

What Are We Here For?

Champion Forest 50th Anniversary

Preached on August 8th by Pastor Jarrett Stephens

This is what we have been celebrating all weekend long here at Champion Forest...it is the blessing and faithfulness of God upon our church. Weekends like this...services like this are so very important in the life of a church like ours.

When Israel crossed the Jordan River, God instructed the Israelites to take twelve stones (each representing one the tribes of Israel) and he told them to construct a memorial with those stones, so that every time Israel would walk by them in the future, and their children and future generations would ask their fathers, “What do these stones mean?” They are there to serve as a perpetual reminder of what God has done on the nation of Israel’s behalf...and in doing so:

Joshua 4:24 – “so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever.”

This weekend and especially this worship service today...I pray that it will serve as a “memorial stone” if you will for our entire church – that through songs and recognitions and videos and of course this message:

- that we would be inspired by the faithfulness of God...
- that we would recount his marvelous deeds on our behalf...
- that we would be encouraged by how very good he has been to us...

And as a result of simply sharing the story that is Champion Forest...that just like the people of Israel, our families and future generations...our surrounding community...all the peoples of the earth would know the hand of the LORD is mighty and that they may fear the LORD their God forever.

I have spent a lot of time these last few months reading up on the history of our church. I’ve had a lot of conversations with a lot of people and have absolutely LOVED hearing the stories people have told me about the early days of the church and then because of explosive growth having to build buildings and then relocate the church and then eventually to add campuses.

In one scrapbook that was given to me to look through, I came across the very first worship service program. Here it is right here. You can sense the heart of the church just in reading the first program.

The church that day began by reading scripture – from infancy this church has always put a premium and a focus and made a priority the word of God.

Then the church lifted up in song “Holy, Holy, Holy” and then “Jesus Saves”. Worship – God-centered, Spirit-filled, Christ-exalting worship has been a hallmark of this church through the years.

There was a time to give! Again, early on as the DNA is being formed something that has always characterized this church – a heart of generosity was being birthed in us.

There was an invitation after the message inviting people to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives and an opportunity to join this church. And this note is typed at the bottom of the worship bulletin:

“Just a personal note to each guest that’s present today. Thanks for coming! The fact that you’ve come blesses us tremendously and makes us grateful to God! Please be assured of our personal care and interest in you as an individual. Come back with a friend next week!”

I’m telling you, one could read this program and in reading it see the heart of this church.

- There was an upward focus as seen in the worship and preaching of God’s word.
- There was an inward focus in the coming events listed as “church training” and “age-division workshops.
- And certainly there was an outward focus in giving so that ministry could be accomplished, and this evangelistic spirit to engage others and invite them to see and experience what God was doing in Champion Forest.

Of all that’s on this first program though, what jumped off the page and into my heart was the title of Pastor Robin Guess message that day. When I first read it, I immediately knew...it was as if the Spirit of God said this will be your message title on the 50th Anniversary Celebration as well...it’s in all caps!

The title of his first message that Sunday and I’m taking as the title of my message today: **WHAT ARE WE HERE FOR?**

This is going to be a very brief message, but one that I think is quite important for our church. I want to attempt to answer this question today – “What are we here for?”

And I believe that what we will find is that we are here today as a church for the EXACT same reasons... we exist for the EXACT same purposes as this church did when it first started 50 years ago.

? – What are we here for? Let me suggest three reasons we are here as a church:

1. We are here to move by faith

If you want to know what pleases God, a simple reading of scripture you'll find out very soon, it's faith. Paul told the church in Corinth:

2 Corinthians 5:7 – “for we walk by faith, not by sight.”

We know that it's faith that pleases God. The writer of Hebrews puts it like this: **Hebrews 11:6a – “And without faith it is impossible to please him...”**

I really believe this is why God blesses church plants like Champion Forest. Typically, in a church plant you have a pastor like Robin Guess that sees the need for a church in a community that doesn't have one.

And that pastor while he has a sincere desire to reach people for Jesus...he may even have a small group of people that want to join him – outside of that, he has nothing!

- There's no resources outside of what they can raise from sponsoring churches or local associations...
- There's no building...so you have to be creative and meet in a house or a school or some community gathering place...
- There's no staffing...so, you're doing it all...

You heard in the video Janie Guess say it. Robin and Jaine's daughter, Phyllis told me over the phone she still remembers that first service where there was just 6 people and five of them had the last name Guess!

Truly, you don't have much, but what you do have is faith in God. And what we see in scripture and I'm sure you've seen play out in your life over and over – God ALWAYS honors faith in him.

And so, if we are going to be a church that pleases God, we're going to have to do over these next 50 years what you have done over these last 50 years and that is to continue to move by faith!

You've done this Champion Forest.

- It takes faith to build a parking garage when all the neighbors around you don't want the parking garage!
- It takes faith to relocate a church so that you won't be landlocked and limited in growth so that we can reach more people for Jesus.
- It takes faith to not be satisfied with just one location, but to go where people are so that more and more people can hear the gospel and grow in their faith!
- It takes faith to say we want to reach every single person in the shadow of our steeple, regardless of what they look like...what they have...what they don't have!
- It takes faith to give and be generous, knowing that you may never know, see or hear of the impact that is being made because of the ministries that your giving helped start.
- It takes faith to never compromise in this increasing secular culture, to never settle as a church, to NOT bow down to our preferences but instead to keep going, keep stretching, keep growing in the name of Jesus!

It takes faith Champion Forest. May God always give us this kind of heart to please him...to get out of our comfort zone and to be a church that is committed to move forward by faith as long as God allows us to be a church.

Historically, this is who we've been...faith as defined us. Don't believe me?

Illus. Damon Shook - As I have prepared for this 50th anniversary, I've watched a lot of old sermons. And one I came across proves this point. Take for example this sermon from Pastor Damon Shook, preached here on the very grounds of the church we are currently sitting in...but it didn't always look this way. At one time it was a field...a forest!

But a pastor and a people saw something different...they saw a future church filled with people. It was faith that allowed them to see it and it was by faith they moved forward. Watch and listen to this: (*SHOW DAMON CLIP*).

Amen! Why are we here? We are here in Pastor Damon's word to take giant steps of faith and I pray that by God's grace we will do just what he encouraged and that is to continue to take giant steps of faith in the future.

Why are we here? We are here to move by faith. But secondly:

2. We are here to live on mission

Did you catch the word Pastor Damon used over and over again in that clip of him preaching? He begged us to see people. It was all about people.

We're here to reach people. On the first worship program, right before that personal note to the guests, this phrase is printed out:

If we go...they'll come

If we go, they'll come...but we have to GO! And this is what it means to live on mission. We GO! This is the mission of Jesus...it's what is referred to as the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:18-20 – “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Here you have the authority of Jesus that is combined with the presence of Jesus and it is promised to us as we GO in his name telling people about his saving grace.

There is a reason this church has grown through the years...and the secret sauce:

- Is not the worship (although we have a GREAT tradition of worship).
- It's not the pastors (and we've had great pastors and teachers of God's Word).
- It's not location because there are plenty of churches in this area that have not experienced the growth we have had the privilege to experience.

You know why we have grown through the years. It's been our commitment to go to our neighborhoods and to the nations and tell people about Jesus. To show his love and share his love...and I believe this is WHY God has blessed us and honored us as a church – it's been our commitment to live on mission.

Which for us has meant, we're not just going to create a ministry to create a ministry...if we are going to do something, then evangelism – telling others about Jesus will be at the heart of it!

- We'll have a rockin' children's and student ministry. But behind every program, behind every event is the gospel.
- Through our CMC, we'll feed the homeless and through our partnerships with other ministry areas we'll help meet the needs of the community, but our commitment is to not just take care of the outward needs, but people's inward need for Christ.
- It's our desire to live on mission that fuels the thousands of mission trips we've taken through the years.
- It's our desire to live on mission that motivated us to start the North Klein campus and to merge our church into the campuses that are currently in Jersey Village and Conroe.

It's our commitment to live on mission that fueled the desire ten plus years ago of the need to resemble our evolving and ever-changing community.

And when this vision was put forth to reach every person that lived near our church – regardless of ethnicity, race, education or origin – you, Champion Forest bought into this vision of living on mission...you embraced it...applauded it!

Illus. Fleming Clip - Watch this clip (*Show Fleming clip*)

I loved listening to this sermon by Pastor Fleming from 2010. The name of it was: A World Redemption Center

And this vision of reaching everyone...to truly be a New Testament Church...it's not separated Jew and Gentile...it's not separated black and white and brown!

No, because of Christ reconciling us to himself by the cross, he has reconciled us to one another and so we live on mission and we go in Jesus name and as we show his love and share his gospel, people – ALL people are welcome here to our church. It's just as Pastor Fleming said, "Unity in the midst of diversity."

If we will continue live on mission – if we keep evangelism...reaching people far from Christ...sharing the gospel at the forefront of all we do, Jesus will continue to bless our church. It's why we are here!

God, give us a heart for people! ALL people. What are we here for?

1. We are here to move by faith.

2. We are here to live on mission.
3. **We are here to build the kingdom.**

Champion Forest, we are here NOT to build our kingdom, but THE Kingdom. It's why over the last 50 years we have given over 15 million dollars to the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention.

There's no telling in partnership with other SBC churches how many pastors we have helped educate through our seminaries, how many church plants we have supported via the North American Mission Board, how many missionaries we have helped fund via the International Mission Board.

There has always been a commitment in us to build the greater kingdom of God. It's why we have mission partnerships with organizations like GEM and UK-USA ministries and FAM and Houston Church Planters Network along with so many others 0 there's too many to name!

It's why when natural disasters hit like Hurricane Harvey – I of course wasn't here, but have heard how we as a church jumped in action and we not only helped our members and neighbors in crisis, but we helped other churches rebuild.

We've NEVER been in this for ourselves and not about to start now! It's about the kingdom.

When Jesus began his earthly ministry we read in early parts of the gospel: **Mark 1:14b-15** – “...Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Jesus taught his disciples...he taught us through the Lord's Prayer to pray: **Matthew 6:10** – “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

He goes on to teach in that same sermon – **Matthew 6:33** – “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

The apostle Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:13** – “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”

We live for the Kingdom of God! We strive to grow his Kingdom and expand his kingdom. And that's why there are two ministries today that I am so happy to introduce because it's these two ministries that will help keep us Kingdom-focused in the future.

The first is our residency program. When I first began talking with the Pastor Search Committee, this was one of the ministries that I knew I wanted to start and that we needed to implement as a church.

Illus. Residency program - I, myself am the product of a residency program...and intern program. When I was first out of college age 22, the only ministry experience I had was working for my home church one summer in Bossier City, LA. I learned some good things, the biggest thing I learned is that I did not want to be a student pastor!

But then coming out of Ouachita Baptist University, I was offered an internship and it changed my life. I was going to school full-time and working. I was getting my theological education but combined with that real life ministry experience. It made me who I am.

I moved from being an intern to an associate on our staff to eventually a full-time minister. In the process, I began to oversee the intern and for my doctoral dissertation wrote about forming a strategic intern program that could help develop future ministers in a holistic way: professionally, spiritually, mentally, emotionally.

I thank God for the 10 plus years of leading the intern program at the church I previously served and I can't tell you the number of interns that were moved up in our organization to serve or that we sent out to help build the kingdom.

And so, in coming here with our multisite approach and with our influence in North America, I knew we needed to start a residency program where we bring in young men and women called to ministry, let them work on their seminary while serve on our staff.

As I was thinking and praying through this, I was obviously learning about the church and came across this picture on social media of Pastor Damon Shook (*Show pic*).

I was looking at this picture and as I have learned the history especially regarding Pastor Damon's 28-year tenure, I learned that he absolutely loved this local church. In fact, he hardly ever traveled outside of this pulpit (and he could have!) – he hardly ever did because he just loved this church.

He was passionate about evangelism. He was passionate about church growth. He served the local church faithfully and as you can see in the pic he was wholly committed to preaching God's Word. He was a family man. A man of character and integrity.

And so, it just seemed like the thing to do...and I've talked this over with numerous people to get their wisdom. I had the privilege of meeting with Mrs. Jackie Shook and getting her blessing as well as the entire Shook family.

But today, we are introducing as a way to continue building the Kingdom into the future what we are calling The Champion Forest Residency Program named in Damon Shook's honor. (*SHOW LOGO*).

And I am excited to announce the beginning in January in partnership with the Lanier Theological Library we are going to be able to bring on 20 residents that will be able to work here in our church, while taking classes at their seminary or Bible school of choice...they can do all their classwork from the Lanier Library.

They will serve in various ministry areas in our church depending on where they sense God leading them: children, students, missions, pastoral, spiritual development, worship, church planting, etc.

This is why we have brought John Wills back on the team. He will be leading this initiative as our Global Missions Pastor and will be responsible for the residents training and development while here.

As we train, watch and observe these residents over time we can raise them up in our organization if there is a need here OR we can send them out to other like-minded churches...THIS is building the kingdom and we're doing it by sending people out that have been trained here through the Damon Shook Residency Program.

Pretty cool, huh! Well, one more way we are committed to building the kingdom in the future and that is through what I'm calling the CF Connect. (*SHOW LOGO*)

You've heard me talk about this. Here's what we want to do. We want to connect pastors to Champion Forest that need a reprieve...that need a break...and we want to connect them to Champion Forest so that we can bless them and encourage them while they refuel and get ready to re-fire.

We also want to plant churches in a more aggressive way all over North America. And so, in partnership with the North American Mission Board, our goal will be to plant a church in every major city in North America...we will plant in cities that have a high population, but low evangelical birth rate.

We want to connect other churches to these church plants so that we can all work together to build the Kingdom. The CF Connect will also work to serve, bless, encourage and resource pastors and other staff by bringing them in for training and leadership development.

We will also partner with the Lanier Library so that when world class scholars come to lecture, we can as a value add to pastors from all over North America as part of the CF Connect to come and learn from these scholars.

What I especially love about this is that we stay connected to our history...in that we will raise future ministers up in the spirit of Damon Shook and continue to train them in partnership with the Lanier Library Foundation where David Fleming just so happens to serve as executive director.

Only God could put this together. We are building the kingdom, Champion Forest...this is us...this is you...and by God's grace will continue to until Jesus comes.

What are we here for? We're here for exactly what we were here for 50 years ago and I pray what we'll be here for 50 years from now.

We are here to move by faith.
We are here to live on mission.
And we are here to build the kingdom.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.