

# Church Resolutions 2016

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Preacher: Cedric Moss

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I want to join Brother David in expressing my own gratitude to all who participated in our corporate consecration last week.

! Those five days of prayer and fasting and seeking the Lord were for ourselves and! And then also for us corporately as a local church.

We sought to humble ourselves. We sought to pray and see God's face and to turn from our wicked ways, believing that the Lord blesses the obedience of his people.

And so I eagerly anticipate the many ways that the Lord will work in our midst in this year and beyond. Well, having come out of our week of corporate consecration this morning, I want to share with you some ways in which the eldership team desires to see our church grow this year in 2016. We're calling these church resolutions, but in a true sense, they really are pastoral burdens. They are pastoral concerns. And they are concerns that are carried by the eldership of this church for this church.

[ 1 : 21 ] But the reason we call them church resolutions is we are desirous that we together as a church own them and commit to them in this year.

We as a church need to resolve by the grace of God to grow in these areas. There are five areas in which the eldership team of this church desires to see us grow together this year.

And obviously these are not the only five areas that we need to grow, but these are five critical areas. And we also believe that rather than trying to focus on many areas, seven or ten or twenty, it's far better to just focus on five.

Five is certainly manageable for us. And I think when you listen and hear these areas, you would agree with us that these five areas would be like dominoes, and they'd have a domino effect on those other areas of concern.

So let's pause this morning and pray and ask for God's help. Father, thank you this morning for the privilege we have to meet together as the household of God in this local church.

[ 2 : 46 ] Lord, we thank you for your kind providence this morning in many ways. We thank you, Lord, for even the change in season and for the reminder that you are the God of all of the seasons.

You're the God of summer and of winter. You're the God of spring and of fall. Lord, we ask this morning that you would meet us by the power and presence of your spirit as we open your word, as we consider what you would have to say to us as a local church for this new year, as we live together as a local church.

Father, would you give me grace this morning to proclaim the concerns on the hearts of the elders of this church.

And Father, I pray that you would give each one present and those who would listen to the recording a postured heart to hear and then to respond as you would have them to.

Lord, we need your help this morning. And so we pause and we pray and we thank you that you hear us in Jesus name. Amen.

[ 4 : 11 ] One of the words in the New Testament that is used to describe the men to whom God gives responsibility for caring for the church is the word overseer.

And this word is found in the two key passages of scripture that we find the qualifications for elders in the church in. And they are 1 Timothy chapter 3 and Titus chapter 1.

And the word is, this word overseer exactly means what it communicates. It means to look over or to take oversight of.

It means to watch over. Watching over is one of the key responsibilities for the elders in a local church. And part of their watching over involves observing.

It involves observing the life of the church. The five resolutions that I will be sharing with you this morning have come from observation.

[ 5 : 19 ] They have come from observing us as a church. And they have become burdens. And not unbearable burdens because the Lord tells us that his burdens are light.

The burdens that God gives us as pastors, they're not debilitating. They're not burdens that would cause us to despair.

But they're certainly burdens that we carry because we know that God has better for us as a church. That God has more for us as a church. And to be faithful pastors is to desire whatever else God has for us.

And to do whatever we can to lead the church to attain those additional measures and heights that God has for us.

As an eldership team, as we looked over the congregation of Kingdom Life and considered our areas of spiritual needs, the primary burdens that we carry for the church for 2016 are the same ones we had for last year.

[ 6 : 32 ] And so, as a church for our church resolutions in 2016, they are the same as they were for 2015.

And this doesn't mean that we didn't grow in these areas. By God's grace, we have grown in each of these areas. But they remain largely pastoral concerns.

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the church of the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 1. Finally then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live and please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

Notice how Paul writes to the Thessalonians and he says to them, You're already doing it. You are doing it now. We want you to please the Lord. You are doing it now, but we want you to do it more and more.

And so, many times there are things that we are doing. They are the right things. We are moving in the right direction. We are growing. But there's a desire that we do it more and more because God has more for us and we have more capacity to grow.

[ 7 : 56 ] So, repeating our church resolutions from last year, because they remain pastoral concerns, does not mean that we have not grown in all the identified areas.

We have grown. And we're grateful to God for that. But there's also another reason that we're repeating the church resolutions for last year, again this year.

And that other reason is that while we have set these church resolutions out, as we did last year, from a leadership point of view, there was not a deliberate effort to lead in a particular way, to foster growth, the desired growth in each of these areas.

In addition, there was really no considered method of measuring how we were doing. And those are leadership responsibilities.

Those are leadership shortcomings and failures. And I take full responsibility for that. But this year is going to be different because what we will do this year is this year, and I'll be sharing how we're going to do this towards the end of the message, this year we're going to be very intentional to lead in specific ways to foster growth in these areas.

[ 9 : 17 ] And then we're going to have a way that we're going to measure how we have done in each of these areas at the end of the year. So with that introduction, let's now consider the five church resolutions for 2016.

The first one is in the area of prayer. Brothers and sisters, by God's grace, as a church family in 2016, let's resolve to grow in praying together.

Now from the very outside, I want to say this is one of the areas, again, we have grown, we have seen some growth. I could vividly recall in this past year that one of our gatherings on a Monday night in corporate prayer was the largest attendance that we have had in many, many years.

And though it hasn't been sustained, that still in itself was an indication of progress, moving in the right direction. On the other hand, in pre-service prayer, we have seen a falling away in this year.

So this area of prayer remains a pastoral concern. And I want to be quick to say that the motivation in my heart, and I'm certainly sure it's the case in David's heart as well, the motivation is not we want more bodies in prayer on Sunday mornings and on the first Monday of the month.

[ 10 : 47 ] That's not the motivation. Instead, the motivation and the concern is that a lack of devotion to prayer among God's people is unbiblical.

It is unbiblical. We betray what we see in Scripture, what we see among the early disciples, when we are marked by an absence of a commitment to prayer.

There are many historical accounts of the church, but the only divine account of the church that we have about what church life was like in the early church is the book of Acts.

It's the only divine account that we have. And what we see in the book of Acts early on in Luke's account in chapter 2, we see this commitment to prayer.

We see prayer marking these early disciples, not just in Luke. It continues through the book of Acts. In Acts chapter 2, verse 42, we read these words, and they devoted themselves.

[ 11 : 55 ] They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship and to the breaking of bread and the prayers. They were devoted to the prayers, meaning they were devoted to those times of prayers, those opportunities that they had to pray.

And I want to say this morning that, you know, if every single chair in this building was filled on every single morning that we gather on a Sunday morning, and it is my prayer that God will do that. But if that were to happen, but the few chairs that we put out on a Sunday morning or on the first Monday of the month are largely empty, brothers and sisters, we're not doing well.

The strength of a church is not its Sunday morning gathering. The strength of a church is the prayer ministry of a church. If you want to really evaluate a church, evaluate where that church's strength really lies, go to the prayer meeting.

It's not on Sunday mornings. We can get people to gather for all kinds of different reasons, and people gather for all kinds of different reasons. Our success will not be measured by how many chairs we fill in this room on Sunday mornings, but it will be measured by the extent to which we are marked by prayer.

[ 13 : 26 ] And again, I believe that so much of what we see publicly is what's happening privately, and we need to be people as well committed to prayer. So much of this year, we need to be prayerful about the many things in front of us, and not just assume that because we did them last year, we can do them this year, we need to pray and call out to God.

So I want to say to you this morning, if your personal circumstances are such that you're not hindered from coming on Sunday mornings to pray, when we gather at nine, on Monday nights, first Monday of the month, I just want to encourage you to make that a commitment to be here to pray. And your space, only you can fill, and you will make a difference. Our second church resolution is in the area of gathering.

And so brothers and sisters, I say to us this morning, let us by God's grace resolve to grow in gathering together. And by gathering together, apart from prayer meeting, which I've already covered, I'm primarily referring to our Sunday morning gatherings, our care group gatherings, and then secondarily to special gatherings that we may have from time to time.

time. And this concern is rooted in a concern that we find expressed by the writer to the Hebrews in Hebrews chapter 10 verses 24 and 25 where he says, and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

[ 15 : 21 ] that's the concern. The concern is that it is the habit of some to neglect meeting together even as the day of the Lord is drawing near.

Now before I elaborate on this, let me just be very clear about what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that every time we gather as a church, every single person is expected to be here.

I'm not saying that at all. that is desirable, but it's certainly not reasonable and it is not practical that everyone will be here every time that we gather.

We are all in different seasons of life. We have different circumstances in our lives. And there are times when we have different work demands and family demands and school demands and personal and family illnesses and all sorts of different things going on, emergencies that come up. And so church attendance sometimes, even when we desire, it's just not possible. Sometimes on a cold morning like this, the car doesn't start.

[ 16 : 31 ] I mean, even the car recognizes. I think a lot of cars are venturing out this morning because it's too cold, especially if they're in a garage. So things happen. I'm amazed at how some of the problems that we have had, like water problems, something, you know, breaking in the house happens on weekends.

And even on a Sunday morning, these things happen and they prohibit us from gathering. So when we talk about the neglect to gather, I'm not talking about these legitimate things that come up in all of our lives from time to time.

Instead, what I'm referring to is the optional non-attendance. being able to gather but opting not to gather.

I'm sure there would be many reasons in people's minds or things that they would share as to why they may not gather at times, but I believe that a common thread between those who optionally don't gather is that somehow they've lost the value or maybe never had the value of meeting together.

They don't see the benefit of it. And that's your case this morning. I just want to encourage you to really ask the Lord to help you to see the many benefits that we get by faithfully gathering together to worship the Lord, to hear his word.

[18:05] You know, to some extent, gathering is like taking vitamins. When you take vitamins, you don't feel the immediate effect of it, but it has an effect on your life.

Sometimes pushing back infections or pushing back viruses that you may pick up from the cold and flu and other kinds of things, making your immune system stronger and more resilient.

It causes you to weather illnesses better. I think many times when we gather, though we're not conscious, God is doing things in our hearts. And in our lives.

And I want to encourage you this morning that until you're able to see, if that's you and you're saying, I'm not so sure how beneficial all this is all the time, just do it out of obedience until you're able to see what benefits the Lord brings to you.

I connected to this area of not being faithful to gather together is the habit of being late for church gatherings.

[19:13] And again, we've seen improvements this year. More and more as we start, there are more people who are present. But here's what I'd like us to strive towards in 2016.

I'd like us to kind of invert what we have. What we have is we have a minority present when we're starting and the majority coming after we've started.

Let's strive to have the majority present when we start and the minority coming after we've started.

See, when we gather together, we gather to meet with brothers and sisters of like precious faith and we gather to worship the living God.

We gather for the glory of God's name and we gather for the good of our own souls and therefore we should make every effort to arrive and to arrive on time. Sometimes a prayer that you miss could be incredibly beneficial to your soul.

A song that is sung could minister to you not just that morning but throughout the entirety of that week. Believing that God is present, that he's meeting with us, we want to capture all that God has for us and we do that by making the effort to be on time.

[20:28] And when we talk about this, I believe that we have to think about it practically. I think all of us know the distance that it takes or the time that it takes to drive from our homes here.

We know roughly what kind of time it actually takes. And I would say if you're habitually late, this is my suggestion, aim to leave about ten minutes earlier in terms of how you plan yourself.

Just organize yourself and then aim to leave about ten minutes early and normally within those ten minutes you're going to be okay if something is delayed and you would generally be here on time.

And again, as I've said countless times, Sunday mornings for us needs to start Sunday night. We need to be turning our heart towards gathering.

We need to be taking care of particular things that we can do, especially if you have young children. Organizing clothes, getting Bibles and putting keys together, not leaving tasks that you can attend to on Saturday night for Sunday morning and certainly not planning to do things on Sunday mornings that would sometimes get you consumed and tired, washing and trying to clean and going to the food store.

[21:49] Those kinds of things would, even if you were able to get through them, they would cause you to be so distracted and sometimes just so depleted that you just don't benefit.

as you actually can from the gathering. And if you're a part of the almost extinct group of women who cook on Sunday mornings before they come to church, I certainly encourage you to set an alarm, get up early enough so that you can cook, you won't be in a rush and then you wouldn't likely be late.

I know for a lot of parents, especially when children have a lot of school work, you turn the TV off during the week and you let them watch TV on weekends, I'd encourage you to manage that on Saturday nights.

Manage it not only from the point of view of getting them to bed early, but also from the point of view of their souls. I think we really do need to build a culture of turning our hearts towards our gathering, not just on the morning of the gathering, but even from the night before, knowing that we're going to gather with God's people, we're going to hear God's word, and we want to prepare our hearts to be able to do that.

So Kingdom Life, let's grow in gathering together and embracing as much as possible the times we have to meet as a local church.

[ 23 : 15 ] a third corporate resolution is in the area of community. This year, by God's grace, let us grow in living in community.

Let us resolve to grow in living in community. We live in a world where individuality is celebrated. We live in a world where life is the norm to live by and to and for oneself. It is amazing to watch some of the bumper stickers, but more so now a lot of the thoughts, I call them thoughts, that you see on the Internet.

whether somebody puts it on their WhatsApp tagline or they put it up on a Facebook page, so much of it is personal. I saw this one some weeks ago and this one lady said, I'm into doing me now. It's into doing me now. That's what I'm into. We live in a world where we are focused on me. We're focused on ourselves more and more. But while this individuality is promoted in the world, community is valued in the church.

[ 24 : 45 ] All of us who have God as our father, we have each other as our brothers and sisters in Christ, and God has put us in his big family, and that family in the context of this local church.

We are a spiritual family. Yes, God has a big universal family, but it is in a very unique and special way that he puts us in a local church where we're part of a family, where we can rejoice with those who rejoice, we can mourn with those who mourn.

I was passing New Lively Baptist Church on Friday, and I noticed that the church was draped in fabric that shows that they had a death.

They're right next door, they had a death, I don't know who died, and we're not in mourning. There are brothers and sisters in Christ, they're part of God's big family, but they're not a part of our local church, we're not a part of that local church.

God puts us in a family because he wants us to be able to share those moments, he wants us to live together as brothers and sisters.

[ 25 : 56 ] God could have devised it a different way. He could have let us be loners, but no, he puts us in a family and so he wants us to experience community.

And I want to say that in this local church, perhaps of all that I talk about this morning, this is our greatest strength. By the grace of God, many of you do community well.

You are wonderful examples to be emulated, examples to be followed, but it is still an area, though it is a strength, it is an area in which we can grow, it is an area in which we need to grow.

In Acts 2.42, which I read earlier, Luke gives us a description of what church life looked like in the early church. And it's interesting that the very first aspect that he highlights is the fellowship or the community that they shared together.

he says that they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

[ 27 : 13 ] They opened their hearts and their homes to one another. They responded to needs by sharing their resources. They enjoyed that rich word fellowship, very, very rich word fellowship.

where they communed with one another in social intimacy, where they were in one another's lives, where doors were opened into each other's lives and they can come in and they can go out and they can enjoy sweet fellowship.

together. And as God's family, as those the Lord has put together in this local church, we are to be marked by biblical community.

We are to be marked by biblical fellowship. Biblical community entails this mutual concern for each other, this willingness to be open and to give of our time and our talents and our treasures for the common good.

And so again, although this is one of our strengths by God's grace, let us seek to grow more and more in it in this year. A fourth church resolution is in the area of evangelism.

[ 28 : 36 ] let us this year resolve to grow in reaching the lost. And we want to think about this on two levels.

First, we want to think about reaching the lost in a personal way, growing in personal evangelism, sharing the gospel with those we come into contact with, taking very seriously that God has called each of us as ambassadors for him, sharing with those in our circle of relationships who don't know Jesus Christ.

And then, on the next level, we want to grow together in evangelism as a church, in our corporate efforts in evangelism.

And our two main thrusts are through alternatives, our ministry to the unemployed, and through Christianity explored.

And God has been kind to allow us to see fruit from these ministries. I can still remember so vividly when we gathered in January of 2015 and we prayed and asked the Lord that he would bless these ministries in that year, 2015, and the Lord did.

[ 29 : 56 ] There are people who are part of this church because they came to alternatives, found work through alternatives, came to Christ having gone to Christianity Explored.

Christianity Explored is coming up again on the 15th of March. And I want us to start thinking about who we're going to invite, who we'd like to invite. Start praying about who you'd like to invite.

On Friday I ran into, I didn't run into him, but I met a friend, I worked with him way back in 1984.

And I saw him, he was working at a business where I went to purchase something. And we began to talk and he was telling me all the different things he was into and what he was doing and so forth. And I listened and was able to just say, hey, we have this course coming up. Because he was into a lot of different things. things. And I said, you know, would you think about coming to this course?

[ 31 : 03 ] And he promised me, he said, yes, I would definitely consider coming. And I thought, how wonderful it is just to, for me now, to just think back, because what he did for me was opened, reminded me that I had a whole other world of relationships that I kind of forgotten.

And it would be wonderful to try to catch up with some of those people and see how they're doing. and even began to pray for them with the view for those who don't know Christ to point them to Christ.

So I want to encourage you to let's do this together, let us reach the lost together on a personal level, and let us band together to also do it on a corporate level.

A fifth and final church resolution for this year is this. It's in the area of discipleship. Let's resolve to grow in being disciples.

And I can say this one that of the five church resolutions, this one is the eldership team's greatest concern and greatest burden.

[ 32 : 17 ] And perhaps it is because to some degree the other four are really connected to this one. there's an aspect of the other four that's wrapped up in this concern for discipleship.

Because I think if we get discipleship right, we will get those other four right. Our starting point to growing and being disciples is to start to see and think about ourselves as those who follow Jesus Christ differently.

If largely we see ourselves and think about ourselves as believers or as Christians, I somehow don't think we get to the heart of what the Lord has really called us to be and to do.

the most biblical word for those who follow Jesus Christ, the most biblical word for those who follow Jesus Christ is this word disciple. When we come to Christ and he saves us and we begin to follow him, we follow him as disciples.

And so although discipleship is listed as the fifth church resolution, in a sense it's really the first priority because when that happens, the others begin to happen as well.

[ 33 : 45 ] We read these words in Matthew's gospel in Matthew 28 and verse 16. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them, and when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.

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

For those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, the process of discipleship begins with water baptism, and then it continues with being taught to do all that Jesus commanded, that body of teaching to obey the words of Jesus in a very foundational way.

The body of teaching that he committed to his disciples when he was saying to them, I want you to go now and you are to teach all nations to do these things, to observe these things.

and so built into what the disciples would have taught as they went out was to teach disciples to do these things, and then to teach disciples to do the same thing for other people.

[ 35 : 16 ] It's to teach disciples to be disciples and to make disciples. That's what we're called to do. Every single one of us, to whatever degree, God gives us opportunities. Some will do that more than others, but to some degree, we must see that God has called us to this.

Not just called us to be a Christian. Not just called us to always receive, but also called us to grow to the point where we can begin to do for others what was done for us.

That is what we are called to as disciples. If we're going to grow to be disciples, we have to be people of the word.

If we are going to be disciples, we have to be people of the word. And what I mean by people of the word is that we have to be spending time in reading and meditating upon God's word, getting to know God's word.

Listen to what Jesus said to a group of Jews who had just come to believe on his name in John 8, 31-32. Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.

[ 36 : 35 ] And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Brothers and sisters, the mark of being a disciple, the mark of discipleship is spending time in God's word, reading it and getting to know what Jesus said.

if you abide in my word, then you are truly my disciples. If I may elaborate on what he said to those Jews, he was really saying to them, okay, you believe in me?

You've separated yourself from those other Jews who say they don't believe in me? You believe in me? Okay, if you truly are my disciple, here's what you're going to do. You're going to be in my word.

You're going to abide in my word. then you are truly my disciples. And friends, the same is true for us this morning.

And this is why the scripture memorization initiative is such a gift to us as a church. It is such a wonderful tool for us as a church.

[ 37 : 42 ] It is a vital discipleship tool. And let me say this. Although there's a competition to give rewards and all that other kind of stuff, that's really beside the point.

If we halfway remember the truth in the scripture, even if we cannot remember where that scripture is found, it's going to do good to our souls. If you had four different translations, they would have words a little off, a little different, but the central truth, if it's a decent translation, the central truth of that scripture is there, and that's what we want to be hiding in our hearts.

It's not just a rote thing where we are just memorizing the words and we get it perfect like a poem. We can do that, and if that's what we're doing, that may not be of any benefit to our souls if that's all that we are doing.

We need to be meditating on that word. We need to be allowing that word to get in us. I was struck this just yesterday about the verse of scripture that we were to be memorizing this week.

I had gotten an email this week, and it caused me to really think about these two verses from Philippians 3, 7 through 8.

[ 39 : 02 ] These two verses really help us to see that knowing Jesus, the worth of knowing Jesus, by far surpasses anything else in this life.

By far surpasses anything else in this life. It helps us to set up priorities, and it helps us to see things in this life for what they truly are.

Those two verses are Philippians 3, 7, and 8. Paul writes, but whatever gain I had, whatever gain I had, I counted it as loss for the sake of Christ.

indeed, I count everything as loss. Here's why. Because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

He's saying everything in my life, no matter what it is, no matter who it is, I counted as loss. He's not saying that it is loss.

[ 40 : 10 ] So you can use those words and you can say concerning having a wife, and concerning having children, and concerning having money, and concerning having all the wonderful things in this life.

I count it as loss. In comparison to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ, my Lord. He says, for his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things.

Now, he wasn't saying he had nothing. What he was really saying is, as far as I'm concerned, the things I possess, they are as loss to me. I have relegated myself that I don't hold them with tight fists.

I hold them loosely. I have suffered the loss of all things, and I count them as rubbish. I consider them as rubbish. Not that they are rubbish, but I consider them that way, in order that I may gain Christ.

And as I meditated on that, it did tremendous good to my soul, and enabled me to offer counsel in that situation. So I want to encourage us, let us embrace our scripture memorization as part of the discipleship process.

[ 41 : 33 ] Whether you do it to get the card checked off and to get something out of the book, so there's another story, but let us do it for the good of our own souls. It is far better to make an attempt and a week later not remember it, because maybe it was just to do you good for that week, I don't know.

But let us make the effort, and in doing so, we would be identifying ourselves as the disciples of Jesus, because he says, if you truly are my disciple, you're going to be in my word.

You will be in my word. So this year, let us resolve to grow in being disciples. So here are the five resolutions, and I encourage you to, let's try to internalize them.

One of the ways we're going to measure to the end of the year, see if we even could remember these. The first one in the area of prayer, to grow in praying together. The second in the area of gathering, to grow in gathering together.

The third in the area of community, to grow in living in community. The fourth in the area of evangelism, to grow in reaching the lost. And the fifth in the area of discipleship, to grow in being disciples.

[ 42 : 47 ] As I close, let me just take a few moments to share how we are going to encourage growth in these five areas in this year, and also how we plan to measure the growth.

Starting in February, starting next month, we're going to be taking every other month, and we're going to be focusing on one of these church resolutions for the entirety of that month, and provide very specific intentional opportunities for us to be able to grow as a church.

So here's what the schedule is going to look like. In the month of February, we're going to be focusing on prayer. In the month of April, we're going to focus on gathering. In the month of June, we will focus on evangelism, and that's a bit flipped.

The third one would have been community, but we're going to do evangelism in the month of June, because in July, we have the music camp, and the music camp is a significant outreach for us, so we want to prepare us as a church to really make the most of the outreach opportunities of the music camp.

And then in August, we're going to focus on community, and then in October, we will focus on discipleship. So for example, what's going to happen in the month of February, when our focus is on prayer, during that month, in addition to suggesting ways that we can grow in prayer personally, and as couples, as married couples, and in our families, we'll also have a different care group to lead our pre-service prayer time.

[ 44 : 36 ] And thereafter, month by month, we're going to have care groups responsible for the pre-service prayer time. We'll rotate them the way we would normally do, except the care group that is regularly serving wouldn't be responsible for prayer.

It'll be another care group that's responsible for prayer. And this is something Brother David has suggested that we do for quite some time, and we're now doing it.

And here's my own desire. I desire to see that we grow with attendance to pre-service prayer, that we move it from the toddler room into children's church.

And eventually, that it's Sunday morning that we come and we pray before we go into our regular time of worship. During February, one of the sermons on Sunday morning will be focused on prayer.

And we're going to do very similar intentional things for the other four areas that we're going to be emphasizing in those particular months. And we're going to be hearing from you in terms of some suggestions that you may have.

[ 45 : 49 ] How can we grow together in evangelism or in community or in gathering together and discipleship? And we will be giving those opportunities for us to really flesh this out in those particular months.

Now, this doesn't mean that once we're done with prayer that we'll just forget that. No, we're going to continue to interweave those emphases throughout the year. But in the particular month, the primary focus will be on that particular area.

And here's how we're going to measure it. At the end of the year, early in January 2017, the Lord willing, we're going to put together an anonymous online survey around these five areas, and we're going to ask particular questions that would help us to measure, did we grow in these areas in 2016.

The questions will be designed to elicit whether growth has really taken place. It will be anonymous. We won't ask you how old you are.

We won't ask you if you're married. We won't ask you your sex. We won't ask you anything. It's simply going to be focused on these areas and to see did we grow in these particular areas.

[ 47 : 15 ] And then we're going to share the results with the church. And together I pray that we have much reason to celebrate and to rejoice in how God has worked in our midst.

And I look forward to that. You're probably wondering, you know, why all the fuss about all of this? Why are we going to all of this extent to do these particular things?

Well, here's why. the Bible says that Jesus Christ purchased us with his own blood, that we weren't purchased with precious stone and silver and gold, but we were purchased with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

And he has given us a high and a worthy calling. And God has more for us. And so we desire as a local church to live lives that are worthy of the calling that he has given to us.

We desire to see true and measurable growth in these areas for this year. And God wants us, I believe, to grow in these ways.

[ 48 : 28 ] So by the grace of God, kingdom life, and for the glory of God, and for the good of this church, for the good of our children, who one day will take our places, let us resolve to do these things, to make for a stronger, brighter future in this local church for our children.

Let's commit them to memory, let's ask the Lord to help us to grow in each of these areas. Let's pray together.