

# Year In Review

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[ 0 : 00 ] I have to tell you that some things give me cold chills.

! I am an emotional person. For you that don't know me, I'll just tell you that ahead of time. But that's the way I'm wired. And I get cold chills when something touches my heart and kind of connects.

And this morning I have cold chills to be able to say to you, open your Bibles. I want you to turn your Bible this morning to 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5.

I have said many times that I am thankful for the Lord bringing us our pastor-elect. And I don't know if you pay attention to his prayers, but his prayers are well-formed scripturally.

There's always a healthy dose of the Word of God woven into his prayer, both to instruct and to frame his thinking and to govern the things that we join him in praying about.

[ 1 : 13 ] And I'm thankful for that. I found myself this morning so thankful that in his prayer he prayed for me as I opened the Word.

I like that. And the reason is, is he wasn't praying, Lord, I hope Reverend Knoyer has had a good time reading USA Today or, you know, Huffington Post or, you know, the Wall Street Journal, whatever else, so he could bring you some very interesting little comment about the culture and blah, blah, blah.

His prayer was that God would help Pastor Knoyer as he opened the Word. That's my job.

That's my calling. And so when we take 2 Corinthians chapter 13 in hand, I want you to know that the Lord has commissioned me and given me the responsibility of taking the Word of God and making it clear and practical for your sakes and for my sake.

God has also called you to have an active part to play in what is going to take place in the next hour and a half. And that is that you're to be actively engaged.

[ 2 : 34 ] See, I got some of you to... Whoa. Whoa. That's all right. Okay.

Hour and 20 minutes. You have a part as well. And I would appeal to you to resist the natural tendency of the heart to decide you're just going to sit there kind of passively and wait to see if anything happens significant.

You are charged by the Word of God to be active in prayer. And if your heart and mind is not atypical, it's needed.

And so I appeal to you to multitask that as I preach, you pray and listen. Well, here we are at the start of the new year.

And New Year's are times that most people make resolutions. Isn't that right? I, for whatever reason, I was doing a little research on what kind of resolutions people make.

[ 3 : 45 ] And probably one of the most common resolutions people make is to exercise more. I mean, I understand, not from personal experience, but from observation, that the gyms just kind of are flooded with about four or five weeks of people who have made resolutions to kind of improve their health and physiology.

And so off they go to the gym and it kind of really bugs the regulars because there are people that don't know how to run the treadmill and are on the stepper and things. And they're only there for a couple weeks, but they really break the routine.

And the beginning of the year is where some people decide that they're going to quit smoking. I trust that's not the general nature of our fellowship, but you know, people do.

And people think, well, okay, in the new year, I think I'm going to read through the Bible. Or I'm going to make a different resolution. I'm going to finish my degree or I'm going to, whatever it is.

We have a tendency of doing that at the beginning of the new year and I want to take a completely different track. I'd like us to look back before we look forward.

[ 4 : 57 ] And the purpose of a backward glance is to help us think objectively about where we have been in order to frame what we do going forward. I want to tell you that in this new year, one of the things that is going to characterize this fellowship is that Pastor Shearer and I are going to share about 50% of the preaching.

He is, we are going to, first of all, tag team through January and February. And what I mean by that is back and forth, back and forth. And then we'll settle into six weeks that I will preach and six weeks that he will preach.

And the first things that we are going to look at next week and the week after relate to some of the objectives and some of the things that we as a fellowship want to focus on. In relationship to that, I think it's appropriate for us to kind of look in the back and say, all right, what is it?

What is it that we need? And what are some of the things that we need to pay attention to in our own personal lives and in our fellowship? And that's what brings me to this passage in 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5.

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you fail to meet the test?

[ 6 : 15 ] Examining oneself is appropriate. It's something that we all do fairly regularly. This morning as I was finalizing the details of getting dressed for the services, one of the things that I did was I stopped in the mirror and I looked at my Christmas sweater.

I wanted to be sure that it kind of matched. I decided, well, should I button it up? Should I not button it? Whatever. You know, there are little details like that. You pay attention. Did my hair look right?

We all did that. Am I right? We pay attention to certain details. We examine ourselves occasionally when we're under pressure. We stop and say, all right, what's going on? Why am I responding this way?

I do want us to understand, the passage tells us that we are to examine ourselves, but I think we need to recognize that it's fairly easy to examine yourself and be quite deceived.

Think with me just for a moment. You're there in 2 Corinthians, but turn back. 2 Corinthians chapter 13, go back to chapter 10. In 2 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul is in the process of defending his apostolic ministry.

[ 7 : 23 ] By the way, when people don't like what they hear, one of the things that they tend to do is become critical of the messenger, and that's what had happened to Paul. Well, look at what he says there in chapter 10, verse 12.

Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves, but when they measure themselves, and the term here in the Greek could be taken one of two ways.

I prefer the way that is not here in the ESV. When they measure themselves by themselves instead of one another and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.

Now, here's the point that I want to start with. I want you to recognize that self-examination can be quite deceiving. In particular, when we measure ourselves by our own standard, and we rely upon our own lack of objectivity to determine where we are and how we're doing spiritually.

I mean, it's amazing. The truth of the matter is, is we're better at identifying sin in other people than we are identifying it where? In ourselves. And Paul says, listen, don't make that mistake.

[ 8 : 34 ] And so when I start out here at the beginning by saying, listen, it's important for us to engage in self-examination, I want you to recognize that just going about doing it in a natural and a carnal way can end up being quite deceiving, and it can cause you a great deal of heartache if not done properly.

But just because it can be done improperly doesn't mean it shouldn't be done. And so let me kind of step into this a little further by saying spirit-enabled self-examination is an essential part of the believer's life.

Spiritual examination enabled by the Holy Spirit is an essential part of the believer's life. Let me kind of get into that a little further by having you look at several different passages that hammer that point.

Go back, if you will, in your Bibles to Job chapter 13, verse 23. Self-examination is beneficial, though it is hard, and it's necessary, in fact, it's characteristic of a thoughtful believer.

Here's what it says in Job. How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgressions and my sin.

[ 9 : 51 ] So let me ask you this. When was the last time you prayed and said, Lord, I am fairly good at fooling myself. I need your help to be more discerning about the issues of sin in my life.

Job prayed that way. Let me have you look at another passage in Psalm 139 and turn to that, if you will. We know Psalm 139 fairly well, but mark what it says in verse 23 and 24.

Psalm 139, verse 23. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

Hey, Lord, you be the one that searches me and checks out my heart. And I need your help to do it because my natural tendency is not to do that objectively, not to be honest with myself.

Let me read another passage to you in Lamentations 3, verse 40. It says this, Let us test and examine our ways and return to the Lord. Let us test. Lamentations 3, verse 40.

[ 11 : 03 ] Let us test and examine our ways and return to the Lord. I'm curious. I'm curious. When was the last time that you consciously and deliberately took some time to think carefully about where you were in your spiritual journey, your walk with Christ, your relationship with Him and with the body of Christ?

Come to one more passage. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, and last week I had the privilege of having bronchitis that kept me in bed until Sunday.

And I appreciate Pastor Shearer on short notice taking the Lord's table in communion. And I don't know whether he used 1 Corinthians chapter 11, but you certainly are aware of the text because we on various occasions have come to that text being reminded in that passage not only of the fact that we're to remember the Lord's death, but we're also to do what?

We're to engage in self-examination. It says, But let a man examine himself The Scripture encourages us every time we take the Lord's table to engage in self-examination.

And I would propose that the better time to do it is not while the elements are coming down the row and you, oh, we are very, very superficial on short notice.

[ 12 : 21 ] Isn't that right? In fact, the matter, the truth is we probably give ourselves a pass when we shouldn't. Self-examination is something that takes some time and some care and some real deliberate thinking about where we are spiritually.

So let's kind of get into that a little further and say this. Self-examination is less painful than the alternatives. Will you note that down? Self-examination is less painful.

Less painful, spirit-enabled self-examination is less painful than the alternatives. What do I mean by that? Just nod your head if you know what I mean. I'll say it again.

Spirit-enabled self-examination is less painful than the alternatives. Everybody look up. Nod your head if you really do understand this. Okay? Here's what I'm saying. If you're a child of God, can you keep on getting away with sin?

Now go this way. No, you cannot. You cannot. And so if we are persisting in disobedience and sinful behavior, what do we know God will do for us?

[ 13 : 30 ] What will He do? Hebrews chapter 12, 13 rather, says this. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens. And so I want you to understand that spirit-enabled self-examination is always less painful than the alternatives.

And so it's wise for us to do that. If we are persisting in our disobedience, you can be sure that one of the things that will flag you as a genuine believer is that He will not let you get away with it.

Listen to me. If you are a genuine believer and you are walking in disobedience, you will not be able to persist. Let's come to another thing.

Spirit-enabled self-examination breeds humility and joy. Spirit-enabled, and why would I say spirit-enabled? Why would I say that at the beginning? Does anybody have an idea?

How many of you tried self-examination without the enabling of the Holy Spirit and the governance of the Word of God? Have you ever done that? It can be rather superficial and very counterproductive.

[ 14 : 39 ] Spirit-enabled self-examination is one that relies upon the Holy Spirit and relies upon the Word of God. And when those things are actively at work in our lives, it breeds humility and joy.

It invariably prompts us to recognize our dependence on Him and to have a thankfulness for His grace. One of the things that I did last week in particular was spend some time in prayer and review of what the last year had been in my own life and what are some of the things that God had brought to the surface and admonished and rebuked me for and dealt with.

What were some of the things that He'd helped me grow in? And without question, as I look back over the year, there was a spirit of thankfulness to say, wow, Lord, I am thankful for what You are doing in my heart and my life and I want You to be the one who receives the praise for that.

I want you to also stop and recognize that there are things that help us to identify what self-examination really is characterized by. So let's talk about that a little bit.

What are some things that mark spirit-enabled self-examination? Listen, it's very easy for us to be quite superficial and say, well, check this box.

[ 16 : 00 ] I have been to church consistently. Check. I have been faithful in my giving. Check. I am one who practices all the externals of religion.

Check. Does that sound a little bit like the Pharisee? Remember when he was praying in the temple? I thank God I'm not, you know. So, let's talk about what are some things that mark spirit-enabled self-examination?

For one, honest prayer to the Lord. Lord, not the garden variety of now I lay me down to sleep. I hope you give me a nice pass for being a good guy. It's like, hey, Lord, I really want to be honest and I need your help to recognize the things in my heart that need to be changed.

And by the way, at what age is that no longer necessary? Listen to me carefully. Getting old without the enabling of the Holy Spirit can make you just kind of a crotchety, unhappy individual.

Everybody said amen, right? How do you want to go out? Joyful, humble, thankful for the power of the Spirit of God to continue the work of progressive sanctification until he shuts the engine off.

[ 17 : 12 ] Humble prayer to the Lord. Number one. Number two. Stop and think about the depth of your love for your Savior. When Jesus spoke to Peter at the very end of John about his responsibility of feeding his sheep, the context and the frame in which he laid the responsibility of what Peter was to do with the remainder of his life was what?

Do you love me? And so an honest question for you to ask yourself and ask the Holy Spirit to help you think about is, so what is my genuine affection for Christ like?

I want you to think with me again to another passage in relationship to this over in Revelation chapter three and don't turn to it, but remember the church at Laodicea when the indictment of Christ actually fell on their ears, what was it?

You have lost your first love. And so I would appeal to you this morning as you think about how do I go about examining my heart honestly?

The question is this, do I really have a love for the Lord Jesus? I'm not talking about are you sitting here? I'm talking about does the thought of Jesus actually fill you with satisfaction and delight and does it cause you to smile in the face of the adversity of life?

[ 18 : 39 ] Yesterday, as we were passing out oatmeal to some people, one under a bridge and another in a tent, very interesting, Greg, where's Greg?

He's not in here, Connie, she's in the nursery, okay. One person, one person, how can I pray for you? That's one of the things we asked, so you're trying to make a conversation, how can I pray for you?

Well, pray for our nation is really divided and the person I voted for did not win. I mean, that's what they wanted me to pray for. Very interesting opportunity to pray in that environment, you know, and so I took advantage of it.

You can weave a prayer into any kind of prayer. You can weave the gospel into any kind of prayer. How many of you learned that? It's just like, hey, thank you for giving me an opportunity here. Bang. The other guy, living in a tent, he said, yeah, you need to pray that the new president comes in.

I thought, whoa, I got one guy under a bridge who wants to pray for the division because his candidate didn't win. That's the only thing he wanted me to pray for, right? And the other guy wants me to pray that this thing would get on sooner.

[ 19 : 45 ] I thought, you guys have no idea what's really going on, do you? Here's the truth. At the center of our confidence and security is the sweetness of our relationship with Christ.

And if you are a believer, there is good reason for your life to be marked by joy in Christ and joy in the Holy Spirit. Isn't that right? So when you do a little self-examination, ask yourself the question, how often am I a moody, unhappy, sullen person because things aren't going my way?

Hmm? If you're a believer, that is where you need to be spiritually, your life is marked by humility and by joy. Here's another thing that is a good test of where we really are.

Give an honest review of your attitudes and responses to those who are closest to you. I'll go real slowly from this one. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you in an honest evaluation of your attitudes and responses to those who are closest to you.

How many of you understand that it's fairly easy to be pretty polite and civil to your neighbor that you only see very occasionally? Huh? The one who really knows your heart best in a marital situation goes to bed with you at night and gets up with you in the morning, shares all the details of life.

[ 21 : 19 ] And if you're a grumpy and sullen person, guess who really knows best? Who? Your husband, your wife, your children. And so ask yourself, do I see in my life as I engage in self-examination, do I see a humble, forgiving, tender, forbearing spirit that loves those who God has put me in close relationship with?

If not, then it's appropriate for you to come back and say, Lord, I need your help to have that kind of attitude. At the end of the day, it's very interesting, when you go through the book of 1 John, you'll find that 1 John is a book that has a recurring theme, namely, how do I know that I'm really saved?

One of the ways that I know that I'm really saved is for my ongoing affection for the body of Christ and for fellow believers. Do you realize that? People that are close to me are the ones that often are a greater challenge than those I only see occasionally.

And so when I'm engaged in self-examination, I ask myself the question, so where's my heart in relationship to those who are close to me? Another thing that I would encourage you to do as you engage in self-examination is kind of check where your confident joy in the Lord is.

Those who walk in communion with the Lord will certainly have storms around them, but they don't have to have the storm in them. I want you to think about a couple different passages in relationship to this.

[ 22 : 51 ] And if you will, turn in your Bible. You're there in 2 Corinthians probably. So turn in your Bible to 1 Peter 1, verse 6. By the way, when Peter wrote this, was he kind of sitting by the Mediterranean Sea kind of anticipating a good retirement and all the benefits of his long-standing ministry?

No, he was expected. He was expecting to be executed. Listen to what he says in verse 6. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials.

In the middle of the heartaches and challenges of life, are you one who is rejoicing in what God is doing and is actively involved in doing in your life? Look at verse 8.

Though now, though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, the characteristic of a believer that is in communion and in sweet relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is their life is marked by confident joy in the Lord.

Is that the way it is? Confident joy in the Lord. One other thing as we think about self-examination. Consider how quickly Scripture comes to be your counselor, your correction, and your comfort.

[ 24 : 23 ] When you stop and think about where am I spiritually, ask yourself this question, how quickly does Scripture come to my mind to be my counselor, my comfort, my encouragement, the challenge to my heart?

Let me have you think about a passage in relationship to this. You're in 1 Peter. Turn over there to Colossians 3, verse 16. Colossians 3, verse 16.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. That word richly means there to have complete, to fill everything. How many of you have little pantries at home where you keep a couple extra cans of whatever it is that you're going to have as part of your supper plan or whatever?

And you go to that and there's nothing there. What do you have to do? You have to make a journey to go somewhere else to get it. Isn't that right? You'd rather have it on site when something comes up and says, oh, I need a couple extra cans of beans or I need this or there it is.

[ 25 : 39 ] It's in the pantry. The scripture is giving us encouragement that we as believers are to have the word of God packed into our life that it is the thing that dominates us.

And so when you find yourself in a moment of stress, when you find yourself needing encouragement, when you find yourself at that point where you're challenged by life, what is it that you rely upon?

What do you go back and cling to and rely upon to be the encourager and the instructor of your life? This morning as I was sitting here on the platform or sitting on the pew thinking about the responsibility of preaching, I had several different passages going through my mind.

One was in Isaiah 8, verse 20 after Pastor prayed where it says this. It says that if the word of God is not at the front and center of the whole thing being presented, it's because there is no light in it.

At the end of the day, the word of God is the thing that is the benchmark, the standard, the measuring stick against which we evaluate all other things to be true or not. And I was thinking about that passage also in Isaiah or in Deuteronomy where it says this, that the priest's lips should get, it's in Malachi, sorry, sorry.

[ 26 : 53 ] Malachi says this, that the priest's lips should keep knowledge for they should seek the law of God at his lips. When a pastor speaks, at the end of the day, the thing that should characterize what he says is a connection to the word of God.

Now if that is true for a pastor, should it be true for godly believers that are part of the fellowship? What's the answer? Absolutely. Absolutely. Your counsel should be framed, you don't have to rattle off the Bible verse, but it has to be the frame of reference that you're relying upon to make your point.

And so looking back, doing some soul searching, some self-examination is valuable to the believer, particularly when it's complemented with a comfort and confidence in the Lord.

And so I want us to do that as a second piece of our logic. We're going to examine ourselves to see whether in their faith, we're going to examine ourselves to see whether or not our hearts are where they need to be.

Let's do the second part and that is rely upon Him and have confidence in His help. Turn in your Bibles now if you would to 1 Samuel chapter 7 verse 12.

[ 28 : 08 ] 1 Samuel chapter 7 verse 12. Self-examination that is not enabled by the Spirit of God is going to breed complete self-deception.

Self-examination that does not bring us to dependence upon Christ is going to bring us to discouragement. And so I want us to couple our self-examination with a healthy dose of confidence in the Lord and His power.

Go to 1 Samuel chapter 7. Any of you that have worked your way through Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, etc., would have to say that the history of Israel is marked by recurring failures.

Isn't that right? I mean, you read the book of Judges and you just kind of think to yourself, man, that cycle is so incessant. They would kind of depend upon the Lord.

They would see some progress in their lives. They would get confident and arrogant and they would fall into deep sin and then they would endure the chastening of God and just cycle back and back and back. 1 Samuel chapter 7 is at one of those points of heartache in the nation's history.

[ 29 : 27 ] They had endured a very, very poor high priest's ministry, Eli, who instead of admonishing and correcting his sons in their wickedness, he had tolerated it.

And as a result, he and his children failed miserably, but also the nation struggled as well in spiritual misbehavior and idolatry.

And as a result of that, God brought other people along to discipline Israel and to bring them to humility. He used the Philistines. There was a great battle and in the midst of the battle, the Israelites thought, well, hey, great idea would be for us to bring the ark because if the ark is there, then God's got to pull it off for us.

Kind of manipulating God in this situation. Have you ever tried that? Don't raise your hand and smile at me. But you know, Lord, I will do A, B, C if you will, right?

Israel thought they could kind of manipulate God and it didn't work out well. As a result of that miserable failure on the part of Israel, they endured many years of spiritual heartache.

[ 30 : 37 ] And finally we find there in 1 Samuel chapter 7 that the house of Israel finally came to the place where they lamented after the Lord.

Look at 1 Samuel chapter 7 verse 2. It says, And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. How many of you ever been at the point in your life where you have been tired of the consequences of your sin and you cried out to the Lord and said, Lord, do whatever you think best but get this nasty heart back to where it needs to be?

Israel lamented after the Lord. Samuel, the faithful prophet, comes into the picture and he says there in verse 3, If you're returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods, the Asheroth among you, and direct your heart to the Lord and serve Him only.

And as a result of their plea and the counsel of Samuel, the nation of Israel obediently began to pursue the Lord and when that news got out to the Philistines, the Philistines decided, All right, we're going to come back and try to oppress them again.

What happened? Now God was on their side and you read there in verse 7, Now when the Philistines, this is verse 7 of chapter 7, when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel and when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid.

[ 32 : 13 ] The people of Israel said to Samuel, Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines. What happened? Samuel prayed.

Samuel offered sacrifice and God divinely intervened for the sake of the nation and protected and preserved them and after that great battle and that success, we find that Samuel called for a time of offering and sacrifice and praise.

Look at verse 12. Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shem and called its name Ebenezer. Now, question, how many of you remember when we used to sing that song, Here I raise my Ebenezer?

Ebenezer. And some of the modern hymn books have just taken it out because we don't make that translation. It's not hard. Ebenezer means what? Hitherto hath the Lord brought us.



One of the things that Israel did on a regular basis, they were into stacking stones. Now, one of the things you know about stacks of stones is they don't happen by themselves. Do you understand that? They just don't pile up by themselves.

[ 33 : 23 ] They may do it on cartoons, but they don't do it in real life. And so when you saw a pile of stones, you thought, that's about something. I wonder what that is. Classic illustration of that would be that when the nation of Israel crossed the Jordan on dry land, what did Joshua tell the nation to do?

Pick out 12 husky guys. By the way, I need four strong men to help move a... Some of you are laughing at this, but I do.

I need four strong men after the morning service to go into the multipurpose room to help bring a large credenza into the conference room. There we go.

So Joshua said, I want 12 strong guys. I want each of them to pick up a big stone and carry it out to dry land. And what did they do with those stones? They built a pile of them on dry land, and there was another one in the middle of the river.

So later on, years from now or years in the future, the children of Israel would look at that pile. What's this all about? Well, there's a pile just like that in the middle of the river, and we crossed on dry land.

[ 34 : 35 ] A reminder. And here is Samuel saying, I want us to build this pile of stones, and what I want... I'll put a big stone up. He says, I want us to call this stone Ebenezer, because this is how far God has brought us.

On the heels of that great and supernatural victory, Samuel wanted the nation of Israel to remember for all time, this is what God has done for us. Why is that important?

Because there will be other times where we will forget what God has done. And in the middle of some of our heartache and our difficulty, we're going to forget that He is on our side and He's at work for us.

Right now, if you read the news, you will understand that Israel is in a hard place. Would you agree with that?

Israel is in a hard place in our world perspective. And as I look at that, I am reminded that the God of Abraham who made a promise in Genesis chapter 12 has not changed His mind regarding His people.

[ 35 : 45 ] And God will take care of the nation of Israel. And because of His faithfulness to the nation of Israel, Tim Kenoyer has confidence that He will keep His promises to me as well.

And that pile of stones that Samuel set up, that pile, that big stone that he set up, he said, listen, this is a reminder, this is what God has done for us. And so it's fitting for us, practically speaking, as a group of people, to stop and think, all right, what has God done?

What has He done? And what are things that we can give Him thanks for? So let's think about the things that we can thank God for. For one, I have to tell you as I think about 2016 and the years actually behind that, I am very thankful to the Lord that He directed this congregation's heart regarding a transition plan and that this congregation voted in complete unanimity to proceed with that process.

And after about a two-year search process, He brought us a senior pastor-elect. That is not some light thing. And I'm thankful for it. And I trust you remain with that spirit of thankfulness.

Furthermore, I would say that as I look back over the year, I am thankful that He has worked in our hearts to give us a deliberate attention to the needs of others and to help us grow in this area.

[ 37 : 03 ] We're not where we want to be, but we're not where we used to be. And I'm thankful for that. I think of just this last fall when we entertained the Franklin County Board of Elections and week after week after week, our small groups brought suppers in for that group of people and served them willingly.

Do you know what they did? Instead, they invited me to a banquet that I tried to get Pastor Shearer or Pastor Andrew to go to instead of me. I even asked Pastor Saul if he would go. And in front of a whole roomful of people, they gave this church an award for being the most civic-minded group of blah, blah, blah.

You know, wow! We served them. Did we do it for a token and a little plaque? I don't even know where it is. It's in my truck. It's in my truck. I'm not hanging it up.

We've grown. We made headway. Thank the Lord for that. He has helped us increase our impact in the community through things like Awana. We've had a lot more young people in Awana this year than last year.

He has helped us in Thursday evening basketball. And I'm thankful for that. Thursday evenings, there is a crowd of guys who come in here and play basketball. By the way, since Joel Dobney decided there's going to be a police officer, Lord willing, he handed that off to me.

[ 38 : 23 ] I went in a couple weeks ago and I'm with the guys in there and they said, so you're Joel's replacement. I said, well, yeah. They said, well, you're going to have to sub in.

I said, no way. I'm sitting over here on the side. I'll be present, but that's it. And I have an opportunity week after week to share the gospel with people that don't hear it any other way.

And by the way, if you'd like to join me, let me know. I'll get you involved. There are other ways in which we are growing in our attention to the needs of people around us week after week.

Quiet little activities that you engage in as God's people in meeting the needs of people that are right there in your neighborhood that you know need Christ and you're building those bridges for their sake.

Beloved, all of this has been the work of God in us and we want to give Him credit for it. And it's fitting for us as we look back by self-examination to say, man, there's a ways for me to go and I need to grow.

[ 39 : 25 ] But at the same time, it's appropriate for us to look back and say, look what God has done and the blessings that He's produced in our life and we're thankful for that. So let me bring it to a close and have you think with me very practically about how this applies to you.

Truth of the matter is that you are here in one of two conditions. I would believe that the vast majority of you are here today and you know Christ as your Savior and self-examination along with thanksgiving is to characterize your life moving forward.

I see what God has done. I know there's more to do and I renew my commitment to Him to grow to be the person that He wants me to be. That's a believer. I don't want to play games spiritually.

I want to be who He wants me to be. But there are some of you here today that do not know Christ and so self-examination this morning is a matter of bringing you to conviction to recognize that the truth of the matter is this, is that if you were to die tonight and God were to say why should I let you into heaven, you wouldn't have an answer.

I got to tell you if you would recommend to me that you've been a pretty good person, I'll tell you this, Jesus died on the cross because there are no good people. Scripture says this, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and there's no hope for an individual making it into heaven on the basis of their own efforts.

[ 40 : 49 ] Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and only those who come to Christ in humility and say, I know I'm a sinner and need Jesus as my Savior are the ones who find everlasting life.

So at the beginning of the year, this is January the 1st, if you're a believer, it's a matter of, Lord, is there work to do in my life? Yes. Can I trust you to help me?

Yes. I am committed to grow. And if you're here as a person who does not know Christ, today is the day to trust Him and plead for salvation.

Let's close in prayer. Our Father, we are thankful this morning for the clarity with which you make it plain to us that we are a people who need the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior.

we're thankful that you have saved so many of us here today. We're thankful that we can examine ourselves with the power of the Holy Spirit and make commitments to grow in our walk with you.

[ 41 : 50 ] I'm thankful also, Father, for the privilege of being able to share the gospel and to have complete confidence that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and that this morning is the hour in which people may call upon the name of the Lord and find salvation through Him alone.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.