were going to fail me. She came into this church, she sat in the back and one Sunday God pushed her forward. As she came up I looked her in the eyes and I had no idea the words I was saying but I said, Sunny I know you're a Christian, if you're coming forward to be part of this church it's because God wants you to serve. Tears started streaming down her face. That's exactly what God had been saying. The next thing she did was ask if she could lead a bible study and of course I said yes you could lead a bible study. She said that blew her mind because she wanted to scream, don't you know what I've done? And our answer was yes, we know what you've done. We believe God's a god of second chances and third and fourth and fifth. I know the things I've done. I'm not going to tell you but I have no business being in this place, no business except the grace of God. So we want to extend that grace of God and we want to tell people if you've messed up he's there and we're going to open our arms wide and say you're loved here; come as messed up as you can, you'll fit right in and then let's work together to become what God wants us to be. Last week end Sunny stood before 17,000 women at a Women of Faith Conference and she gave a beautiful testimony of the power of God. God used her to bring over 300 women to Women of Faith. God is using her in a mighty way in this church and in this community because this church believes in second chances. Some of you are here today because this is your second chance and we want to expand and we want to sacrifice and we

want to build. Listen, it's going to be hard to build that building; it's going to be expensive to do what we're doing. We are willing to do that because we want to spread our arms wide because there's a community that needs to know that God loves them; that their marriage can be saved. God loves them and they can have second chances.

The third thing that we need to tell them as a church is we need to let them know that sometimes life is too much and maybe some of you have heard the old saying; God will never give you more than you can handle. Have you said that before or have you heard that? Well I'm going to blow your mind this morning...that's a lie, it's not true. God will always give you more than you can handle. God will always put a load on you and let you feel like there is no way you can stand up under it. God will always allow you to have more than you can handle because only at those times in your life do you lean on him and there are times when life is too much and when life is too much and you need to lean on God you need to be able to lean on your Christian brothers and sisters around you. That's why we push these small groups so much. We want you to have a community of people that when you're hurting, when life is too much; there is somebody there to lift you up when you can't walk. There's somebody walking beside you. We want that for all of you in our church. We want there to be people in your life that love Jesus and love you and when you can't take it they are there. That's exactly what the New Testament church is about. It says in John 13:35, by this all men will know that you're my disciples. How will they know you're my disciples, if you love one another. I have several verses, don't try to keep up with me, John 15:12, Love one another; John 15:17, love one another; Romans 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11, 4:12; 2 John 5; love, love, love, love one another. We want a church that shows the compassion of Christ through our small groups and you love each other and when life is too much there is somebody there. Watch this video...

"Hi, my name is Jenny McQueen and this is my husband Rex and my son Tristan. Rex and I were married July of 1997 and Tristan joined our family March of 1999. When Tristan was a year old we decided that we wanted to have another child and a year later we found out we were expecting. On January 14th our lives changed forever. I went to the doctor and we found out that our child was going to be born with a congenital heart defect. The next week they took our child, we had a little boy and we named him Ethan Cole McQueen. He was doing really well, he had stopped breathing but they ventilated him and everything was looking fine. The medicines were working and surgery was something that we didn't think we were going to have to do. The next day Rex and I went down to the nursery to see him and we walked in on all the nurses and doctors working on our child. The awful sight of seeing our child being worked on and the tubes and all sorts of stuff going through him was the most traumatic thing that you could ever see happen to your child. I would do anything to have taken that pain away from him. On February 5th Ethan came off the ventilator and for the first time in 16 days we got to

hold our child. What a glorious occasion that was. He was doing well and it looked like in the next few days we were going to get to move out of ICU. A friend of mine emailed me this scripture that really touched home for me. It's from Psalms 61:1-4, it says, hear my cry O' God, listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I will call to you. I call as my heart grows faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I for you have been my refuge a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings." On February 9th again our lives changed. As my mom and I were standing over his bed looking at him and touching him and smiling and talking to him he crashed. Again I didn't know what to do so I went to God and I pleaded with him, I begged God please do not let my child die. I cannot bear the thought of losing my child. He means more to me than anything in this life. I don't know what I will do without him. I prayed this prayer constantly to God. I then looked at Rex as he was holding me in his arms and I said they've been working on him for too long. I said it's time for him to go. I turned to God and I said okay God you can have my child. He will be in a much better place with you. The next instant God gave me a peace. It went from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet and I knew it was okay for him to go. They then let us come in and hold our child one last time. As we were holding him, Brother David came in and witness to us that a level that no one else could have witnessed to us on. David got down on his knees and said to us its okay for you to cry, God is crying with you because he has lost a child and he knows what it's like. He then said you are not leaving your child there, that is his shell but he is no longer there, he is in heaven with God. That is something that I have known all my life but in that moment it meant so much more and it was so much easier leaving Ethan's body there at the hospital and going home without him. The peace that God gave us the day that Ethan died I expected would carry me through the next through months but before I knew it the anger and the depression set in. I became so angry that it caused me to turn from the people I needed most, my family and my friends. I had so many thoughts going through my mind that I was ashamed of most of them. When I thought it couldn't get any worse Rex lost his job of three years. I began to ask God, are you punishing us? One Sunday God spoke to me through David's sermon. I began to see that I was in a really bad place. That day God told me that it was okay to let Ethan go. I prayed that day that God would release me of my anger and my depression and slowly my bad days turned in to bad moments. So many good things have come from his. The witness that the church showed to us, I believe is what brought Rex back. He asked me one time, we had received some money from the church, why are all these people sending us this money? We don't even know them. I think that was God's way of bringing us back to where we needed to be. It has also strengthened our marriage; it's brought us closer together and made us realize we need to rely on each other. I want to thank the church family for all that you have done for us, for the flowers, the food and the money that you have given us. Thank you for all you have done and thank you for your continued prayers. "

These are some of the stories of The Avenue Church and we could have picked from hundreds of stories. We believe in life change. We believe in God making a difference in our community. We're not just doing church; it's not just religion, its life changing. So when life throws too much at you and there is too much to handle, we want to be here to connect you to God and connect you to other people and help you see the power of God in your life. But the most exciting thing that we do is take people from the world that wouldn't even consider God and show them a God that loves them and see them give their life to Jesus and begin their eternal life. I have one more video I want you to see. [Baptism Video] That's not a year in a life of our church, that's a day and if you'll notice they were all taller than me because they're adults. We not baptizing a bunch of children; we're not running buses and baptizing kids, we're seeing life change, we're seeing differences made and that's what's going to happen. We've seen incredible things in the last 10 years but we're ready to see something new. The old is gone, we're on the threshold of something greater than we've ever seen being this New Testament church exploding with life changing people. Today where are you? Are you trapped in a dead end marriage or you afraid that you're not going to make it? Are you struggling today; feeling like you're not in love anymore; buying into the lie that you fell out of love? There's hope for your marriage today. Maybe today you feel like you've disqualified yourself from God. If we just knew what you've done you'd understand that God would never use you. We're here to tell you that God gives second chances and third and fourth and fifth. Maybe today life has thrown too much for you to handle and you don't have anywhere to turn, we're going to encourage you first today to turn to God and then help you connect you with other people so you don't go through this life alone, by yourself. There's power in this place. I told you in the beginning when the Holy Spirit came upon the first church they knew it. The Holy Spirit is here, the question is are you going to be part of it?