

Through God We Hope

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Preacher: Pastor Kenoyer

[0:00] Amen. We're going to do a practical exercise before we actually go to our study in the Scriptures and hold it in your hand.

Okay, just hold it. What I want you to do is take just a minute and look at one of the initiatives that we have for this year, and I'm going to read it out loud, and then I'm going to ask you how you are doing at this.

Now, I'm not going to call on you, and I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand, but just kind of have you think with me. The initiative that we have for this year is God's Word, model and encourage the personal discipline of linking Scripture to behavior and decisions.

Encourage the personal discipline of linking Scripture to behavior and decisions. And I'm going to explain how you can do that in simple, simple terms.

One of the things that I would encourage you to do, I want to very strongly encourage you to do this, is that when we get together and we sing and we look at the words of songs that we're singing, here's what I appeal to you to do.

[1:40] Are you tracking so far? I want you to cross-reference the passage or cross-reference a passage from Scripture with what the song says. Does it make sense?

I was doing it on the bottom of my little order of service. And I do it mentally as we are working our way through various songs because I take great, there's pleasure in that.

Do you realize that? Let me give you just a very inane, kind of marginally worthless illustration of it. The other day, my wife and I were channel surfing.

Do you know what channel surfing is like? I think channel surfing is something that men do better than women. You know, it's click, click, click. Women are click, click, click.

We take things and we get a lot more done because we're in smaller bites. And we were channel surfing and saw a Taylor Swift concert. Not one of the people that I would, you know, think I would really want to go see at any particular time.

[2:47] But the thing that I was really struck by is that as soon as her band would begin playing the next song and she would launch into it, guess what all the little groupies were doing down front?

They were singing their hearts out. They knew all the words. In fact, as the band would start up, they would get right into it without being invited.

Off they'd go. And now we're not into doing Taylor Swift concerts here, but here's what I want you to do. When we begin singing together, I want to see the heart of the believer light up with seeing practical connection with what we're singing about in particular passages of Scripture.

Now, let's try this. A very Baptist thing to do. But I want us to say amen. Just, you know, do you know what amen means? This is true or so be it.

Yeah. So, now we are very reserved as a people and we're kind of marginally moving away from being overly reserved. And you don't have to say amen to be blessed by God.

[4:02] I want you to understand that. But our goal is to begin attaching Scripture to what we're thinking and doing and the simplest, probably the little easy baby steps is to do it here when we're together.

Would you agree with that? Make sense? Nods are almost like an amen. Now, we're going to work at that. We're going to work at that. And all God's people said, that was fantastic.

Okay. Now, I get cold chills when I open this book.

Look. Because God has given to us His Word. Do you realize that the Word of God is one of the explicit, distinct illustrations of how He loves us?

Have you ever thought about it that way? The Scriptures tell us that. And by the way, since all of you that are here this morning are going to be here tonight, you're going to hear me preach about that a little bit more.

[5:05] I want you to look around because everybody that's here this morning will be here tonight. It's going to be another lesson from the Scriptures that is going to be a blessing and encouragement to you. So, come. We're going to look at the value of the Word of God.

And we're going to touch on one aspect of it in that the Word is an illustration or a proof of the particular love of God for us.

And so, as we open the Word this morning and we think together of things that we believe God wants us to work to do as a family of believers here, let me kind of frame the starting point by having you look at Philippians chapter 3, verse 13 and 14.

I know a number of you on various occasions in your life have actually run in a 5K or run cross-country or things like that where you had to go at it a little harder and a little longer than just the 100-yard jaunt, right?

And when you target an objective like that, one of the things that helps you is to have a clear picture of where you're going and break it down so that you know how you're doing.

[6:23] I want you to look at Philippians chapter 3, verse 13. Here's the apostle saying this, Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

Question, what lies in front? What is Paul really thinking about? He is thinking about eternity. He is looking forward to the day when he will see or he would see the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the ambition and the affection, the interest of his heart is affected by that vision, that goal. He says, Forgetting those things that are behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

As we start into this year, I want you to think of the model that the apostle sets in this passage of being very intentional in the effort and the ambition that we as a believer have to accomplish things that are noteworthy and praiseworthy to the glory of Christ.

A number of years ago, our fellowship actually recognized that it would be fitting and it would be biblical for us to take some time on an annual basis and set some explicit and specific goals, things that we were going to work at as a fellowship and targets that we want to shoot for.

[7:58] In conjunction with this, one of the things that happened back, I think it was back in 2008 that we first got into this, but back at that time, the pastoral staff and deacons worked to set some specific goals.

And then in conjunction with that, one of the things that took place and does take place is that in June, there's a review. How are we doing? It's a little bit like, what's the word? Lap times.

You know, how are you doing? Are you hitting the targets? Are you making progress? Are there things that we need to work at again and work at a little harder? And so we've, over a number of years, set these strategic initiatives, worked at them.

And so it's kind of interesting to be able to look now about five, six years into this and say, look at some of the things that God has done in our fellowship because of our intentional pursuit of goals that we find in the Scripture and help us grow in grace.

I recognize as I look back over some of the things that God has done for us that today we are far more engaged in ministry to those who are around us than we once were.

[9:02] I notice that we are more intentional in nurturing family life. We're targeted on that. So what are we doing to help our families grow in their relationship with one another, the devotional life, their walk and ministry to one another?

We're also more intentional in encouraging attention to spiritual life. And it continues to be a goal. But I think we can look and say there's much more attention to what is happening in our fellowship's personal walk than there used to be.

We also place a high value on lasting relationships. And we move from kind of Sunday morning, Sunday night to where there is a part of our church day and a church week that is targeted and is set specifically for the matter of encouraging us in our relationships with one another.

Father, we've expanded our commitment to missions and to pray for those who suffer for the Lord Jesus around the world. And even this morning as you were coming in and noticing the scrolling things on the screen behind me, one of the things that passed was information on a pastor that is suffering again for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the purpose of that is to encourage you to remember to pray for that man. Don't just kind of, yeah, yeah, but pray. Do something about it actively. And some of the things that we now are beginning to take for granted in our daily life as a church were once only prayerful ambitions.

[10:28] They were things that, well, I would like to see our fellowship work at that, but there was no plan, no intention to move beyond just an ambition. And we've seen God use our strategic initiatives to move us forward in a particular track.

Now, earlier I referenced a great list of personal things that God has helped us do or corporate things that God has helped us do. And as I look over the things that God's done, I can't help but recognize many of those things actually came out of strategic initiatives that we set as a fellowship and then have pursued.

And so it has been kind of a habit that early in the year, one of the things we do is we look at what we are and then we look at things we want to do.

Now, I recognize that it's pretty familiar with you. You see it on the screen when you come in in the morning. But I want to say it to you again that we as a fellowship recognize we're a family of believers committed to reaching the world for Christ and edifying one another.

What are we doing here? We're a body of believers. More explicitly, more specifically, we're a family of believers committed to reaching the world for Christ and edifying one another.

[11:40] So let's stop just for a minute. This is not a song. I'm not going to sing it. But when you hear me say something like that, what should be going through your mind? And the answer is passages of Scripture, where in the Bible does it give us any idea that we have a right to think about ourselves as a family, as a church?

Don't answer the question because I'm sure it's obvious to all of you, right? And where in the Bible does it give us any idea that we have an interest or we should have an interest in seeing people come to Christ?

How close to our heart should that ambition be? And by the way, as a sidebar, if it is close to our heart, everybody smile at me. It is. It is.

Right? Hello? Is it close to your heart? When was the last time you prayed about God giving you, personally, an opportunity for evangelism? One.

Second, how many people other than close family members are you praying about explicitly, specifically, asking Christ to see them come to grace? Is it reasonable if that is something that is in the Bible that our prayer life should model that?

[12:52] And what's the answer? It should. It should. We're family believers. We're people that God has drawn together. And we are committed to reaching the world, and we are committed to edifying one another.

It's reasonable to ask where these goals and objectives come from, and the answer, as I've already illustrated to you, really rises out of Scripture, and we need to be conversant.

We need to know where those Scriptures are and how they relate to us as believers. And it's reasonable to ask ourselves, okay, so what is it in the broader picture that God is doing in our lives corporately and in your life individually?

Now, I want to explain what the Scriptures makes clear about that. For one, it is in the heart of God the Father to honor His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, with children that He has chosen for His own. And once He has chosen and given those children to Christ, guess what goes on subsequent to that? What is God doing in the life of all who are believers?

[13:57] What is He doing? He is in the process of conforming you into the image of His Son. Romans chapter 8, verse 28 says what?

All things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose.

And then that string follows through to make it explicitly clear that God is in the business of working in your life to do those things that are necessary for His glory and His good.

A couple days ago, I was driving. I forget where it was, but as I was driving along the side of the road, there was this large, large, large sign, big, big sign.

And it said, \$50 million Powerball, Saturday, Sunday. Now, I'm probably more gullible and vulnerable than you are, but I remember, Pastor Knoyer did this, I remember looking at that sign and thinking, whoa, what would I do with \$50 million?

Anybody else besides me ever been tempted by those signs? Oh, you're such a righteous group today, and I appreciate that. I'm driving along, and I'm thinking, what would I do with \$50 million?

[15:13] And then here's the second thought that I had. I thought, you know, if my father thought I needed \$50 million, and if my father thought I wouldn't hurt myself with \$50 million, he would give it to me.

Now, is that accurate theologically? What's the answer? You bet. See, the Scriptures tell me that I have everything I need. And he has provided all that I need for life and godliness.

Not only that, but he is working out the details of how I am doing economically with this explicit goal in mind of helping me grow to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isn't that right? That's what he's doing. And so, what we want to do as believers, as we think together of what we're going to do in this coming year, we want to have a passion to see that issue of growth played out in real time.

You know, it's interesting when you stop and think not only that the Scriptures tell us what God is doing, but we find in the Scripture different illustrations of apostolic leadership that was interested in seeing growth in people's lives.

[16:29] Let me reference a couple of them for you. Go over in Galatians chapter 4. If you're in Philippians, you can just turn back a tiny bit to Galatians chapter 4 and verse 19.

Here's what the apostle says. My little children, for who I'm again in the anguish of childbirth till Christ is formed in you. I have to confess that I like the way it reads in the King James.

It says, I labor in travail till Christ be formed in you. The apostle's saying, listen, I am going through the pangs of childbirth, poetically speaking.

He says, I'm going through that level of challenge with this explicit goal in mind that you who I love would grow to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, as we think about strategic initiatives and we think about what are the things we want to work at this year, the undeniable goal is this, is that the outcome of our goals is that God's people grow to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17:36] We find the same affection over in Colossians. Paul, writing to a different church, expresses a very similar motive. And if you look at Colossians chapter 1, verse 28 and 29, here's what he says.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everything with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. A pastor's goal, the deacon's goal, a father's goal, a mother's goal is that those who are part of their family and who they minister to would, as a result of the ministry of the Word of God would grow in maturity to look more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I cannot read the passage without sensing the apostle's level of commitment and earnestness that the people that he cared for would grow to be like Christ. I want to tell you that desire is not enough.

Do you realize that? How many of you have had great ambitions to do certain things in this last year, 2012, and you look back and it's not done? I remember looking out the window a couple days ago and realizing that I had had a noble ambition to paint the exterior trim on the west side of the house.

Does anybody know why the west side is so important? Because that's where most of the weather comes. And I remember last year, this was 11, looking out the window on the west side and thinking, I'd better do that in 12.

[19:05] And here it was 13 and I was thinking, I'd better do that in 13. But then there was this little thought came along with it, if I don't do it in 13, I may be doing something to replace windows.

Much, much more expensive than slapping a little coat of paint. You know, you go beyond just the desire and the ambition and you have to set some specific goals and say, all right, we're going to get it done.

And we as a fellowship took our overarching statement about what we are and we broke that statement down into six different areas that we were going to work together as a family of believers. And they have been in front of you at various times. And when you take out your little goldenrod piece of paper, you can see it's broken down into God's word, lost mankind, building saints, prayer, honoring God, and family.

And what I'd like us to do in the remainder of the time that we take this morning is think together of the specifics of our strategic initiatives for 2013. Let's begin a little bit over there with God's word.

[20:09] And recognize the first one that we've identified there is that we want to nurture partnerships for devotions, prayer, and accountability. We want to nurture partnerships for devotions, prayer, and accountability.

A fundamental Bible truth is that we need godly encouragement and companionship if we're going to grow in grace. Let me say that again slowly so you recognize it.

It's a fundamental truth in the scriptures that we need godly companionship to help us grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're hardwired from creation as individuals who depend upon relationships and benefit from good relationships.

By the way, the reverse is also true. How many of you realize that you are affected negatively by bad relationships? Huh? That's the way it is. But I want you to think back with me just for a moment and don't need to go to the passage, but follow with me.

Back in Genesis 2, verse 18, it says this. Speaking about the species, it says, It is not good that man should be alone. Now, in that case, God had created all living beings, mankind included, but He'd done something unique with man.

[21:25] What was it? In every other case, He created them what? If you know the passage, male and female, male and female. There were two elephants. There were two hippopotamuses.

There were two giraffes. There were two salmon. There were two halibut. You know, they're all two, two, two, two, two. You got it? And man was what? He was alone.

Now, by the way, was that an oversight on God's part? What's the answer? Not at all. Did He do it for His sake or for our sake? He did it so that for all of eternity, the record would indicate that God in His wisdom understood we needed the reminder that we need each other.

Now, what's the problem with needing each other? How many of you realize that relationships are A, work, B, messy? Okay? And so here's God saying, listen, I want you to understand.

You need other people in the equation. Furthermore, I want you to think with me and turn over to the passage. Hebrews chapter 10, verse 24 and 25.

[22:35] Hebrews chapter 10, verse 24 and 25. Here, towards the latter part of the book of Hebrews, we find the author speaking about one of the reasons why we gather together.

It 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.

Now, we find here an explicit command that believers are to gather together. Now, there are a number of different reasons why we are to gather together.

If you were to track back in your Bible to Acts chapter 2, verse 42, there we find that the early church gathered with four particular things in view. They gathered for the apostles' doctrine.

What is the apostles' doctrine? That is, when someone takes the Word of God in the apostolic era during the New Testament time, it was the apostles in particular who were teaching.

[23:39] And when they studied the apostles' doctrine, were they studying primarily what Peter and John and others thought? What's the answer? No. They were studying the Scriptures.

And so, when the early church met to study the apostles' doctrine, one of the things that they did was that they studied what the Word of God already has to say.

And secondly, it says they gathered for the breaking of bread. And that refers to the Lord's table, which we will celebrate later in the month. And we will come and remind ourselves of the finished work of Christ and the gospel, which is in the elements.

They gathered also for prayers, for corporate prayer. Is there a time when we ought to pray together as individuals? And what's the answer? I trust that you wake up in the morning and you pray. I trust that the last thing you do when you go to sleep at night is that you close out the day with prayer. I trust that you pray at every juncture of every decision that you're making and that the constant flow of life, praying always with all prayer and supplication.

[24:49] The other thing that we find also is that the church gathered for fellowship. That's koinonia, which is joint or mutual participation. And it has in mind the ministry of one to another.

And in that ministry, there is an encouragement and an edification that God intends to take place. We want to encourage that through partnerships for devotional life, prayer life, and accountability. Now, we want to be intentional through this year in pointing out the value of such relationships for the purpose of encouraging our devotional life and our prayer life as well as our individual walk. And our intention is, and follow this if you will, we want to encourage husbands to minister and disciple and nurture their wives' spiritual well-being.

Everybody smile at me. Isn't that a nice thing to say? Everybody, look up, look up. Now, I'm not going to ask all the husbands in here that are doing this on a regular basis to raise their hand and wave at me.

[25:51] Why wouldn't I do that? There are a couple reasons. Number one, because you remember what Jesus said, if you're going to pray, don't do it publicly.

I'm doing it. I'm doing it. That's not a good idea. But there's another reason. Probably there aren't as many doing it as should be. Right?

We want to encourage that. Now, by the way, can I tell husbands that if you go home from this sermon and sit your wife down on the couch and say, starting tomorrow, you'll be meeting here at 830, and I'm taking over your spiritual development, you may get a little pushback.

One of the reasons is, is what you haven't been doing very effectively rises out of the fact that your heart's not in it.

And before you decide you're going to do advanced surgery on your wife's spiritual well-being, you probably ought to be doing a little bit in your own life. Understood? Okay. So, we want to encourage partnering for the sake of devotions and prayer and accountability.

[27:01] We want to encourage husband with wife, parent with child, man with another man, woman with another woman. And I want to make this clear. We do not intend to kind of put formal lists together and say arbitrarily, we have taken all the A's in the congregation, and the A's are going to be meeting with the Z's.

You know, there's got to be some logic to what we're doing, right? So, the A's are with the Z's, the B's with blah, blah. You know how it goes? We're not doing that. One of the things I've learned the hard way is that what you decide you're going to organize in your own flesh doesn't go very far. Everybody would agree with that, right? What we want to do is pray about this, encourage it, encourage, pray, pray, encourage, nurture, and see God begin to help you as God's people intentionally work to develop relationships for your spiritual development.

Now, track with me. If I know I'm going to walk across an icy patch, I'm inclined to figure out a way to keep from falling.

How many of you understand what I just said? Okay? And one of the ways you keep from falling, we've got a little place where in the wisdom of whoever built our house, you know, the roof comes together, and there's this drip zone.

[28:30] How many of you know what I'm saying? It drip, drip, drip, drip, drip. Water comes off the roof and puddles right there, and it forms a perfect little ice sheet. And I throw down salt.

The salt melts the ice, and then drip, drip, drip. Guess what happens? It's just, and so generally when my wife is crossing over there, guess what I automatically do? And she has the wisdom to wait for me.

And I will kind of be south of the ice patch and help her across that. There is a natural desire in her heart not to do one of these, I skated for a millisecond, and then I ended up on the ground type of thing.

So she wants a little help, and I'm going to encourage you and nurture in the heart of God's people. You go look for someone to help you and disciple, encourage you, partner. I want you to recognize another thing that we are going to work at, and I've already illustrated it to you.

But we're going to model and encourage that personal discipline of linking Scripture to behavior and decisions. So I want to tell you that you're going to hear about that more and more. You're going to hear about it on a regular basis.

[29:35] I trust I don't beat the drum to the point that you get a little tired of it. But it's going to be there. I think a drum has a good place. When we were singing that song, I think, I am horrible when it comes to music.

Very thankful other people are not quite as horrible. I was up here, and John, you were leading, and you rested too long for me. And so I launched right into the song. I don't know.

Do you remember that? They're over here snickering at me. It's a good thing the rest of you can't hear it. But I think in that song, 10,000 Reasons, that drum beat, Justin, you can hit that harder for my sake.

I mean, I want boom, boom, boom, boom. You need that. Would you agree with that? Get your blood moving. Yeah. I need to have my blood moving.

You know, I like that. So every now and then, I'm not going to grab the drums and do that, but my goal is to encourage you to make the connection.

[30:38] What saith the Scriptures? I appreciate ministry with Pastor Saul. He is a godly blessing to me, a companion in the gospel.

And for some strange reason, God made us really different. I mean, you know, we are really different. He doesn't like to hunt.

He doesn't like guns. And God, in His wisdom, has given him a son that now is interested in guns. I understand that. And he even has a grandson that says, and when I turn 16, I'm going to have a gun under my bed.

And so, Pastor Saul and I, given all the chatter out there on Facebook and other things about guns and self-defense and blah, blah, blah, we were having a little bit of pastoral discussion about, and I follow this, because in all the conversations I've seen on Facebook, I really am missing scriptural context.

How many of you understood what I just said, scriptural context? I'm not hearing people say, oh, yeah, well, I understand what does the Bible say, right?

[31:50] I don't hear people asking that question on either side. I appreciate Pastor Saul saying, well, you know, I'm trying to frame this scripturally, and here's a passage that has some application, but here's a rebuttal to it in thinking the thing through biblically.

I want to encourage God's people to develop the discipline of asking yourself, so what does the Bible say about this matter? Here, most of us can recite 2 Timothy 3, verse 16, right?

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, da-da-da-da-da, and is profitable. That's the way it finishes out. That the man of God can be what? Completely furnished for all good works.

You have everything you need. How many of you have ever started into a project on repairing something on your car and discovered that you didn't have the tools for it?

You ever done that? Or you've started into a home remodeling thing. Plumbing is the thing I always think about. And, you know, you're under the sink, and you find out that somebody borrowed that little faucet wrench that was designed to reach up there into the dark abyss and loosen the valve just the proper way.

[33:11] You follow what I'm saying? The Scriptures tell us that God has given us everything we need. And one of the things that I want to become kind of hardwired into our fellowship is Isaiah chapter 8, verse 20.

I want you to turn back in your Bible for a moment to that passage. But Isaiah chapter 8, verse 20. This ought to be one of those passages that you have written on your hand and in your refrigerator and probably in the car and a couple other places.

It should be something that is there on the frontal part of your brain. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 3, I hope is also there.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has what? Blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. This is another one that I want put up there in the front with you.

It says there in Isaiah chapter 8, verse 20, To the teaching and to the testimony, if they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. They have no light in them.

[34:18] Sadly, our generation today is far more like the generation that Jeremiah wrote about than Isaiah was referencing.

Turn over in your Bible, if you will. You're in Isaiah, so go forward just a little bit into Jeremiah chapter 2, verse 13. Verse 13, for my people have committed two evils.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters. In the ancient world, you didn't live very far from water.

Does anybody know why that was? How many of you grew up carrying water if you wanted to have water? I can see that.

In the ancient world, you did not have indoor plumbing, let alone outdoor plumbing. And guess what? Water was the absolute part of life. And it says here, You have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters.

[35:34] The consequence of forsaking the fountain of living waters is that you live a dry and miserable life. On top of that, here's what God's people had done.

It says, And you have hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. I look at what is going on in many people's lives, and they put far more value on the thinking of this world and psychological babble than they do the Scriptures.

And it's woven into their thought process. It's woven into the way they respond to heartache. It's woven into the way they deal with the challenges of life. Well, let's see what Dr. Phil thinks.

Beloved, I want to model and encourage the personal discipline of linking Scripture to our decisions and our behavior. Let me come to another thing that we want to focus on together, and that is lost mankind.

And frankly, we want to take the time to review and revise our discipleship materials this year. It's been our joy to see a number of individuals come to Christ in this last year, and in the course of what God's been doing, some people have come publicly, others have come privately.

[36:51] But following a person's profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, a normal thing that should take place is that there should be a discipleship process that goes on. An older believer encouraging the new believer in growing in the grace and knowledge of our Christ, our Savior.

And that takes time. And we recognized earlier, as we were seeing what God was doing, that we need to come back and review the discipleship materials we had, because most of what we were using had their roots back in Evangelism Explosion, in the program that we were ministering there.

And we realized that a lot of that material, we no longer fit practically in what we're doing as a fellowship. And so we want to go back and take some time to look at that and study how can we do a better job with personal discipleship with those who come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

We also recognize that one of the things that is very special about this year is this is year where we have a missions conference. In our youth ministry, our young people kind of have a rotating cycle of missions.

How many of you knew that? One year it's overseas. The next year it's, well, this year they're going to shepherds. Can I say something in relationship to our missions team?

[38:10] Everybody listening? The consistent comment we have received from every single place we've ever taken a missions team is this. Your young people are well prepared to serve in the environment that they have been placed in.

How did that come about? You ask any one of our young people that's gone on a missions team and they will tell you that the preparation was, can I use the word, challenging.

Is that right? Every time the preparation has been challenging. And the reason is we think sending young people or sending anybody on a missions trip is not just a paid vacation to the Bahamas.

We think it's ministry. And preface, preparation for ministry should be adequate training and study. So there's a cycle for missions with our young people.

There's a cycle for the adults that is one year a Bible or a missions conference, one year a missions trip, and one year ministry in the community and around about us to continue to look for ways we can serve people that need the Lord Jesus.

[39:28] This is missions conference year. And I'm really excited to be able to tell you this morning that we are looking forward to having Waleed Bittar minister to us. He is a missionary up in Canada that has a great deal of ministry.

He's Jordanian, I think it is. And he works over in the Middle East with Muslims. And so he has a tremendous ministry. He'll be here. In addition, we have Tom Grafe, who is working in Romania with ABWE.

And then we have Doug Boivere, who is part of the Triem, and he ministers in Africa. And these three are just outstanding, world-class missionaries that are going to be here during our missions conference.

And I tell you, ahead of time, missions conference is going to be a time that focuses, focuses, focuses on what God is doing around the world. Let's look third at the issue of building saints. What do we shoot to do this year to help us grow in grace? And I mark down there that we are going to teach a series on godly living. We're going to teach the issue of godly living.

[40:31] Let me tell you that I think we kind of live on the doorstep of Sodom and Gomorrah. How many of you realize that? We live in a world that is saturated with wickedness.

How do we respond to that? Well, I want you to understand that given the challenge, we want to set a foundation for godly living in our love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then carry that foundation forward into living a life that's set apart from the heart out. When you hear the term holiness or you hear the term godliness, if you have any background, if you're my age or a little lighter than my age, right, you tend to think about a set of do's and don'ts.

How many of you realize that? Godly living, holy living is all about, you know, what? The nasty nine, the filthy five, I've talked about that before, and things we don't do.

We don't do this, we don't do that. I understand that there's a place for all that, but the starting point is this, is what? Our love for the Lord Jesus Christ and holiness and godliness rise out of our heart and our affections for Christ.

[41:45] We do care about the purity of this congregation. We do care about the testimony. I found myself the other day getting caught up a little bit in fretting about the culture that we live in.

And I was praying about it, and I recognized that the problem with meat, which is spoiling, and that's what's happening in our country. Would you agree with that? But it's not the meat's fault for spoiling. It's the salt's fault for not being salty. And we're going to focus this year a little bit on the issue of godliness, and we're going to teach some lessons in relationship to that. Let me skip ahead, if I may, to prayer.

We are committed this year to have some prayer services that are going to be dedicated to an entire hour of prayer, where instead of having a half an hour Bible lesson and having a half an hour time where we break up into smaller groups, we're going to have a time that we spend the entire time praying together, and there will be advanced planning that will put together matters that we want to pray for as a body, and the hour will be organized in such a fashion that the whole hour is committed to a time of prayer.

Finally, on honoring God, I want you to look at one of the things that we're going to attend to. We are going to be involved in a pastoral search, and we are going to be involved in long-range strategic planning.

[43:04] We will begin the process of a pastoral search, actually, to fill the vacancy left by resignation, and we want that process to be marked by prayer, by careful deliberation, and input as well as timely reports on the progress that we're making on the effort.

I want you to know that this Saturday, when the pastors and deacons meet together, that will be the starting point of beginning the process of the pastoral search, and we will keep you as a congregation closely advised of the progress we're making and where we're going with those things.

Ask those who are part of our youth leadership team to be involved also in giving us their input and information coming together. We're going to spend time processing that, praying over that, and out of that will come a pastoral profile and a job description recommendation, which is part of our way of doing things.

We'll come to you as a congregation and say, here's our proposal. You are the ones who are going to decide on what are we looking for. See, one of the things that I think is always beneficial for us to remember is that, as a general rule, when we do things at Maranatha, we have a tendency of doing things, guess how?

According to the Constitution that you as a people have given as the document for governing the way we handle things. And so, just to understand, we're going to begin the process of a pastoral search.

[44:31] We also recognize that long-range strategic planning calls us to think forward with anticipation, and we intend for our board to work aggressively on this more in this coming year.

We recognize that it's wise for us to think about what is the future going to look like for us as a family of believers, and how do we prepare for what God may have in front of us?

We've got to think about that, and that is going to be an intentional responsibility of the leadership as they work on this behind the scenes and keep you advised of the process that you're engaged in.

Let me come to the closing one, and then we are going to have John come and lead us in a song before we have an invitation. Let's talk about family. One of the things that we want to grow in as a family of believers is growing in our care for the disadvantaged through such things as Operation Christmas Child, Baby Bottles with PDC, which is coming up, and a number of other similar projects that we've been involved in.

An encouraging thing that I think we've all seen God do is, through our small group ministry in particular, small groups have been very quick to respond when they see a need.

[45:45] Very quick. And we want to encourage that and facilitate that by having each little small group kind of share, well, this is what worked for us so that there's a regular flow of ideas.

Here's what happens sometimes. Somebody gets a good idea, and they kind of birth it, and it goes off great, but nobody else learns about how well it was, how well it went. And we benefit from hearing what others are doing because it encourages us to love and to good works, going back to the Hebrews passage.

And so one of the things that we want to see take place in this coming year is greater attention to things that we are doing to meet the needs of people around us right in our community that have needs that we kind of, if we're not paying attention, they drop off the radar screen, and we don't respond to them.

And so we, as we look into this year, we recognize what Paul said in Philippians, I press towards the mark. I have some goals for what I want God to do in my life this year.

But it doesn't help us get there if we don't set specific targets and work at it. Do you have to accept every one of these goals and work at them individually in order to be blessed?

[46:59] What's the answer? No, no, no, no, no. But you have to set some. I remember several years ago when we talked about reading through the Scriptures on a regular basis.

Some people set the goal of reading through the New Testament in the year, and they got that done. Others set the goal of reading through the entire Bible in the year, and some people got that one done.

Some people set the goal of reading through the Scriptures four times in the year. They got that done. And the fact that they set the goal helped them on a regular basis make progress towards that, and the blessing of doing that has been spiritual progress in their lives.

So let me encourage you as we close this morning. Beloved, in order to press towards the goal of the high calling of Christ, you need to set some specific targets and be part of that process in your life, and I call you to do that.

John, would you come and lead us as we close? I'm going to sing the first song, and then I will come up for an invitation at the second song so you know what we're doing.

[48:17] Stand and sing with us, please. Give me one pure and holy passion.

Give me one magnificent obsession. Jesus, give me one glorious ambition for my life, to know and follow hard after you.

To know and follow hard after you.