New Commitments to Old Truths

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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. On Christmas Day, it's just such an amazing blessing to see so many people hungry to worship, hungry to gather, to sing and to hear the Word.

And just had an amazing Christmas Day time here. And now on New Year's Day, to be able to begin our new year to gather and worship is just a really great blessing.
It's good to see all of you here. I know that we've got some guests with us with a holiday weekend. So, if you're new to our church, thank you for being here. Some of you may be looking for a church home.
And we would love to serve you and get to know you. Others of you may be in town visiting family. And if that's the case, we're so thankful that you've chosen to come and worship the Lord with us today.
And for our members and regular attenders, we don't take you for granted. So many in this church who are so faithful, so committed. And we're thankful for your week after week after week diligence as you serve and as you worship.
[1:10] And as you faithfully help us do what the Lord has called us to do. So, we're just thankful today to see all of you here. This is, in some ways, an unusual Sunday.

It is not often that Christmas Day and New Year's Day lands on Sunday. It won't happen again, I think, for 11 years. I think it's 2033, the next time we get Christmas and New Year's on the same day.
And so, in some ways, this is a very unusual thing. In another way, though, today is very normal. It's the Lord's Day.
And the church gathers on the Lord's Day, no matter the day of the year. And so, in some ways, while it's a special day, one of my favorite parts of this church is that while we do special things and try to make things unique, the heartbeat of our church is what we do every Sunday.
The heartbeat of who we are is just striving to gather, to encourage, to teach, to train, to make disciples, to worship. And that whether it is Easter Sunday or Labor Day Sunday, there are people who are going to show up ready to worship, to pray, to sing, to study, and to serve.
[2:28] And I'm just thankful that whatever day of the year it is, and whether it's a holiday, a high attendance day, a low attendance day, that our church has people who just love to be a part of the body of Christ.

And I hope as we approach this new year that we will do so with joy, that we will do so with an urgency in the moment, not taking for granted any day, recognizing that every day the Lord gives us is a blessing and is a gift, and is something that we need to enjoy.
I know that for some, New Year's is a time of making resolutions or setting goals. For some, that's a big deal.
For some, you don't do it. For some, it's somewhere in between. But I suspect whether you make goals and write them down or not, it would be impossible for any of us to approach a new year without giving some thought to evaluating the last year and giving some thought to what we want to do in the year to come.
Whether or not you have a specific list or you have specific habits written down that you want to change, I'm sure all of us have given some thought to how did last year go?
[3:48] How did last year go for our family? How did last year go for our marriage? How did last year go with our kids? How did last year go with our finances? How did last year go with our spiritual lives?

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And as we think about last year, we instinctively think about the year to come. And again, whether or not you're a detailed goal maker or not, we can't help but think forward and wonder what will this year bring.
For some of you in the congregation today, you have very real challenges you already know this year is bringing. Others of you have really exciting things happening in 2023 that you already are excited about.
And for all of us, there are unknown blessings that await and to be sure, unknown challenges that await. And that's true for our church as well. There are things we're excited about for this year and things we already have planned and things that we know will roll around at a certain time of year that we're looking forward to and some blessings we don't know about and some challenges we don't know about.
But as we begin a new year, it's good for us as a congregation to remind ourselves of who we are and what we are to do.
[5:06] And so I want to take some time this morning and just rally our minds and our hearts around this theme of new commitments to old truths.

That as a church, what we need to be about is making fresh, new commitments to old truths.
Our church doesn't exist to reinvent anything. We're not trying to outdo anybody else.
We're not trying to compete with anybody else. All we want to do is be faithful to the old truths that God has given to us. But to be faithful, we need to make fresh, new commitments to these old truths.
And there are a number of places we could turn to, but I want to invite you to open with me to Acts chapter 2 where we find in verse 42 a very well-known, very common scripture.
[6:08] This will not be new to you, but I think helps us in a very succinct and clear way have a vocabulary that we can use in common today from scripture to think about what kind of new commitment we want to make to certain old truths.

So we'll look at a couple of different scriptures today, but Acts 2.42 is what I want to have in front of you. And my mindset today is a bit as if we were just as a congregation having a family meeting. More so as if this was the beginning of a new year and just as a family, we were just gathered in our living room. More of me just trying to share my heart as a pastor of our church to help encourage us and to remind us and to focus us.
On purpose today, I just want to say things that are old. Not trying to say things that are new. Not trying to say things today that are difficult in any way.
I just want to say old truths that we all know, but we need to make a fresh new commitment to. In Acts 2.42, I think we find a great place for us to rally around as the text describes here in the early church, verse 42, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers.
[7:54] The apostles' teaching, the fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers. Some of you will be familiar with this story.

Probably the most well-known football coach in the NFL's history is a guy named Vince Lombardi. If you're a football fan at all, you'll be very familiar with that name. There's a famous story.
It was July of 1961. And the year before, the Green Bay Packers had lost a heartbreaking loss in the championship game to Philadelphia.
And so, they have all the off-season there to grieve over that loss and to think back and replay in their minds what they could have done differently and how they let that game slip away, how close they were to winning that championship.
And in July of 1961, 38 players that comprised the Green Bay Packers met for the very first day of training camp. Now, most of these three dozen professionals are men who had tasted the pain and the heartbreak of the season before.
[9:07] And as they gathered there, the players, the coaches, were so eager to correct what went wrong in the championship game. And they already had their mindset on the end of the season trying to hoist that championship trophy.

And Vince Lombardi famously began training camp July of 1961 in what is now a very iconic way. All these men who are professionals, the best in the world at what they do playing football, he didn't speak to them that first day about strategy, didn't speak to them about changes they're going to make in their blocking schemes or in their routes.

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Instead, what he famously did was he picked up a football and held it up and he began training camp by saying, gentlemen, this is a football.
And it was his way of saying, we have to start all over again. We don't take anything for granted. We don't pretend that we just automatically pick up right where we left off last season.
We've got to remind ourselves of the basics. This is a football. It was his iconic way of reminding his players that we have to never forget the basics.
[10:37] That's where my heart is this morning. So borrowing from Vince Lombardi, I would say, church, this is a Bible. This is our authority.

This is our standard. We are not the world. We're not trying to be the world. We're not trying to compete with the world.
We are the body of Christ, sinners saved by grace, existing and living for the glory of God.
And so with that in mind, let's just take some time this morning and here on this very, not just the first Sunday of the year, but the first day of a new year, remind ourselves and make new commitments to very old truths.
I just want to walk through the elements that we see in Acts 2.42 and I'll share a few other scriptures as we go along the way. And I also just want to take some time as a family and just share with you from my perspective and what I see, how we as a church are doing with this.
[11:56] We understand we're never a finished product. Until the Lord returns, there's always work to do. There is nothing we could look at in scripture where we would ever say we've arrived.

There's nothing we would ever say we're perfect at this. And so what I want to try to do is, I hope in a helpful and gracious way, say, hey, by God's grace, here are some things we're doing well.
Not for the sake of pride, not for the sake of complacency, but encouragement to say, here's some things I think as a church we're doing really well. And also to be honest and say, here are some things and some place I think as a church we can get better.
Not in a frustrating way, not in a scolding way at all. Just to say as a congregation, collectively, I do think there are some things that we can improve on, that we can be more faithful, more obedient, which is good because that's what we want to do.
That's who we want to be. And so let's just walk through this as a family, considering these old truths as I ask each of us today to make a new commitment to living out these old truths.
[13:08] So the first thing we see in Acts 2.42 is that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. This, of course, would be the teaching they had heard from Christ.

This is the preaching, the teaching of the apostles that they are involved in today through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We have this collected Word of God superintended by the Holy Spirit that gives us the teaching of Christ, the teaching of the apostles, that we have the New Testament that we can study, that we can read, that we preach.
And so I think the first way that I want to just say what we must be about is the preaching of the Word. We must be a church devoted to the preaching of the Word.
And this is, every Sunday, a two-way street. This reminds the church that the pastor who is preaching the Word of God must be faithful to teach the Word and to be in the Word and that the congregation is reminded that the primary way that the pastors of a church serve the congregation, not the only way, but the primary way that pastors of a church serve the congregation is through the faithful teaching of Scripture.
It's not the only thing that we do. It's not the only thing that we are called to do. It's the primary way, though, that we are to faithfully serve the church is to preach the Word.
[14:38] And the greatest example or picture or test of this is you just look around the congregation.

You go to any church, any Lord's Day, you just look around the congregation. You just see, do people prioritize the Bible?
Do they need a Bible? Is the preacher preaching the Bible? And you wouldn't know that unless the Bible is open. And if the Bibles are open in your laps, the pastor better be sure what he's saying comes from the Word.
And if the pastor is laboring in the Word, he's going to want to see that people have the Bible open because you should not take my Word for anything. You need to test my words to make sure my words come from the Word.

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And so, on the front row, we've got about 15 people, and I see 15 Bibles. That's how it should be because we prioritize the preaching of the Word.
[15:41] But the priority of preaching is not just something the pastor does. It's something the entire congregation must have as its priority. And so, in Acts 2.42, they were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching.

It speaks to the seriousness with which we approach the preaching of the Word. If I were to give an evaluation for our church, I feel like we do this well.
I don't say that in a braggadocious way. I don't say that to say that we can't always make strides. But I feel like this is something our church does well, not only in corporate services, but all throughout our church.
If you go to our youth services on Wednesday nights, you're going to see students with Bibles open because you're going to hear preaching from the Bible. If you go to Crossroads, our college and young adults ministry, you're going to see Bibles open because you're going to hear the Word being taught.
If you go to Sunday school classes of our adults, same thing. If you go to our children's ministry, you're going to see children that bring their Bibles to church because they're going to need them because they're going to be open because teachers are going to teach from the Bible.
[16:54] If you go visit our youngest classes in our church, you're going to see Bible verses being taught, being spoken, and even to the very youngest of our children, they're going to begin to hear the elementary things of the faith.

The Bible is not just something we give lip service to. The Bible is something in our church we truly believe is the priority of our lives. However, don't ever let what may be collectively true to make any individual think that that means it doesn't have to be true for you.
It would be possible to attend a church that takes the Bible seriously yet individually you do not. And we don't want to forget that as a church, while we are one family, we are all made up of individual members.
It's what 1 Corinthians teaches us. And so, the individual members must be doing what we want the collective whole to be doing.
So, while it is an encouraging thing to walk around our church and see people with Bibles and to go into Bible studies and see the Word taught and if you come in here on a Wednesday night or Sunday morning or Sunday night or any age group, what you're going to see and hear is the Word of God having priority.
[18:22] But, the question also needs to be asked, is that true of you? Not just is that true of collectively us, but is that true of you?

And so, what you see in Acts 2.42 is they were taking the teaching of the Word seriously. That needs to always be true of us.
And in the heart and in the spirit of just a family meeting today, let me just share a few things I think will help you and help us as a church as we try to even get stronger in this.
One of the ways as a church to help ourselves, our families, our homes, our children to take worship seriously, just a few practical things. Number one, come prepared spiritually.
Come prepared spiritually. The goal of Sunday morning isn't just to show up. I think sometimes we think to ourselves, if we just, if we just make it in the building at some point, we've, we've done our part.
[19:41] But, we want to come prepared. prepared. Now, I want to be really clear with this. Because we are all real people that live real lives in a real world, we have real struggles.

And Sunday morning is not an occasion where everyone who is on the spiritual mountaintop all show up. There are very real struggles among every church.
some of those pains are known and some of those struggles are private. Nobody knows. There are some people and families in our church who are going through different challenges through the loss of a loved one or maybe through an illness, whatever it may be, and people know about it and you've shared those, those anxieties, those burdens and people are praying for you and trying to encourage you and we know what's going on and there are a thousand other heartaches and worries that nobody but you may know about.
So when I say come prepared spiritually, let me be very, very clear. I do not mean that on Sunday morning everybody needs to be having everything in their life going just perfectly well.

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Sometimes you come to church with a broken heart. Sometimes you feel overwhelmed and broken. Come anyway.
[21:12] Sometimes you feel discouraged. Come anyway. Sometimes you feel lonely. Come anyway. This isn't a collection of perfect people.

This is a collection of real people with real struggles. So I do not mean when I say come prepared spiritually that you come to church and everybody's marriage and everybody's kids and everybody's ministry and everybody's business is every, just everybody's doing perfectly well.
That's not what I mean by that. What I do mean is even in the midst of the anxiety, in the midst of the fear, in the midst of the heartbreak, take time to prepare yourself to meet with the Lord when you gather for worship.
take time to have your heart ready and settled, to be mentally and spiritually, emotionally prepared for why we gather on the Lord's Day.
That does not need to mean that everything's going great. It just needs to mean that right in the midst of the joy or even right in the midst of the pain that we come spiritually prepared.
[22:25] another very, just simple thing that helped with this, be on time when you come on Sunday. Now, let me be clear.

If you wake up late, come anyway. If you're driving and traffic's bad, come anyway. If you have to come in late, come anyway. But, it wasn't that long ago I had two boys that played Little League soccer or Little League basketball or flag football.
It wasn't that long ago. And if they had a game at nine, you know what didn't happen? Kids didn't show up at 9.05. In fact, they didn't show up at nine.
The game was at nine. They were there at 8.45, 8.40. The same kids who didn't want to get up and go to school and they were dragging and didn't get to church on time for the soccer game, the football game, the baseball game.
Those kids were there early with uniforms and they weren't eating breakfast bars when they were running the bases. They had already eaten breakfast. Why? Because the parents want the kids to be prepared.
[23:42] the children weren't driving themselves to the soccer games. They were completely reliant upon parents.

And the reason the children get to the baseball game on time is because the parents don't want them to miss the game.
please hear me carefully. I know real life happens on Sundays. I know it can be hard.
And I don't want to be discouraging and I don't want to be mean-spirited. That's not in my heart at all this morning. I just want to say that part of taking worship seriously is that individually in our families we say I care about my kids piano practice and I care about my kids football practice. Those things are not unimportant but there is nothing I will take my kids to this week. Nothing more important for them than going to worship on the Lord's day.
[24:57] If that's true it will affect our preparation on Sunday morning. Now my entire married life I've gone to church on Sundays very early.

Marcy had to get the boys ready by herself. I was not there. I don't know if there was a single Sunday in my life where I was home to help feed my kids or get my kids dressed or get them out. She had to do it all by herself. our whole life. And so I want to be very transparent with you and tell you I don't know everything you go through to get your kids up and ready on a Sunday morning. And so I'm not saying this in any way with a harshness not in any way. I just want to say that the way we prepare for anything is based on the priority it has in our life.
And if you get up late come to church. And if your kids are eating cereals they go into Sunday school come on to Sunday school. I just want to say that if we take seriously the spiritual work and activity of gathering for worship it will be evident.
[26:35] You don't have to come to church with life being perfect doesn't exist. But let's live by priority. We come spiritually we come on time. I think our church does well with this.

Could we be better? Sure. Could each individual family do better? Sure. I think we do well with those things. I'm grateful for those things. Somebody asked me Friday a friend of mine about church today.
He said are you going to have anybody there? I said I'm sure that we will. It's Sunday. Our church shows up on Sunday. You're reliable. You're faithful. You're diligent. You care about the right

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things.
I think we do well with that. One other practical thing I just want to encourage you with this. We have a lot of children in our church. I love that we have children. One of God's blessings to our church is that we have a lot of young families.
I'm thankful for that. Your children are not a problem. They are not in the way. They are not a nuisance. We love your children. We want children in our church. We want children in our Sunday morning worship services.
[27:42] We love children. We love parents of young children. We love children's ministries. If you looked at preschool and children and youth and college ministries, we spend a lot of money on those people.

And we love it. We want to minister to your family. We want to minister to your children. And so, there are some things that we have to be aware of.
We have a church with a lot of children. children. Because of that, it takes a lot of teachers. It takes a lot of finances. It takes a lot of patience.
I suppose there are churches that have no children in them, and those places are probably pretty quiet and well organized and very well run and probably very well funded. And probably the last place you want to be on a Sunday morning.
We want to see people of all ages. And as we do that, we also want to train our children well. And so, one of the ways to make worship a priority is we prepare before we come.
[28:50] A second way to make worship a priority is that we come on time in the service. And a third way to make worship a priority is that we do our best to not distract during the worship service.

Now, again, I want to be very clear here. Some of you have little children. children, it takes some time to train them. Some of you have little ones that are just coming to church for the first time.
It's not easy to bring little ones into worship service for the first time. Some of you have babies in the nursery and you've got to go and take care of them during the service.
Absolutely. Some of you have jobs that require you to be on call or others of you may have physical or medical conditions that you have to address at certain times, of course.
But as best we can, one thing we can do better as a church is limiting distractions while we gather here for worship. We can be better. And I know we can be better because I hear it quite a bit from people.
[29:57] What can we do to help this? I want to be clear. I want your kids here. I want your teenagers here. I want your friends here. I want people who aren't new to church being here.

I want people with medical issues here. And if you have to step out to take care of something, step out. If you have to step out to take care of your child, step out. 100% no problem. But for those of us who are able to, we need to think in terms of how do we limit distractions when we gather for worship.
This is something we can do better at. It just is. And we never think we're distracting and one person passing a note or one person on their phone or one person getting up and leaving.
It just seems like it's just no big deal. But one person gets up and leaves, 900 heads turn. It's just the way it is. Now again, let's be extremely gracious.
And if you're sitting next to a family with young kids, don't be critical. Don't be harsh. Don't be mean spirited. They're learning. They're training. It takes time. Be patient.
[31:05] But we need to do the best we can to prioritize the worship of the Lord on the Lord's day. And one of the ways to prioritize worship is to be prepared, to be on time, and to limit distractions.

I don't want anyone that's got a little baby thinking, I've got to step out. Should I step out? If you've got a little baby, you need to step out. Step out. If you've got a child and the nurse needs fed, step out. If you're sick, something's going on, you need to step out.
Step out. This isn't about being harsh or critical or judgmental, but when it just comes to priority, let's make sure we're doing everything we can to not distract others.
This is by definition congregational worship, so it's not just about me and the Lord. It's not just about you and the Lord. It's about we. There's a congregational aspect to it.
And so, if you're late getting to church, please come in. But, if everyone's on time and no one's getting up and walking around while we're worshiping, what you will find is fewer distractions serves everybody well.

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[32:20] Now, this is real life, not perfect life. We are real people, not perfect people or robots. Okay? Nothing happens perfectly.

We get that. But when the apostles devote themselves to teaching, what it does speak to is the priority that is placed on worship.
I think as a congregation we do this well. I'm grateful. As we end a year and begin a new year, can we be better at this? Sure.
But I think this is something we do well. I'm so thankful. I look around on Sundays, even this morning, and so many of you got little children, and it would be so easy to not bring your children to church and find something else for them to do.
And it can be hard to listen when your kid's pulling on your shirt and hard to listen when your kid's asking for a pen or for money or your credit card, whatever they may do during church. And so many of you, you just, you just, you work through it.
[33:17] You work through it. And the quicker you teach your children, the better for them, the better for you. And let me just, I mean, again, it wasn't that long ago, I had two little guys and my little boy sat on the front row.

And if they didn't pay attention, everybody saw it. And I saw it. I've been there. And we had to teach them. And we had to train them. And it wasn't perfect.
But by the time they were seniors in high school, they just about got it. Number two, this speaks of the importance of personal Bible study.
They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. The apostles' teaching, we devote ourselves to that in congregational worship. But not just that. Part of how we devote ourselves to the teaching of the Word is through personal, daily Bible study.
This is so important. 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.
[34:25] It's important what we do here on Sundays. It's important what we do here on Wednesdays. But that's not the totality of what we do. We need individually to be in the Word, individually devoting ourselves to the apostles' teaching.

We've got right now, today, right up there at our resource corner, at our bookstore, we've got a table out there, and there are some books for daily quiet times, some books that will walk you through individual books of the Bible already broken up into daily studies for you.
We've got four different read-through-the-Bible plans out there. Those read-through-the-Bible plans are printed off. They're free. Take one. We gave away hundreds of them last week. We printed a whole lot more for this week.
Take one of those. Take two of those. Have a plan of how you're going to read the Bible this year. You don't have to read the whole thing in a year. That's a good thing. It's not the only way to do it. Just make sure you have a plan where you're devoting yourself daily to the Word of God.
So, back to verse 42. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. That's congregational preaching. That's personal Bible study and fellowship. biblical fellowship.
[35:37] This is all about relationships. This is a very important part of a New Testament church. I think this is something our church does well.

I think this is something our church can do better. When I do a new members class, I'll tell our prospective new members, I'm not trying to sell them on anything. I'm not trying to tell them that we've got everything figured out.
I tell our people in new members class areas I think we do well. I tell them things I think we need to improve in. This is one of the areas I think we do well, but I definitely think as a church we can improve in this. To devote yourself to fellowship means I take relationship building as essential, not optional.
There are some of you and you've been in this church for three months and you know a thousand people's names. Others have been in this church for 30 years and you feel all alone.
Some of you want it that way. Some of you desperately are trying to connect and it's happening. Others of you desperately are trying to connect and it's harder. Well, our church isn't a machine.
[36:47] We're individuals. We're people. And some people make friends more easily and maybe some seasons of time our church does a good job at reaching out to new members and sometimes we're not as good as we should be and some classes may be really good at welcoming people and maybe other classes it's more of a work in progress.

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I think we do this well. I think we can do better. But I will say this, that when they devote themselves to fellowship, there was a sense of desperation of saying, I need these people.
And if we were honest, one of the reasons why we don't think we need each other is because we fill our life with so much triviality.
We spend so much of our week just, even if not on sinful things, just on small things.
But one of the things believers should recognize is that our need for relationships is foundational, not optional. And so I just want to encourage you, if you're not building meaningful relationships with meaningful fellowship in the body of Christ, let that be something this year that's a priority for you.
[38:12] Now, I can't promise you it's going to be simple or easy, and we don't have a three-step plan that guarantees everybody makes a best friend. I wish we could. But I will say the work is worth it.

And one of the things that New Testament churches understand understand is that you can't be a New Testament church without meaningful relationships. You just can't.
That's why gathering in person is essential. That's why having pastors that you can see and talk to and be around is essential.
Because God has made us to need biblical fellowship. But let me talk for a minute for those who feel like you are well connected, that you have lots of friends, that you know lots of people.
Are you using what God has given you to help other people find biblical fellowship? So, one of the things that can happen in churches, I've been to this church a long time.
[39:30] I know lots of people. I don't ever come to church and feel lonely. I don't ever look around after church and wonder who can I talk to. I don't wonder who can I call if I have a problem.

I've been here a long time. People have been so kind to us, so gracious to us. I don't feel lonely. I don't feel lost. Here's the question for me and for you if you're like that. What am I doing to help the one who does feel lost no longer feel lost?
What am I doing to help the person who feels lonely make meaningful relationships so they don't feel lonely? The question is not just do you have friends. This is a church. This is a family.
This is a congregation. The issue for us has to be not just ourselves, but how are we helping the entire body function as the Bible's called us to do? So practically speaking, your number one investment of your life is your house.
You will spend more money in your house than anything else, so let's just start there. Are you using your home to help people build meaningful relationships?
[40:42] That's the easiest way to do it. You say, well, I've got lots of friends. Wonderful. Invite new members who don't have friends. You've been in your Sunsville class 15 years.

You know everybody. Wonderful. Invite the family who's brand new to your class who doesn't know anybody. How are we using our home? How are we using our time? How are we using our resources? Not just to say, do we have meaningful relationships, but how do we help other people do that?
And I get it. Some people are weird. You may know anybody weird. If you don't, guess what? And you think, if I have them over, they may be weird.
I have these three families over. There may be that one family nobody clicks with. Let me just tell you something. Making relationships is always work. It's also essential to the body of Christ.
If we didn't do things because they were hard, if we let that be an out, well, this is hard. I'm not going to do this. Can I assure you something? Getting this facility ready for every Sunday and every Wednesday is hard work for our building staff.
[41:57] If they said, this is hard. I'm not going to do it. Can you imagine what this place would look like in three weeks? It's hard. Teaching children Sunday school, is hard.

Even if you love it, it's hard. If our teacher said, you know what? This is hard. We're not going to do it. We would have chaos. Building relationships is hard.
It's costly. And admittedly, sometimes it doesn't go well. But it's worth it. And what we saw in the early church is they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.
And you know what's natural when people come together to hear the word of God? What is natural is they also have a bond with each other. That's where the fellowship comes from.
The most natural thing for us to do is to gather, to study the Bible, to read the Bible, to listen to the Bible, to sing the Bible, to pray the Bible, and then look around and say, who else is around here

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that loves Jesus?
[43:01] Let's get to know them and serve with them. Our fellowship should be the natural overflow of our devotion to the word of God. I think we do well at this.

I think we can do better. And let me just be very direct. If you're new, part of that burden's on you. You've got to be willing to go to Sunday school. You've got to be willing to go to discipleship groups. You've got to be willing to find a ministry. You've got to be willing to reach out and meet people. And part of that burden's on those of us who are old and been here a long time. We need to make sure we don't forget what it was like to be new. I think we do well.
I think we can do better. I hope that that's something this year that we see happen even more strongly. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, and then it says to the breaking of bread.
Probably two different things are in view here. One would be sharing meals together. And certainly a second thing I think that's being meant here is the importance of the Lord's Supper.
[44:04] The church would break bread in a sense of sharing meals together, but we also break bread as we share in the Lord's Supper together. And that should be a very important part of our church.

We looked about a month ago on a sunny night. We took the Lord's Supper together and the entire night, the whole thing was devoted just to understanding why the Lord's Supper matters so much. We used three words that sunny night to help us to understand it. One is the Lord's Supper signifies. It signifies His body. It signifies His blood. It signifies His return.
A second word we looked at was the Lord's Supper purifies, that we take time to confess our sin individually. And so, the Lord's Supper purifies the church. And the third word we looked at was the Lord's Supper unifies our church as we remind ourselves that we are all sinners saved by grace with one Savior over all.
And so, when we take the Lord's Supper in a very clear, strong way, the Lord's Supper purifies us and unifies us because of what it signifies to us.
[45:19] I think when our church gathers for the Lord's Supper, it's my favorite services of the year because there are always services where we uniquely set our attention on the cross and on the fact He's coming again and we remind ourselves of our need for a Savior.

I would say this, if I'm just being honest with the congregation, I think this is an area as a church, I'd love to see us grow in this in the year to come.
I'd love, I mean, when we gather on a, we do the Lord's Supper typically, typically we do it one month in the morning, the next month in the evening. One month in the morning, next month in the evening.
Typically, that's generally how it works. When we do the Lord's Supper on Sunday evenings, the people who are here, it's always such a blessing. And people come with their hearts prepared and it's a meaningful time and our deacons meet to pray before we come in here.
It's always a meaningful time together and I love those services. I do think as a congregation, we can grow as a whole in having a priority when we take the Lord's Supper.
[46:28] I'd love to see our church get even stronger in this. I'd love to see our church when you know we're doing Lord's Supper that night, rather than saying, are we gonna go back to church?

I don't know. What are we doing tonight? I'd rather flip that and see our people say, we're taking Lord's Supper tonight. We're saying no to whatever else is going on. I don't mean that in a legalistic way.
I'm not saying if you don't come on a Sunday night when we do the Lord's Supper, you don't love Jesus. I'm not saying anything like that. I'm just saying, I do think in the early church, one of the things that made them so powerful was they lived by priority.
Now they weren't perfect either. They were sinners too in real world, making real mistakes. But part of what made them so powerful was the priority with which they lived their life.
And I do think if I'm just being honest with you, one thing our church can grow in this year is when you know we're doing the Lord's Supper, that becomes your reason to say no to everything else.
[47:31] Please hear me clear. It's not a legalistic thing. It's not as if you come on that Sunday night, God owes you something. It's not as if you don't come that night, God's gonna zap you.

I'm just saying that one of the things that makes the church so powerful is when that church lives by the highest priorities.

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And when the church gathers for the Lord's Supper, there's just nothing more important we can do. It's something the early church did and it helped them be powerful.
And then the verse ends that they were also devoted themselves to the prayers. Prayer must be important. Prayer must be important for our church as a congregation and prayer must be important for us individually.
We want to pray for the Lord to move in power. We want to pray for each other. We want to pray with each other. We want to pray for our church. We want to pray for other churches.
[48:38] We want to pray for other biblical churches in our city. We don't have the market cornered on church. We're not the only biblical church around. Where there's any other biblical church in our own city, let's pray for them.

Let's pray for God to bless them. Let's pray for churches around our state to be blessed and to be strong. They're not our competition. We don't measure our success versus how we're doing it compared to some other church.
If it's a biblical church, they're part of us. We're part of them. If they have revival, praise God. That's good for the body of Christ. If another biblical church is growing, praise the Lord. Let's pray they keep growing.
We want God to work wherever He sovereignly works. Let's be a part of praying for that. But let's also be a part of praying for the church around the world. Let's be a part of praying for our missionaries.
If you don't know who our mission partners are, call our church office Tuesday morning at 8.30 and say, please tell me who are our mission partnerships. I want to pray for them by name.
[49:37] Sometimes we can get so focused on what we're doing and who we are and what's going on here that we don't lift our eyes up and pray for those around us. Let's pray for our missionaries that we support.

Let's pray for ministries that we support. Let's pray for church planters. Let's pray for persecuted Christians around the world. Let's be faithful to pray for ourselves and for others.
And so, what are we to be devoted to? The preaching of the word, daily Bible study, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and praying.
And you say, I knew all that when I came. I hope you did. And I hope that together we make new commitments to these old truths.
I hope that we leave here and say, I want to be faithful in the small things, in the details. I started by telling you a quick story about probably the most well-known coach ever in football, Vince Lombardi.
[50:51] Let me end with, let me go to basketball. Most well-known coach in basketball probably a guy named John Wooden. John Wooden also had a very iconic way that he would begin his season when his players would start the season.

He did something very odd. He didn't start with how you shoot. He didn't start with defensive stance. He didn't start with triple threat position, be ready to dribble and shoot and pass.
He didn't start with how you have zone defense and man-to-man defense. John Wooden would gather his team. You know how he started his season? He would teach his players.
These are men 18 to 22. Most of them much taller than him, much stronger than him. Scholarship. And he would teach them how to put on their socks.
Then he would teach them how to tie their shoes. This wasn't kindergarten upward basketball. This is UCLA. They won like 9 million championships in a row.
[52:05] And he would teach his college athletes that you take your socks and you pull them tight and you can't let it crinkle up around your little toe.

It should be snug around your little toe or you're going to get blisters. He would teach them that you take the heel of your sock and you pull it tight because if it bunches down there at the heel, you're going to slip.
He would teach them that when you put your shoes on, you don't do what I do and just take the top strings and pull them tight. You actually start from the bottom islet and pull it snug and then the next one and the next one.
And he would show them how to put on a pair of socks. Then he would show them how to put on their shoes. Because he said, if you don't know how to put on your shoes and socks, you're going to get blisters and not be able to run.

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Or your shoes are going to fall off and practice in the game and you're not going to be effective. And he would take time out of a practice to teach these men how to do the very same thing you teach your toddler to do.
[53:25] There is a sense in which we want to never outgrow prioritizing the basics of church life.

the preaching of the word, daily Bible study, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer.
By God's grace, church, I think we're doing really well. By all the measurables, attendance, it's the most it's ever been, giving, it's the best it's ever been, new members, most we've ever had in a year, all the measurables, we're encouraged.
But if we think that measurables are more important than individual hearts and homes, we've missed the basics.
the question is not just how are we doing, that's one question, but the other question is how are you doing? and I want to say this as we close.
[54:53] You may be a brand new Christian, you may be new to our church, you may be a family that's fallen apart, you may have been at this church since it started in July of 1903, you may have been in our church for one hour, we are not perfect, we do not have it all figured out, we are very much still a work in progress.

And if you're looking for a church home this new year, I'm going to be very honest with you, you've not found the perfect church. that's not us. But I do believe by God's grace we care about the right things.
And by God's grace we're striving to live by priority. And while as pastors of our church we care about the whole congregation, we also at the same time care about as best we can each individual home.
And you may find yourself struggling and in need and you may say I'd love to do everything you said, I don't know what to do. Call us.
You're not bothering us, you're not a nuisance to us, that's why we're here. You may say I would love to prioritize Sunday mornings, I don't know how to do that.
[56:24] You may say I would love to teach my children at home, I don't know where to start. You may say I would love to read through the Bible, I don't know what plan to use, call us. Let us help you, let us serve you, let us pray with you, let us struggle with you, and let's live this year collectively and individually with new commitments to old truths.

And the first way I could say we can help you is on your way out, go to the resource corner of that table and you find a Bible reading plan, take one, get to work on it, and if you've got questions, you call us and let us serve you.
Not because we know all the answers, we don't, but we'll walk with you as best we can as together we live out new commitments to old truths. Would you pray with me?
Lord, I thank you for this church. What a precious collection of saints. You have been so good to us. You have blessed us in so many ways. There are so many things that we're thankful for, so many ways that we still want to grow, so many things that we look at and say God has been so good to us and at the same time other areas we say we've got so far to go, but that's alright because you've not given up on us and your spirit is still working with us and our church isn't giving up on anybody and we want to continue to help families and minister to them and with those with little kids help us to be patient and helpful and supportive and with those who are at home by themselves help us to serve them and love them and for those that are doing well help us to celebrate and praise and rejoice with them with those who are lonely and hurting and struggling help us to weep with them and help us to have the ministry of compassion and gentleness and grace with everyone that we come in contact with.
[58:41] and in this world that is innovative Lord in some ways help us to never outgrow the simple basic old ways help us to prioritize your word as a congregation and as individuals help us to build meaningful relationships and fellowship with each other help us to break bread with each other and build friendships to prioritize the Lord's Supper and the importance it has in the congregation and help us to be a church and people of prayer for our families for our church for our missionaries for those who are planting new churches for those who are serving overseas in this world that loves that which is new may we be faithful in that which is old the gospel once for all passed down delivered to the saints may this be a year we are found faithful whatever the gospel and the the the the the the the the themumbles

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Amen.

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