I Am Thankful for You

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Date: 31 December 2023

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Thank you.

This Sunday evening was just as packed, and we praise the Lord for so many people who are able to have been with us Christmas Eve morning and Christmas Eve night.
And there really is no better way for us to end a year than here in worship. There are a number of things that I would love to do if I were in charge of the calendar, which is a superpower I don't have, but one I would love to have.
I would always have Christmas on Sunday. I would always have New Year's Eve on Sunday. Now, that creates a problem. So, we'd have to have the earth spin a little bit differently one week a year. But if I was in charge of it, we'd figure it out. I love being here on the last day of the year. There's just something right and fitting about ending a year and going into a new year altogether here as the body of Christ.
[1:38] As we look toward next year, as always, we are completely dependent upon the Lord to provide for us, confident that He will because our God is faithful.

We look forward to a number of great things we know that He will bring to us. We also anticipate, as always, challenges and the testing of our faith that produces perseverance that we will need to live out both individually and as a congregation.
And I don't know about you, but for me, I love endings and I love new beginnings. I love the change that comes with that.
I love a season of reflection. I'm one who likes to look back and evaluate. I like to look back and try to see things that went well and to try to be grateful for those.
To try to see things that individually or maybe as a church that we can improve on in the next year. I love new beginnings, too. I love a new school year.
[2:44] I love a new calendar year. I love that time to reset and refocus. I like new challenges. I like the idea of, as a church, striving to take time to do both sides of that.

To look back in a biblical way, to look back in a way that reminds us of God's faithfulness, and to look forward with some fresh insight and some new energy, a new vision of what the Lord would have us to do.
About six weeks ago, when our senior adults were gathering for their Thanksgiving dinner, Gary Broughton asked me to share a brief devotion with them at that dinner.
And as I was preparing for that, my mind went to Philippians 1, verses 3 to 11. And that text deals with Paul being thankful and grateful for the body of Christ.
It deals with his affection for that church when he would remember them and pray for them. And I shared a few brief thoughts with our senior adults that night, just about some things that I am thankful for and some of the reasons for the affection in my heart toward this dear congregation.
[4:04] And really, ever since that evening together with our senior adults, this text has just stayed on my mind. It's just been one of those texts through the Thanksgiving and Christmas season that I just find in my own heart, my own mind going back to over and over again.

And so, what I want to do as we end this new year and begin a brand new year together as a church, I want to go back to this text that has been really dear to me for the last couple of months and just share from my heart to you specifically what I love about you as a church, how I thank God for you as a church, and the things that I want to give praise to God for the work He has done in you and through you and by you.
So, in Philippians 1, let me just read this text to you. Philippians 1, 3 to 11. It says, It says,

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What we see in this text is that Paul feels thankful. He remembers the church because he thinks often of the church.
He's prayerful. He feels joy. He thinks about the partnership that he has with the body of Christ, that he's not by himself, that he's not a one-man show, that he's a part of a larger body of Christ that are together collectively doing the Great Commission.
[7:01] He thinks about the faithfulness of Christ and how that is our ultimate hope, that it's not in what we do ultimately or what we purpose to do.

It's the fact that the Lord will complete the work He has begun. He mentions the affection he feels for the church.
It's not just simply that they are workers. They are family. They're not just simply connected by task. They're connected by love.
There is affection. There is a personal connection he has with them. And his love for them is rooted in the reality of eternity.
What is driving the urgency in his heart, both for himself and for the church, is this understanding of eternity, that we don't have all the time in the world on this earth, that our time is short, and when our time here comes to an end, we move to the life which is to come that lasts forever and forever.
[8:13] So with these thoughts in mind and the example of Paul as my guide here in Philippians 1, I want to just do a bit of what he did and using the text of Scripture here to help organize my own thoughts to share with you why I am so thankful for you, how I pray for you as a church, and why I have such affection for you.

It is kind of a unique Sunday in the way the church calendar falls. Here between Christmas and New Year's, this ending of a year, the start of a new year, it just seems a fitting time for me to say things that I hope that you know, that I trust you've heard me say before, but I don't want you to assume, I want you to hear.
I want my family to know that I love them, yes, by my actions, but also by my words. I don't want my family to assume that I love them or think that I love them or hope that I love them.
I want them to know that I love them by my life. I also want to look my family in the eye and tell them, I love you and I'm here for you. And I feel the same way with you as a church.
I hope that you know that I love you. I hope that you think that's true. I hope my life shows that's true, but I don't want it just to be assumed. I want to be able to look you in the eye as a church and say that I love you and I thank God for you and I'm grateful for you and I have affection for you and I see what God is doing in your life and through this congregation.
[9:54] And myself, though the pastor, I'm just a member of the church. I benefit from being a member of the church as you do. I'm blessed by being a part of the body of Christ as you are.

And I just want to share biblically and specifically how that's true. If you're a goal setter, this is a good time of year to set goals.
If that's not your thing, that's fine. But I do think evaluation is helpful. And I think that organizing your goals for the new year around the themes of Scripture are particularly helpful.
Physical goals are good. In fact, I feel convicted, John. I'm going to join you. I'm convicted. I'm going to match this year how much you said you've run since April. I've got a mile and a half in me. Not at one time. I'm not crazy. But I've got 365 days to run a mile and a half. Somebody help me with the math and let me know what I need to do each week.
[11:02] I'm going to do it. You've inspired me. That will be more than I ran this year, by the way. So it is growing. I like to grow as a person. But whether you're someone who sets specific goals or writes them out, some of you do, some of you don't.

But I do think it's important to look back and look ahead. Now, we've got to be careful. We talk about this pretty often here. There's a biblical way to look back and there's an unbiblical way to look back.
The unbiblical way to look back is to look backwards and be stuck back there and talk about what you used to do and how you used to be faithful, how you used to serve, how you used to share the gospel, how you used to do these things and just live in the past and miss today.
That's an unbiblical way to look back. A very unhelpful way to look back is to look back and reminisce about how great things used to be and complain about how terrible things are today because you're not going back to that place.

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You're in the world that you're in today. A biblical way to look back is to be reminded of the good things God has done and the ways that He has demonstrated His faithfulness and use that as an invitation for you to give praise to the Lord and to build your faith and your reliance and dependence upon Him knowing that He who is faithful does not change.
[12:34] So, there's a good way to look back. There's an unhelpful way to look forward. It's unhelpful to look forward by just being pessimistic.

It's unhelpful to look forward and just assume that things are bad, they're going to get worse, they're going to always be bad, and there's no hope, and there's no purpose, and why are we here anyway? That's not helpful.
What is helpful is to be realistic and to say that one of the things we know by reading this Scripture is that life on this earth is hard, and things are difficult, and they may get more difficult, but our God is faithful.
And all of the world is driving to a purposeful end. And that purposeful end is the culmination of all things where our Lord and Savior returns.
And we want to be found faithful to have done the work He has given us to do. And whatever sacrifice lies ahead, whatever pain may lie ahead, whatever disappointment may lie ahead, according to the Scripture, all of these things are light and temporary, momentary, compared to the glory that will be revealed.
[13:59] And so, we look backwards in a way to be thankful and in a way to be faithful because of God's goodness. We look ahead in a way that reminds us of the purpose that God has for us and the urgency of the hour.

Then, when you consider that you're not doing that alone, you've got a thousand people every Sunday that are here to help you, to pray for you, to support you, to encourage you, to partner with you in the work that you're doing.
That just puts wind in our sails and propels us forward. Now, what we have to understand as a church is that we don't want to get our measure of faithfulness according to how many people are with us.
There are faithful churches that are way, way larger than we are. There are faithful churches that have just a few. But I do want you to understand it is a blessing to be a part of a church at a certain time in history where God has seen fit in His providence and kindness to give us so many people to partner together and be a part of our spiritual family.
I believe with all of my heart in God's goodness that our church's most fruitful days of ministry are ahead of us.
[15:36] I believe that with all of my heart. I have no idea if our church's largest days are ahead of us. I have no idea. The Lord has seen fit to grow our church quite a bit in recent days.

And I praise Him for that because every person who's joined our church is new family members. It's a great gift. I'm thankful. But one of these days, the cost of belonging to a church may be so high that people drop.
One of these days, the persecution for believers may create some changes where people aren't here. I suspect and trust all true believers will be here and all true believers will remain and be a part of what the church is doing.
But I don't know what the future holds. If you look at the numbers, the demographics, the research, even in our own state, the number of churches that are in decline is staggering.
I don't know what the future holds for us in terms of size. What I do know is that if we are faithful to what the Lord has called us to do, we have great days ahead.
[17:13] Not easy days. Not days that the world may say are worthwhile. All of you in this room, I trust, make sacrifices already that the world may look at and say, why do you do that?

But this text reminds us that He who began a good work and you will complete it. Our work is not done and the Lord will complete the work. Which gives me all the hope that I need.
All the vision that I need is this. That Jesus Christ is working. He's building His church. He's accomplishing His purposes.
And He has graciously allowed us to be a part of that. And that is enough to get me up in the morning and be excited about what the Lord has called us to do.
So as I think about the language in Philippians 1, and I think about how Paul shares his love and affection for this church, I want to do the same thing for you.

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[18:23] Number one, I am thankful for your love of the Bible and desire to learn more of it. I am thankful for your love of the Bible and your desire to learn more of it.

The Bible saturates all that we do here, and I love that that's true. 2 Timothy 3.14 says, Every ministry of our church has that same shared conviction, that the greatest thing we can do is teach the Bible to people and strive for them to love the Word and love Christ more.
And that is in complete alignment here. There's things in our church that aren't perfect. There's things that we can be stronger in. That's always true. And we need to strive with the power of the Spirit to do what we can to grow in areas of weakness or to strive to get better in all areas.
But one thing that is absolutely true at our church is that all of our ministries, without exception, have a shared conviction that the Bible is our authority.
It is our standard. And when we gather together, the greatest use of our time is to teach the Word that our people, whatever ministry it may be, would know the Bible better, and because of that, love Christ more.
[20:07] I love that about you as a church. As you've heard me say the last month, I'm inviting you, those who would like you to join with me in reading through the Bible in 2024.

The reading plan that I'm using is available at our Ministry Connection, printed out. You can also download it or print it out from our church website. We've also sent that out by our church newsletter and email the last month or so.
I encourage you to get a copy of that or print that out and join with me if you would like to starting tomorrow. The reason is that while it's essential that when we gather as a church, that the Bible is the forefront of all that we do, that's essential, but that's not enough.
It's not enough for us just to sit under the preaching or teaching of God's Word once a week. We need to individually have the same conviction daily in our life, in the same way that we're not going to gather for a worship service without the reading and study of God's Word, in the same way we don't want to go through a day individually where we're not in the Word ourselves.
It's important, yes, that we are in the Word as a congregation, but also that we are in the Word individually. 2 Timothy 2.15, Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of truth.
[21:42] So, we need our Bibles open on the Lord's Day, and we need the Bibles opened each day. And if you go back to verse 3, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, I want you to notice this connection in Paul's mind, that he thinks about the church, and that church reminds him of God.

And as he thinks about God, it helps him be reminded to pray for the church. These are things that absolutely fit together, that the more that you're a part of the church, the more you should know God, and the more you spend time with the Lord, the more you should be praying for your church. These two things should be together. You come to church, it's all about Christ. When you spend time by yourself in prayer and at home reading your Bible, it should remind you of the blessing we have of the church.
I thank God when I remember you, he says. I think also the words of Deuteronomy 32, verse 45, when Moses finished speaking all these words to all of Israel, he said to them, take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law.
For it is no empty thing for you, but your very life. And so just as our church has the Bible at the center of all that we do, and I'm thankful for that, I want to encourage you moms and dads to make sure that you're not only raising your children in a church where that's true, but that you're raising your children in a home where that's true.
[23:42] So I'm thankful that our church loves the Bible, and it's the foundation of every ministry. I'm thankful for that. And one of the ways I pray for you is that this would be true in our hearts, in our homes, as well as our congregation.

I'm also grateful, number two, that you love all the generations and emphasize the whole family. I'm thankful that you as a church love all the generations and emphasize the whole family. Psalm 145 verse 4 says, One generation shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty deeds.
On the glorious splendor of your majesty and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness.

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One generation to the next. And one of the things that I love about this specific local assembly is that we've got people that work hard every single day to make sure that the entire family is prioritized.
[25:15] To make sure that every ministry is learning the things of God and teach them to then praise the name of God.

I love seeing our preschoolers learn about Jesus. I love on Wednesday nights when our children are coming into, they're at the south entrance and they're doing their final rehearsal, their Awana verses.
I love to hear that. I love to see our children coming out of Sunday school on Sundays with their sheets that they've learned and things that they've made to help them to understand Bible stories.
I love watching our children as they learn and grow and know more of God's Word to see their conversations and hear their Bible language grow and increase.
I love to be around our teenagers and to watch how they are growing rapidly in the things of the Lord. I love how our high schoolers and our Crossroads ministry are teaching our students not only to know the Bible, but to think biblically and to think critically.
[26:23] I love that our adult ministry and men's and women's ministry and music ministry takes the Word so seriously and strives to help people of all ages to know and love the Bible.

I love that at this local church you're not going to outgrow the church. You're not going to become to a point where you say, I think I'm too old for that church.
Now that church is just for the young people. I'm too old. Or I'm too young for that church. That church is just for old people. I'm too young. Or I feel like I'm learning a lot of the Bible.
I'm growing spiritually. I think I've outgrown what that church has to offer. I love that this church loves all generations and emphasizes the entire family.
And that's important because again, back to Philippians 1, he says, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.
[27:30] This is something for everyone in the church. He's praying for all of the church, not just the children, not just the senior adults, not just the married people, not just the singles. It's for all of you.

There's a joy that's made complete with all of the family of God. And that is so important. That is so important.
Third, I'm grateful that you allow your leaders to lead. I'm grateful that you allow your leaders to lead.
I tell people all the time that I think if you're doing it right, all ministry is hard work. But that this church is a great place to do hard work.
Hebrews 13, 7 says, remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
[28:37] And this is for me, this is a very sobering text. Because what this text says is the church should look to their leaders, look to their shepherds, follow them, imitate their life, imitate their faith.

And the question becomes, if you as a congregation allow your leaders to lead, not according to their every whim, I'm talking about biblical leadership, I'm not talking about dictatorship, I'm talking about people who are serious about the Bible, serious about prayer, serious about biblical shepherding.
If you allow your shepherds to lead you and you follow them and you imitate their life and you imitate the way that they trust and follow the Lord, that then becomes a massive question for the leaders if they follow us, what will this church look like?
And this is something that I'm grateful for that you allow your leaders to lead, but this is something that for me, and I pray for all of our leaders, that you never stop feeling the weight of this.
Husbands and fathers, you need to lead your families, but you need to be reminded you're not a dictator, you're a servant.
[30:10] You're not just a boss in your home, you're a shepherd. And husbands and fathers, if your wife and if your children follow your example, will they become more like Christ or more like the world?

Biblically, unapologetically, husbands need to lead. Fathers need to lead.
But it's a servant leadership. It's a humble, Christ-centered leadership. It's not a leadership of demanding your own way.

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It's not a leadership of you raise your voice and everybody's afraid of you because you can yell louder and longer and deeper than anybody else. It's not a leadership that if you don't get your way, that you become a nightmare to live with.
It's a leadership that says, I love Christ above all else, and because I do, I want to give my life in service to my wife and to my kids.
[31:33] Biblical leadership in the home is strong and it's gracious. It's passionate and it's gentle.

it's Christ-centered. But it gets worked out in relationships with people.
And I'm praying more and more and more that the men and the husbands and the fathers in this church will be the kind of Christ-centered leaders that we have been called to be.
And that as our families follow our lead, they become more like Jesus.
That's the heart of Hebrews 13. Follow your leaders. Imitate their faith. But what happens in a church if the leaders aren't faithful?
[32:43] What happens in a church if the leaders aren't biblical? What happens in a home if the leader's not faithful?

It leads to chaos and confusion. One of the reasons why people come to our church staff and tend to stay a long time, there's a lot of reasons.
One of them is because as a church you follow your leaders. Not blindly. You shouldn't follow us blindly ever.
You only follow us if we're following the Lord. You only believe us if what we say comes from the Word. You only follow us if our lives, they're not perfect. Don't expect any person to be perfect other than Christ.
Do expect your leaders to be faithful examples. And you're a church that makes it easy to lead. It's not easy work. But you allow us to what God's called us to do.
[33:48] Now, I take that as gratitude and thanksgiving. I give that praise to the Lord and then I want to remind myself and our other leaders here what 1 Peter 5 says.

I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that's going to be revealed. Shepherd the flock of God that is among you exercising oversight not under compulsion but willingly as God would have you.
Not for shameful gain but eagerly not domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.
This is important. Philippians 1 back to verse 8 for God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.
That's the heart of leadership. That we live our lives as leaders under the umbrella of knowing that God sees all God knows all God is never fooled and that the affection that we have as leaders must be the affection of Christ Jesus.
[35:05] We are to love Christ and we are to love like Christ. Shepherding. Any of the terms the New Testament uses a pastor, a shepherd, an elder, an overseer, any of those terms there is a certain work those men are supposed to do but there is also a certain love that should motivate them.

Just being smart or just being an organizer or just being gifted is not enough biblically. You are to love your flock.
Not domineering them, not dominating them to use the language of 1 Peter 5 but by being examples to them. And so when Paul says in verse 8, I yearn for you with the affection of Christ Jesus, what he is saying is that this is about relationship.
This isn't just about strategy. This isn't just about organizational charts. This isn't just about how many churches can we start or how many ministries can we start or how many people will show up. this is about loving people and you cannot love people from a distance. You've got to be among them which is why in 1 Peter 5 the language is shepherd the flock of God among you.
[36:27] And so as I am thankful that you as a church allow your leaders to lead, it drives me to be prayerful that your leaders would be worthy of following.

Not blindly, biblically. And for the young men in our church, college students, high school students, middle school students, children, who the Lord may one day call to preach, may one day call to be a leader in a church, hear me clear at a young age, hear me clear on this, education matters, yes, but it's not enough.

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Experience is good, but it's not sufficient. You must love Christ and you must love the people. If you are a high schooler and you feel in your heart a desire to preach and the reason you want to preach is because you want a job where you can tell everybody what to do, pick another one.
Trust me, pick another one. If you want a job where you can have set office hours and then clock out and you're done, pick another one.
If you want a job where you can study and teach, you just don't care about what the people think, do, or say, pick another one. All of those things are part of the job, but if it's absent of love, it's not faithful ministry.
[38:02] And so, while I'm thankful that you as a church allow your leaders to lead, I'm prayerful that your leaders would always be worthy of following their faith.

Fourth, I'm thankful for the unity of the faith that we enjoy. I'm thankful for the unity of the faith that we enjoy.
Verse 7, Paul said it this way, it is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart for you are all partakers with me of grace.
What Paul's saying in Philippians 1 is we're all a family. We're all a part of a family. We're all partakers of grace.
Yes, there's different roles. Yes, there's different expectations, but we are all a part of the family. Ephesians 4 says it this way, the shepherds and teachers are to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood.
[39:21] The unity that matters in the congregation is the unity of the faith. True unity comes from common convictions. That's what binds our hearts together.

Not everybody in this church has the same opinion, nor is it necessary. necessary. But I will tell you what I've told a lot of friends of mine, a lot of pastors, that one of the things I'm so thankful for, while each week I feel like I've got more to do than I can get done, each week I feel like no matter how much I do, there's things I didn't get to that I needed to.
Each week, no matter how much I study, I feel like there's more I should have read, could have read. I always feel that way. But let me tell you what I don't do. I don't have time stolen from me because of conversations of persnickety church members who want to fight over silly things.
None. Never. I have. I'm quite familiar with it. But praise God, it's been a long time. Questions? Sure. Things to work through, challenges to work on, absolutely. Pressing challenges that come from all the ministries of our church and the size of our church, sure, all kinds of things to work through.
[40:59] All kinds of decisions we have to make that we can't chapter and verse and we've got to work through them and think through them. But I never have a week where I have a church member who just wants to complain or argue.

Never. I never go home from a day and think I wasted two hours of my day over the silliest, most trivial things that have no bearing on anything whatsoever.
I don't. And I'm thankful for that. Because what that means is that collectively as a church, we have chosen to live in the unity of the faith.
It does not mean we have the same opinion on every single thing. It does not mean every decision that somebody makes is a decision you would have made. It does not mean every decision that gets made is the exact way that I would do it.
Nor should it. I don't win every vote in a staff meeting. Nor should I. There are things that we do, nothing of a biblical nature.
[42:14] There are things we do if it were just me and only me. You might do them slightly different. But it's not just me and only me. There are things where you say, you know what, if you were in charge of everything for a week, there may be things you think we could do differently.

And that's okay. Unity of the faith doesn't mean that we have every single preference the same. What it does mean is that we're willing to put preferences aside for the sake of pressing forward for the glory of Christ Jesus.
And you want to ask me, humanly speaking, why I'm thrilled to have been able to serve here for 23 years? It's because I know there's not many churches that that's true.
You have chosen to be the kind of church that seeks a biblical unity. Or it's okay to talk through disagreements.

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It's okay to share a differing opinion because it's done under the banner of the lordship lordship and glory of Christ.
[43:25] And I'm thankful that that's true. I'm thankful that we, number five, stay focused on what matters most. There's a lot of things that can distract a church.

When I was a young, new pastor, this is something I didn't, I wasn't aware of. I wasn't aware of how hard it is to try to keep a group of leaders and a church congregation collectively together so focused because there are so many good things that can distract from what we must do.
And I'm thankful that you as a church helped to make that happen. I think about the words of Hebrews 10, familiar words to you, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and to good deeds, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.
Church, there's only a few things that we must do. We must meet together. We must preach the Word. We must sing hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs.
We must pay attention to the public reading of God's Word. Lord, we must use our spiritual gifts to build the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit, and we must love, serve, and encourage each other.
[44:53] Those are things we must do. And what causes so many churches to pull apart is they just get distracted.

And I'm so thankful that you as a church have chosen to focus on what matters most. Go back to verse 9 of Philippians 1.
It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment. We must be a discerning church.
Discerning theologically, discerning doctrinally, discerning ecclesiologically, discerning in a sense of how we spend our time and what we prioritize. We must grow in discernment so that we do not get distracted.
Just a couple more very quickly. Number six, I'm thankful that you worship through giving with joy. I'm thankful that you worship through giving with joy. Later on in Philippians, Paul actually addresses that very thing, that there's a love of financial, sacrificial investment in the kingdom.
[46:12] Second Corinthians 9. 7 says, each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Because of your generosity, our church has been able to give over $300,000 away this year to mission causes all around the world. Because of your generosity, our churches will give over $100,000 to world mission causes that goes to help international missions and state missions and church planting and to support orphan care and to support disaster relief and to support care for children, to support care for seniors where they have places to live in our state.
Because you give, we have been able to meet needs of families in our church that are hurting through our love account. Because you give, this year we were able to add 90 additional parking places a year ago and we needed every single one of them.
It's a biblical thing to worship through giving. If that's not a part of your life, I invite you to do so. Not because I'm trying to twist your arm to give, not because we're going to shut the lights off if you don't give more, but because it's one of the ways we express our love for the Lord.
It's also one of the ways we fight against a love for worldly things by being quick to give unto the Lord to remind ourselves that He's the owner of all things and the giver of every good gift.
[47:51] I'm thankful for deacons who serve and pray for our members. 1 Timothy 3, 8 to 13, describes what the characteristics of deacons should be.

This day, as is true every single Lord's Day, we meet in the reception room, we get on our knees physically, and we pray for you.
Pray for those who teach. Pray for those who lead. We pray for those who are new to our church. We pray for those who are serving in various ministries.
We pray for those who are unbelievers. We pray for people to be saved. We pray for you every single Lord's Day. Our staff and our deacons, that's how we begin.
Right in the reception room, when we started that years ago, it was really easy. It's getting harder not to pray, just to get up and down. Actually, getting down is easy. Getting up is getting harder.
[48:57] Every week. Group of men physically on their knees praying for you. That's what deacons do.

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Deacons serve. Deacons in the church biblically are to lead the way in serving. Our deacons have widows they pray for and serve and help to take care of.
Our deacons serve through helping with the Lord's Supper when we do that once a month. Our deacons come and give some time at the church for buildings and grounds to help serve upkeep in that way.
Our deacons gather every Lord's Day to pray specifically for you. Our deacons give leadership over our love account to help with those requests and those needs. They love you and serve you.
Our faithful men, imperfect men like all of us, but faithful men who desire to serve you and help you to know Christ. And I am so thankful that in 23 years of serving as a pastor here at this church, the deacons of this church have been nothing but a kind encouragement to me.
[50:10] And to use the words of Philippians 1 verse 5, they are true partners in the gospel and I'm so thankful. And then lastly, I'm thankful for a staff of men and women who truly love the flock among us.

Again, to use the language of 1 Peter 5, shepherd the flock of God among you who are to know our flock, to love our flock, and to care for them. On our ministry staff, we have three in their 20s.
And I'm really glad about that because some of us around here are getting kind of old. We've got three in their 20s. We need fresh eyes and strong backs.
We need young people and we've got good young leaders. I won't give you any names, but we've got three in their 30s, one of who's about to be in his 40s.
He's getting older. Pray for John, I mean, pray for whoever that may be. We've got three in our ministry staff in their 50s, one of whom's 60s right around the corner.
[51:28] And I'm grateful for that too because when our staff meets, we've got a variety of ages, a variety of experiences, a variety of gifts, but truly one passion.

that is to glorify Christ by leading and serving you well. So, all of these things are things I'm grateful for.
All of these are things that cause me to give praise to the Lord as I think about my love for you.
None of these are blessings I want to take for granted.
None of these are things I want us just to assume. They're always there. These are things we pray for. These are things we fight for. These are things that we teach and care for.
But I want to be clear. I want to be clear to you to know that what you as a congregation have collectively chosen to do with how you live, how you serve, how you give, how you follow, how you partner in the ministry is such a blessing.
[52:54] Now, the most important thing is not that your pastor feels blessed. That's not the most important thing. The most important thing is that Christ is glorified. Regardless of how I feel, the most important thing is that Christ is glorified.

But I do want you to hear me say clearly. And I do not want you to wonder or assume. I want you to know that with all of my heart, I love you.
And I thank God for you. And when I read the words of Paul in Philippians 1, I just sit back and say, Amen.
That's how I feel with you. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you. Always in every prayer of mine for you, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.
And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion of the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in my defense and confirmation of the gospel.
[54:12] For God is my witness how I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, the glory and praise of God.

Those are the words of the Holy Spirit penned by Paul to the church at Philippi. And they so clearly express my heart and my love and my affection to you.
And I want you to hear me say that I love you. I'm thankful for you. I am grateful for the year God has given us. And it is with complete excitement and eager expectation that I look toward this next year together in ministry and service with you.

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Would you pray with me? Lord, we thank you today for your kindness. We thank you for this church. And on this day, I'm thankful for a chance just to be able to express my gratitude through biblical language of how you have been so good and so kind.
And we give you the praise for it all and ask that you would continue to help us to grow in knowledge and discernment and unity of the faith and to continue to strive to be the church you have called us to be.
[55:41] It's in Christ's name. Amen. Real quick, before you're dismissed, we've got a few that we need to present to you as new members. If you are joining our church, if you would come forward at this time, I'm going to call off their names in just a moment.

We do have several that we're still meeting with and following up on. We're excited about that because we've got a few that we are talking to about what it means to know Christ. A couple that we're talking to about what it means to be baptized and we intend to be baptized.
You're welcome. That's all. This is not what it means to be baptized. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome.
You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome.
You're welcome. You're welcome.

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