

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

A CELEBRATION OF 2022 | ALL THINGS NEW

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Aaron

Well this is always a great time of the year to pause and look back at the year that we have just come out of and then look ahead into the year we are heading into and kind of celebrate some of the highlights and anticipate some things we expect God to do in the life of our church and in our own lives individually.

So, Ryan, it's good to be with you today to talk about the fact that we've just come through another year. It's staggering to think about just how quickly 22 went by, but it was a really, really good year in so many ways.

Ryan

One hundred percent.

Aaron

So I'm just really grateful for all that God has done. We just want to take a little bit of time to talk about that and to bring some things to the surface that maybe many people in our church witnessed, they were part of, they were aware of. And maybe there are a lot of things that they didn't know went on, both on the platform, and even behind the scenes.

Ryan

Love to talk about it. Yeah, let's do it. Let's just go ahead and jump right in.

Looking back at 2022 I feel like it was a big year. A lot of things happened like you said. I'm just going to throw something out and just have you respond to it. What is the first thing that comes to your mind as we look at 2022?

Baptisms: Over 400 baptisms happened in 2022.

Aaron

Yeah, that's incredible, in light of even where we've been over the last couple of years. In 2020, I can't remember the number of baptisms, but it obviously dropped because we couldn't be in person with people. It's very difficult to do virtual baptisms.

Ryan

Me and you baptizing each other week in and week out.



Aaron

So that number is really exciting to see. And a number of those baptisms came out of *Rooted*, which we'll talk about here in a bit. But just seeing that happen, it's so thrilling.

Ryan

It really was, man. I remember once, I was at the West campus, and we were doing baptisms spontaneously. We were leading through it and people were getting baptized left and right. And we're done. People were leaving. We were getting ready for the next service and this family comes back in. And they had actually gotten in the car, down the road, and their teen-aged daughter was like, "I have to go back and get baptized."

So they show up. They were like, "Hey, we were here. We left. We're hoping to get baptized." And I was like, "Yeah. We're going to do it again second service." And they were like, "We can't stay for second service. Can you do it now?"

We were like minutes before service started and I was like, "Yeah. We can do that." And she goes in fully dressed, like in her clothes she wore to church. She just had a hunger and a want to get in there and to just experience what was happening on the inside. She just wanted that act. It was a beautiful, beautiful moment.

To think that 400 of those happened across our city, just here in our church is wild.

Aaron

Yeah.

Ryan

Those are some of my favorite ones. When people leave and then they turn around and come back. That's great. That's powerful.

I'm just going to keep throwing things out. You know this was a big year. Midtown campus launched in January 2022. And I know you like to get over there a few times throughout the year. So, what did that mean to you after obviously doing it once, COVID, and then coming back in a really big way this year?

Aaron

Yeah. We had launched (for those who don't know) our Midtown campus just a few weeks before COVID. And then when COVID happened we had to make some really tough decisions around, mostly, resources, both people and dollars. So we decided to—the phrasing we used was push pause on that campus just to reallocate some of those resources.

A lot of that was out of our hands. Midtown was meeting in a rented facility and so we didn't know when we would be able to gather. So that was a very painful decision to

make. I remember the day that we had to make that decision was a really hard day for me personally, and for our team.

So to be able to relaunch Midtown is really cool. Just to be able to come back around full circle on that. And Alex is just an incredible campus pastor. The team, they are doing such a great job. And to see that relaunch and then to see the future that we have... We've got a desire to get them into a permanent facility in that area. So hopefully we'll be able to take some steps toward that this next year. It's exciting.

Ryan

Yeah, 100 percent, man. And I'm not going in sequential order here, but just kind of going all over the place. The next thing that is on my mind is Men's Night, another thing we kind of took a pause on, a strategic one these past few years. But we got to bring that back this year. And, maybe, if you could, celebrate that night a little bit, but even the back story of why these types of events mean so much to you and why you thought now was the time to bring these back.

Aaron

Yeah. The last Men's Night that we did was in 2016. And you know those t-shirts from that night, I still see them around. Guys will be wearing them around town. And I'll have a number of them come up to me and say that that was their first experience with our church.

I had a guy last night who came up to me, and he just said, "Hey, when did we do the last men's night?" And I said, "2016." And he said, "Okay, so we've been in this church for six years." He was marking it from that day.

The reason why we do these events is... I've said this to the team before, these are not cul-de-sacs. These are on-ramps. We don't just do an event just to do an event. This should be an on-ramp into a number of things. So, an on-ramp into primarily, first and foremost, a relationship with God. We're hopeful for that—an on-ramp into our church, an on-ramp into a group, an on-ramp into a serving opportunity. So we're always looking for that.

And then there's just something unique that happens when we have these evenings. We're going to do a Women's Night later this month. But whenever you get a whole group of men together there are some things that I can say to them as a pastor that I can't necessarily say in a mixed group—both for men and for women.

So, those types of events—there is something really special that happens. Watching nearly 2,000 guys show up on campus, devour, what was it? Sixteen briskets.

Ryan

Hundreds of pounds of meat.

Aaron

Lots of food that just disappeared in a very short period of time. And then to actually watch their demeanor—the first song a lot of the guys were standing there a little stoic, the classic groomsmen stance, and then by the end of the night to see the guys expressive and to see the hundreds of guys who came forward to say, “Hey, I’ve never had a father who blessed and prayed over me.” Even men with wrinkles and gray hair were saying that—so being able to pray over hundreds and hundreds of men.

And then even to see in the weekends after that where our worship services changed a bit because we saw the men leading out who had been here for that night.

Aaron

So, I’m such a believer in those events that we do, as long as we keep our focus on the purpose of them. It’s not just to have a good time. It’s not just to get together and have cool cars in the building. You know, eating good food. It’s an on-ramp into something more.

So, we’ll be rolling those back out next year as well.

Ryan

It was such a powerful, powerful night. And even your session teaching through what does it mean to really be a man, and then that blessing that you walked everyone through and to receive that at the end of the night, just hundreds and hundreds of men coming forward.

I remember praying with two guys, brothers-in-law, and they both wanted that blessing, they wanted to be the men that God always intended them to be. It was the first time they were asking for that. They knew that there was so much more that God wanted for them. It was truly powerful. It was probably the best way that I could describe that night.

Aaron

Yeah. And it was pretty wild. You did an amazing job emceeding that night, by the way.

Ryan

Did my part, you know?

Aaron

It’s not an easy thing to do. And I was pretty taken aback by the fact that you showed everybody of your baptism, which maybe we can put on this, this morning so everybody can see it.

Ryan

I'm up for that. That was a picture from many, many years ago. And I'd say, if we do a before and after, we're doing a great. We're aging well.

Aaron

One hundred percent. God is good.

Ryan

I think that was another thing that really hit me to, of just standing in that room, being on the stage, and knowing that years ago I was sitting there and convicted of the same challenge, very similar to what you were putting out there, what it meant to really follow Jesus. And to be a part of it from the other side is just remarkable. Love it.

And then, I want to switch gears here a little bit and talk about the discipleship efforts that we've put into place this year. Once again, something that you've said over and over again, you have no intentions of growing a big church, necessarily, but you want to be a part of true disciples coming to know Jesus more and more. And we've been looking for different ways, very similar to when you were talking about Men's Conference as an on-ramp... How do we help people get onto this path to look more and more like Jesus?

And one of the ways that we started doing that this year in a big way is *Rooted*. And for those who don't know, I'd love for you to just give a little pitch of, once again, what is *Rooted*? Why do we think it would be such a good for a thing for our church in this season?

Aaron

Yeah. I mean, I've been familiar with *Rooted* for a number of years. It actually originated in Kenya with a church there. And then there is a church on the west coast known as Mariners that actually took it, brought it to the west, and kind of rewrote it. We're friends with the team at Mariners and have been out there seeing what they have been doing through it.

So we've been kind of kicking the tires on *Rooted* for a while and decided, roughly about a year, year-and-a-half ago, we wanted to roll this out to our church. So, all of our staff did the pilot groups. We were in a *Rooted* group together just to go through this. And we just found it to be exactly as the name states, it just helps to provide a root system to your faith, which is so important. When you think about a tree's root system, when there is a storm that comes through, if the tree's roots aren't very deep and not intertwined with other trees it's going to fall.

I think that is what COVID showed us, not only in our church but in churches all around the country. When a crisis hit, I think one of the things we recognized, it's unfortunate, we realized that we had a big crowd, but did we have disciples? And I think for us to look at that to see 30 percent of our church peel away and never come back, but our giving

never dipped, that showed me that it was God pruning His church, “Hey, let’s not just develop a crowd, let’s not just gather a crowd, let’s make disciples, resilient disciples who will still follow Jesus even in the midst of crisis.”

And I’m not suggesting that everybody who left our church walked away from their faith. There were a lot of people who landed in other churches, or they moved, or whatever. But I think that it really challenged us to say, “Hey, let’s develop. Let’s not just grow wide, let’s also grow deep. And those things don’t need to be mutually exclusive. We don’t just say, “Hey we’re going to grow wide at the lack of depth or we’re going to grow deep because we don’t care about reaching people.”

We care about both. We care about reaching lots and lots of people, because there are so many people, now more than ever, there are more non-Christians alive today now more than ever, so we want to reach as many people as possible. I’m never going to hang a no-vacancy sign on the front of our church, but I’m also not going to try to develop systems just to grow a church for the sake of growth. We’re going to do everything that we can to reach people. But when we do, we want to provide a track where they understand why they believe and we’re providing a root system for them to be resilient disciples.

So, I’m thrilled about *Rooted*. We had like 1,000 people participate in it.

Ryan

A thousand people.

Aaron

I think we’ve already got close to 500 people already signed up for the winter session of *Rooted*. If you haven’t had a chance to get signed up, as you’re listening to this, I want to encourage people to do that.

There were like 37 baptisms that came out of *Rooted*. The *Rooted* celebration night was phenomenal. It was a Wednesday night here at the church and it was so cool to see, I don’t know, almost 800 people here for that. They were just like all in. There was nobody slacking that night. They were all leaning in.

Ryan

And I’ll tell you what I loved about it. It honestly made me think of youth ministry days when I used to serve in youth ministry in the sense that the celebration... We had a bunch of people come forward, like you said, and get baptized. And the people who were there were so excited that they didn’t stay in their seats. So when someone in their group was getting baptized, everyone flooded to go up front and they circled the baptistery, and as they came up everyone was just cheering and going nuts, almost as if

they were getting baptized themselves. And it was just a beautiful scene. This is it. They are getting it. They are truly rooted in community and what God has for them.

And just to tag on that endorsement, if you haven't been through *Rooted* do it. Even if you've been around church for a while and you're like, "Is this for me?" I'm telling you it is. I just went through it in the fall of this year. And what I love about it is that there is a lot of good discipleship stuff, but tagging all of that content in with experiences.

So *Rooted* is 10 weeks but it has three experiences: A prayer experience where you get to spend an extended time with God. A serving experience where you go outside the walls and partner with someone local here, and for me it was amazing.

We partnered with Isaiah 1:17, this organization that helps create temporary housing for kids who have been removed from their homes and are going into the DCS system. So they can house them there for about three days. And we got to go into this abandoned building, I mean I felt like Chip Gaines. I'm kicking down walls, knocking stuff down. And then to know at the end of the day what this space is going to be used for, it was a really cool thing.

And then you get an experience of: How do I share my story? Probably the most intimidating thing for most people is like, "How does my life and my faith intersect with people I love, and I work with, and I'm with on a regular basis?"

So, yeah, can't recommend it enough. *Rooted* in 2023. Get into it.

And 42 new groups launched from *Rooted*. They started for 10 weeks but then they said, "No, we want this longer." So that's been pretty cool too. Fifty-seven baptisms, 42 new groups launching out of it, and a lot of that relational side that you talked about in *We Are Traders Point* of we want to help people find life-giving relationships. And I feel like *Rooted* does that.

Want to switch gears?

Aaron

Sure.

Ryan

Alright. So we're going to switch now and let's talk about... And this one to me is, I think, one of the ones that a lot of people are going to perk up on this side of just all of the ways that we've made an impact as a church here in the city, but then around the world as well. So I just want to celebrate a little bit and then get you to just kind of speak into what it was like and how it hits your heart in this moment.

So for some of those who don't know, our outreach team has just exploded over the past few years. Shanna is doing an unbelievable job with FAM, our family and adoption

ministry. So we have over 200 volunteers helping us meet the needs of vulnerable children here, the Resource Center, all of that.

I know earlier in the season we got to actually go out and sit down in the barn and take a look at that Resource Center and know that week in and week out there are people all over the city coming here to get crucial supplies so that they can take care of their families and keep their families together.

Aaron

Yeah.

Ryan

And then, we're on the heels of this now, but an initiative that you just led, the Christmas Impact Project through Shepherd Community Center—this chance that we get to partner with a local organization to serve in the near east side of Indy. We're talking 10,000 gifts. Walk me through what's going through your mind, why you decided this is where we wanted to go as a church. And maybe even some of the impact that you've already seen as us going forward.

Aaron

Yeah. If I'm not mistaken I think this was our third year to do this.

Ryan

Sounds right.

Aaron

You know we used to do the Giving Tree a long time ago, which is a similar concept. But I like this partnership with Shepherd. We really believe in the people at Shepherd and what they are doing. They open up a Christmas store so that way families who are in need can actually go, and it's almost like they are shopping for gifts. So they can do so with dignity. They can pick out the gifts for their kids. They can take them, and they can wrap them, instead of us showing up at a door with a bag full of gifts that are just kind of random. That way it is really providing a source of dignity and hope for people.

I've really been encouraged by how our church has just wanted to jump in every year. I think our vision was too small a couple of years ago. And then last year I think I said, "Hey, we can inch this forward." I think this year it is inching forward again. It's just getting bigger and bigger every year. And it's really encouraging to me as a pastor just to see how excited people have gotten about it. We've had a number of people just come up and say, "Hey, I want to help." People out of state were like, "How do we do this?" So we are really encouraged by it.

Ryan

Amen.

And I heard that 10,000 gifts is what we committed, and they are thinking that we'll roughly serve 600 families on the near east side of Indy. They are looking at a very different Christmas if it hadn't been for the generosity of a lot of our people. I know we even pulled together a lot of people at our campuses to come together. Even small businesses and local organizations said, "Hey, how can we pull our resources together and make a really big impact in this way too?", which is, like I said, our people catching fire. And seeing the urgency of it has been pretty cool.

And toward the end of the year it was like leading one initiative after the next, because right before that you did the child sponsorship event with MOHI. So, man, we would love to hear a little bit about how that one got started and then what you saw that weekend. And maybe even catch everyone up to date on what are the final results of what we were able to do that weekend.

Aaron

Yeah. I don't know of anything that requires as little of an investment, like \$40 a month, which, obviously, I don't make too light of \$40 dollars a month, that's a lot. But a lot of us spend that on coffee. But for \$40 a month, you know, I've never seen anything move the needle to make as much of an impact as child sponsorship. And I've been kind of involved in this for about 13 years or so, both with MOHI and we also partner with Compassion. So we do child sponsorships in South America with Compassion. We do child sponsorships with MOHI in Africa, particularly Kenya.

So we hadn't done a sponsorship since, when was the last one with Compassion? I think it was 2015, 2016? So it's been a bit. And I think we did 5,000 child sponsorships on Easter Sunday back then with Compassion.

So we kind of ran this back with MOHI to do it. And I was really thrilled when we had over 1,500 people who chose to jump in and do child sponsorships, which the leadership of MOHI (if people recall Mary and Wallace Kamau were with us) they were thrilled. They said that was the second highest, no that was the highest child sponsorship since COVID and the second highest in their history. So we were just really thrilled by the fact that our people jumped in. Think about over 1,500 kids who just got sponsored and the ripple effects that God's going to create. It's really thrilling.

Ryan

That's incredible, man. And it's cool to be on both sides of it. And even some of our philosophy about outreach, we don't just want to send money to places; we don't want to just have transactional partnerships, but relational ones.

And right before summer I got to go over there for the first time to visit MOHI and to be in Kenya from Nairobi to Kalisie, and to see the legacy that Traders Point has over there.

I remember they would introduce me to someone. They were like, “Hey, this is Ryan. He’s from Traders Point.” And immediately people had so much gratitude and thankfulness for what has been built there through the generosity of this church, from centers to churches to new spaces and how they’ve been able to expand.

And now, even with our partnership on a leadership development side, because they have these huge goals of... They want to reach 100,000 kids and have 100 churches and 100 schools. And now we get to partner with them, not only financially and not only through child sponsorship, but also through how God has blessed us here through leadership development and what it looks like to raise up leaders to kind of move this vision forward. So it was cool to see a three-fold partnership really being played out all in one year.

Aaron

Yeah. And I just want to encourage anyone watching or listening to this right now that if you maybe feel like you are in a little bit of a rut spiritually, go to Kenya. Go to Kenya and spend three or four days with Mary and Wallace and Missions of Hope. Let them walk you around and show you the thing. It will humble you. It will excite you. It will... It’s like a shot of adrenaline into your faith because you just see what’s happening over there.

And it just shows you, collectively, what we can accomplish together when we all come together. So, I’m excited about that partnership and what’s going to happen in the future. I can’t wait to get back over there myself. It was 2019 the last time I was there. So, it’s time for me to get back over as well.

Ryan

Man, so much. And that’s just a glimpse from a very high level.

Aaron

I mean, the list of our partnerships is pretty extensive. We just don’t have enough time in this recording to talk about it, but I’m really excited about the organizations that we’re coming along side of and the difference that we are attempting to make throughout the world.

And you said it, Shanna leads this whole ministry and she’s done such an amazing job.

Ryan

That’s so good, man. And maybe this is unfair to ask of you, but as you look back on 2022, how would you tie a bow on it? What’s the word, or the phrase, or just the sentiment that comes from your heart as to the end of this as you look back on all that God did this past year? What’s the thing that comes to the surface?

Aaron

It might sound kind of cliché, but in honesty, I'm just very grateful, especially given the few years that we've come through and just how challenging they were—to kind of see what is emerging out of that. And I've said this, I think I've said this probably up front, I know I've said it to you and some of the teams, there just seems to be a really healthy, sweet spirit in our church right now. And I'm really grateful for that. I hope that it continues to last a long time. It's easy, I think, as leaders to hear maybe the criticisms or the negatives, but there are so many positives and there are so many things that God is doing, so I'm really...

I think I'm just kind of recognizing... I've said this. I kind feel like I'm at half-time in my ministry here. I'm not presuming anything. I'm not saying that I'll be here another 15 years because that's not entirely up to me. But I'm feeling very introspective right now. Okay? This is half-time.

When you think about all of the big games that have happened, a lot of stuff happens in that third quarter. It's big. So it's like, "Okay, God. What do you want to do next?" And I don't want to dictate that, but I also don't want to be asleep. I want my surf board ready, see a wave, let's ride it. So I'm really grateful.

Ryan

That's good, man. And I think one of the things that I saw in 2022, and it's something you highlighted a lot in a lot of different meetings and with the staff was, there is a momentum shift. It even comes out with the way people are sitting in the auditorium, the way they are leaned in and the change in worship. There is this momentum, this wave that we feel like we are getting to ride.

So as we are jumping into 2023, everyone is on the edge of their seats, what can you give us as to what can we look forward to in 2023? What are you ready to share about what we can expect?

Aaron

Well, I'm anticipating it to be a really big year. It's kind of like that concept... Jim Collins wrote about this, years ago, in his book, *The Principle of a Flywheel*. I feel like we've kind of got that flywheel kind of movement again. So the momentum, hopefully it's going to pick up.

And as I'm looking at just the schedule, I'm excited about what God's got in store for us. I've been able to kind of get away and kind of do some prayer and planning and vision casting, "God, where are You leading us as a church?" So, we'll be casting lots of vision for what God can do in and through our church in the next two to three years.

Sermon series wise, we're going to kick off the year with a short, little three-week series called *Letters From My Future Self*. I remember this book that I read when I was in middle school—checked it out of the public library. It was called *Me, Myself, and I*. It was

this fascinating book where the character gets in a time machine. He faces a problem, gets in a time machine, and goes back in time to meet with his old self and then the two of them get in the time machine and go back to meet up with the younger version of themselves. And then the three of them solve the problem. And I was fascinated by that whole concept.

So even in this message series... I've actually had this question asked of me by a lot of our younger leaders at times. Like, "Hey, if you could give yourself any advice when you were in your 20s or whatever, what would it be?" So this is kind of the concept of: what would it be like to get a letter from my future self? And so we're just going to walk through maybe two or three things. It's very personal for me. What would my future self want to say to the old Aaron? So we'll be walking through that.

And then right after that we're going to do an extended series in the book of Philippians, which is just a book of joy—joy and gratitude. So we'll walk through that collectively together as a church. That will lead us all the way through Easter.

Ryan

That's so good, man. I'm excited for 2023. And then looking back at 2022, I know for me, and lots of those listening, man, thanks for your leadership. Appreciate where you took us in 2022. Trust you, man, going into 2023.

Any closing remarks as you kind of close us out here?

Aaron

Well, I'd love to just wrap up with a passage of Scripture that I actually read during our *We Are Traders Point* series. I think it is just a great summary of our past and kind of where we are headed in the future.

You know, Isaiah the prophet talks about in chapter 43 where God was recalling to the Israelites how He had delivered them from Egyptian slavery. It's a pretty impressive story where He splits the Red Sea; they walked through on dry land, incredible. God's is kind of like, "Eh, you know what? Don't dwell on that. Forget all of that." He said this in verse 19. He says:

"For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland."

And I love that. As we just look at the legacy and the past—the long-term past of our church and then even the immediate past of the past year—let's give glory to God for it. Let's be encouraged by it. But let's not dwell on it. God is about to do something new. And that's really exciting. And I can't wait to be a part of that with you and everyone else who is a part of our church family.

Ryan

Let's do it.

Aaron

Let me pray.

God, we are just so grateful to You for the amazing things that You have done in the past year. And now we just look forward in eager anticipation to what You are going to do in a brand-new year. So, God, I pray that there would literally be thousands of lives that would be changed, that there would be hundreds of people who would come to know You for the first time, that collectively together as a church we would rally together and just be in expectation of the new things, the exciting things, the incredible things that you want to do through us, because right now this world is in a tailspin. It's either Christ or chaos. And we're seeing that right now. This is the world that You have made. And it makes no sense if we don't understand it through that lens.

So, God, I just pray that You would empower us, You would fill us. I pray that You would provide a sense of unity and generosity and alignment in our church so that we can bring as many people as possible to know You and then grow them deeper in their faith and trust in You. So that way we can withstand the storms and the crises that will come because we know they will. We just ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.