

2 Corinthians 11

Sunday 12/23/2018

This is the gift that You gave us that outweighs any gift that we could give, we could have, or anyone could ever give us. That is the gift of eternal life. We thank You for that. Lord, I pray that today You will speak through this, the testimonies, and Lord, everything that we do today in the quietness of this hour. And then as we take communion here in just a little bit, that all that You do for us and You mean to us. Lord, we love You. Thank You for these good people here. Truly, what a blessing it is to have been able to impart not only the Gospel of God to them, but ourselves, as we give ourselves to each other, as we give ourselves to You. We thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

I. The Key to a Successful Ministry

For me, that is a great verse. I think it shows you the real key to a successful ministry today. Just because a person has a church or the church is in existence does not mean it is successful. I learned a long time ago that just because you get a bunch of people in a building with the name "church" on it does not make it a church. What makes it a church is what is on the inside, following the principles of the Word of God and how you interact with those.

I think for a pastor, for me anyhow, it shows the real key to a successful ministry is what a pastor and a church are really like today. I am a pastor. I have been in the ministry almost 50 years. I have been around. I have seen some things. I think that in many cases, pastors are willing to impart the Gospel to their people, but they are just not willing to impart themselves to their people. I think that is so vital and so key in a ministry.

Honestly, there are many churches that look at you as giving units. You have a number in an office someplace, and you are a giving unit. For me, that would make it a lot easier because I would not have to remember your name. I would just say, "Giving unit 26, giving unit 27, giving unit 20." But that is so impersonal.

When Paul wrote the book of 2 Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians, he deals with them on the aspect of everything they are doing wrong in the church. We have talked about this before. He is covering a lot of bases of things that they are just really not doing well. But someplace in the process, that church turns the corner, and they really want to do what is right. So then he writes 2 Corinthians. Where 1 Corinthians is an admonishment of what they are doing wrong, 2 Corinthians has become for us the handbook of the ministry. Where chapter by chapter in 1 Corinthians he is straightening them out on something, now because they have gotten their hearts right, chapter by chapter he is teaching them the great aspects of the ministry.

For me, I have taught it forever, I have studied it forever, as the greatest handbook on ministry. Where Romans is the greatest book in the Bible on Christian doctrine, what we believe and why we believe, 2 Corinthians is the greatest book in the Bible, chapter by chapter, that shows us how to minister.

In chapter 1, basically as he goes through that whole chapter, he tells us that in ministry, a pastor becomes one with his people through them suffering together, the things that they go through. I have said many, many times that in many churches, you have issues, you have struggles, and many people can identify with that. In many churches, it is like you are down at the bottom of the stairs with all your problems, and the good church folks are up at the top of the stairs, having solved all theirs. All they do is yell for you to get up where they are at. That is not what the ministry is.

The ministry is the leadership, a pastor especially, going down those stairs and putting your arm around that person and helping them up those steps one step at a time. You do not get in a hurry with it. You do not demand somebody to be where you would want them to be. You know why you do not do that? Because if God demanded for us to be where we should be, we would all be in trouble this morning. He is patient with us; we have to be patient with others. More than just being patient, we have to endear ourselves to what they are going through. We have to love them no matter where they are at. Everybody has made mistakes in life. Everybody has things in life that they are not proud of. But you know what? It did not stop God from still loving you and getting you where you are at today.

In chapter 1, he says, "A pastor will identify with his people through the suffering together that they go through." I have told you this many times. The ministry for me, I learned this years and years ago: there are only two things in life that are worth investing your life in because they are the only two things in life that are going to last for all of eternity. One of them is the Word of God, and the other one is the souls of men. Make the proper investment into those two things.

II. The Ministry and Church Family

For us here, we have a real special, close relationship. That is why I wanted to thank all the parents for the good things that you have done in your children's lives. They become the blessings in my life because now they are actively part of this work and this ministry, and they do a lot of great things.

I talked last week about one of the great keys of having a successful ministry is being able to delegate things. I realize what my weaknesses are. I realize what I do not do well. But in spite of me pretending I do, I just recognize that God has given me a bunch of people who do things a lot better than I do. When we pull together as a team, when we have a common goal and a common ground we are working toward, it will be the ministry that bonds, it will be the ministry that puts us together and bonds us together, and yet it will be the bond that keeps us together. That is just where it is at.

Having said that, as I said a little earlier, it is no accident that you are here today. You are here as part of this work by God's design. Looking back over the last year and seeing what God has done and what He continues to do, next Monday night on New Year's Eve, we are going to baptize 15 or 16 people: men and women, young men and girls who have come to the point where they have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as their own personal Savior, and now they see the need to follow Him in biblical baptism. It will be a great time. We will spend our New Year's where I used to

say that the world is out there boosting it up, but it is not the world anymore. It is God's people right on top of it too.

While the rest of the world and the Christian world are out there doing their thing, we will, as traditionally as we have always done, meet here and thank God for what He has given us. We will bring in the New Year with the very thing that is going to bring us up into Heaven someday, and that is the Word of God and the preaching of the Word of God.

I said last week, just joking around, and I got a lot of comments on it from emails, that when Moses went up to Mount Sinai, he met with God face to face through the burning bush. God gave him all the instruction through that. I have looked at that for years in my life that that is what God does, the time we get together. That book is the unsearchable riches of God, and it is like Moses getting around that burning bush, and God was giving him everything that He had. New Year's Eve, we will be around the burning bush. We will get some Word of God preached to us. We will have a great time. I said last week, it comes down to your choices: you either come and get God from the burning bush, or you go with your friends to Anheuser-Busch. But it is where you will be at.

It is just a great time. I am always mindful of what God does. The older I get, the more I appreciate all that God has done within my life by giving me people like you in a church like this, my family ministering by my side, and just all of you who are just part of everything that we try to do. I look around and look forward, as I know you do, for the grace of God of what God is going to do for us next year. Every year we get just a little closer, a little tighter, and a little better prepared to do what God wants us to do.

III. Testimonies of God's Work

Today, I just want you to sit back and relax, and I want all of us together, just in a quick reflection, to look back over this year. I have asked five new families in our church to come up and take about five minutes and just talk about what God has done in their life. I am going to introduce each one, and I have a little thing to say about each one of them simply because they all represent what I try to tell you all the time: everybody in this church who is plugged in, dialed in, and doing what you can do, everybody in this church brings something different to the ministry. There are not one or two people that do the same thing the same way here. That diversity is what makes it work, recognizing the fact that you have an invaluable piece of this puzzle here. Even more wonderful is you are willing to impart that to other people. It just is not about you and your life and what you want and trying to get all you can and can't all you get. It is more than that. It is about you recognizing what God has done in your life through that book and what He has done in your life through the church that God has put you in, and then you recognizing that and then giving back to others and imparting to them not just the Gospel, but your own selves. I watch you do that all the time. I think it is very incredible that we have what we have here.

➤ Chris and Cheryl's Testimony

The first one is going to be Chris and Cheryl. Come on up here, guys. I have known Chris and Cheryl for almost 30 years. Did I marry you guys? My cousin did. Oh, my cousin did. Okay, great. It sounds like my cousin. Yeah, he probably is. He could be. I think he is my grandmother, didn't I tell you the truth? No.

One of the great blessings in my own personal life is that a church is made up of different levels. Kids like this and some of the other ones here that were with me like 30 years ago are finding their way back now, and I need them more than ever. It is such a blessing to me that the ones that I invested my life in over 30 years ago, God is now putting us back together again. That is a unique thing for me. It is a blessing for me because they, as the other ones, have nothing to prove to me. We stood the test of time. We stood the test of fire. It is an incredible thing. So Chris, I just want you to take a few moments. There is the mic. You are on, and you do not have to mic it up. You just hold it up to your mouth, and we are good.

Chris: Well, Bob said we have known each other for quite a long time, and it is really a privilege to be here in this church now. I still have a lot to learn. I am still learning. I love learning. Cheryl and I have been married 25 years now, and like I said, through the ministry, I was a detention home ministry. The guy I was working under married us, and it is just a great thing. It is awesome to see God's hand in our relationship and the relationship of us to our church.

Now, you guys, I will tell you, the real blessing for us, and I know me and Cheryl have talked about this, is when we first came here, I mean, I felt like we just did not miss a click. You know what I am saying? We did not miss a click. It was like, I mean, I got here and I met new people that I have not known. Cheryl and I met people that we did not know, and instantly you guys made us feel like we belong here. That is a testament to the Lord Jesus Christ and the body function that we all are different facets of the body, but we are all parts of that body. Each one of you guys that we have had a chance to be with in our prayer groups or out on the street, you guys have made us feel like we just belong here. That is really an awesome, awesome thing.

I know that you do not just do that. You did not just do that for us. I have had friends that have come and went to the Iron Man, and you guys did the same thing to them. It is just a testament to the body. When somebody sees that, or somebody that maybe has been around a while, I have been to quite a few churches, believe it or not, but it is not always like that. I am going to tell you, the body does not always function like that. You know when you find home, you know where home is. Everybody this year, Christmas comes around, and what do you do? You go back to your family. Your families are here. They visited. It is home. It is home time.

With me and Bob, that is how I feel. I honestly feel that if there was anything we needed, anything that we could call Bob on a dime, and I have, he would be there, and I really appreciate that. Not all pastors do that either, like he was saying, but we are glad to be here. I know looking forward in the year to come, in the years to come if God allows it, I am looking forward to meeting more of you guys and being more involved in things that God would have and lead us to do. Hopefully, I get to be part of that. I just thank you guys. I know Cheryl, that is the same thing with her. She would say, "You want to say anything?" I am sure that she would say the same thing. She really appreciates everything. You ladies that have been around my wife in the Bible

study, you know what I mean. She really appreciates it, and I appreciate it. I thank you guys. I say Merry Christmas to you guys and thanks again for welcoming us into the body here. So there you go. I love you guys. I love you. I love you too. I love you too. A lot.

They do not come any better than that couple, I will tell you. I just appreciate them very much. What a blessing they are.

➤ Leland and Karen's Testimony

The next couple, again, we kind of go back a ways, but we do not. I will explain that in a second. That will be Leland and Karen with their three children, Joey, Lauren, and Danielle. Will all the kids come up here too? This one is really a special blessing to me. It was about, what, two months before camp? Something like that. Three months before camp. Yeah, well anyway, it was before camp. They lived out in Harrisonville, and I do not know how they got my number, but she called me, and she was concerned about her children. They did not have a good church they were going to. We just so happened to have camp coming up in a couple of months. So we talked on the phone, and I told her that I would get her the information for camp. I called one of our ladies and mentioned it to her. I think she called you the next day. I mean, it was, and then you showed up that Sunday. They have been here ever since. They just, this is like that, huh? That is right. You are like that little black Izzy dog with the father of Thanksgiving. She showed up on my doorstep, and she is not ever leaving, and I am glad. So I just, I love this family. They are, they mean to me, I love their kids. They have just worked in well with our kids, and they are just great. Leland and Karen are out on the street. The kids are out on the street on our people ministry doing the work, and I just really appreciate it. So here, I am going to let you go at it and take a few minutes. Yeah, you can come up here if you want. Yeah. I cannot touch the pulpit. I cannot touch the pulpit. I cannot touch the pulpit. Stand back. Here, I will touch it for you. I do not want anything.

Leland: Well, good morning. I guess I look back at Christmas, and my brothers loved me very much. They loved me so much, they would give me chocolate at Christmas time. I could not read at that time. If you have ever heard of Baker's chocolate, you know, it is just not right. It looks good. My ears said chocolate. I heard them say chocolate, and I could feel the chocolate, and I could feel in the wrapper, I could feel the little grooves, but there was just something wrong. It smelled like chocolate, but something did not taste right. I do not know. I was like, "Oh, this is nasty." My brother said, "Do you like it? We like ours." My brothers loved me. I was the youngest. I could not read yet, but then I came here, and our eyes are opened in a different way. My senses, I began to see principles being taught, and principles about the Bible, I see them being written, and I am writing them, and I hear them being taught. Then for the first time, relating to chocolate, for the first time it tasted like Hershey's.

So coming here, I have been in a lot of churches, been a lot of traveling, and nothing tasted right until I came here. I just want to share that about you, and I have seen it in the journey in our life. I look at stepping stones in life. Everywhere you go, every person you meet is like a stepping stone. The Lord is leading you down a path, and then finally came to old paths, and this is the right path, and I am just thankful to be here. I have seen how you guys, in your readings, your

hugs, you live it daily. I see you hear about your work, and I see how you are in all the fellowships and everywhere you go. I cannot believe how busy I am, and I am not busy, but I am enjoying it.

Then we are going to go down into inner city, Kansas City. I have been to New York City, and I am like, "Okay, I am going." So it is a little bit fearful, and then they took us down there and said, "You are going on the street." Okay. Then your prayer life begins to increase, and it is neat because I saw your lives, your prayer lives increase too. I am like, "But you are praying for different reasons than I am." I am scared because everything was new to me here, and it is a new path. When you are on a new path, it is a little bit scary, but having your faith and loving God and seeing a loving church and seeing how you live it has made a difference in my life. I thank each and every one of you for the faithfulness that you have chosen to be on this path. So, thank you. I will not touch the pulpit.

Karen: All right. I know Pastor Bob said five minutes, but I swore he told me five hours, so I brought my folder. I am just kidding. Sorry, I got to add my eyes. All right. Wow. What has the church done for us? I could certainly speak all day. Each and every one of you have had such a wonderful impact on all of our lives. Leland and I were going through life just trying to be the best Christians and the best parents we could be. We went to church every Sunday. We were involved in every area that we could be, including our children every step of the way since they were babies. We prayed before meals. We had family nights. We were involved in the children's lives as much as we could be, probably more than they wanted us to be.

Raising three kids was tough, but we were prepared for the hard work, but it was just getting way too difficult than we thought it should be. We kept hearing, "If you raise them in church, they will turn out just fine. Keep them in church. They will stay on the straight and narrow road. Go embrace your morals." But you see, the trouble is, they were not. No matter how many times we sat them down for a talk, those long, long talks, they would say, "We will change," and they truly wanted to. But you see, they did not. In a couple days, maybe a couple weeks, it was back to the same old, same old. Leland and I would just shake our heads and say, "What is wrong? What are we missing? They just are not doing what they ought to be doing. We go to church every Sunday, every Wednesday, but yet they are just running after the world."

The kids were frustrated also. All they knew was we went to church, we have these parents who love God but are crazy strict, and that the whole world is having fun, and they could not because we call ourselves Christians. Well, the world pulls pretty hard and has a lot of pretty and enticing attractions, and we were losing the battle. We went for counsel, and all we got was, "Yep, you are in them tough stages. We will be praying for you. You are good parents. They will come around." Well, you see, we did not see it that way. We wanted them to be passionate for Christ now, not after the world chewed them out and spit them out. We said to each other, "What our kids need is back to the basics. They are doing service, but they have no reason why." Our former churches just kept doing more and more works. Instead of camp, they replaced it with missionary trips. Well, we said they cannot be missionaries if they do not truly know why they are doing what they are doing.

So we went on a journey to find a good church camp where they could continue to learn about God's Word and try to catch the love and passion that Leland and I have in serving Jesus. We searched and searched for discipleship lessons to present to our church. After a few years, we finally found some, only to be shot down. So Leland and I decided that we would try to disciple our kids on our own. But it still was not working. They were not catching that passion. It was another thing that these strict parents were making them do. So our search continued, but we were still looking for a camp for our kids to go.

I truly believe that God put on my brain Bob Alexander's name. Years ago, my brother sat underneath his teaching, and it transformed his life. Transformed it so much that is how I got saved. I said to myself, "I wonder if he is still around or whatever happened to him." So I typed his name in, and Old Path Baptist Church came up. I poked around on the website, and I said, "Whoa." I listened to the sermon, and I said, "Step back. That is some awesome preaching." I could not get enough. So I showed it to Leland, and he said, "I love it. This is awesome." Then we found the outline of the books of the Bible. So we decided to go through those one night a week with the kids, and they loved it. We also listened to his Sunday sermons, and then in January, Pastor Bob mentioned, "We need to start gearing up for camp." Well, he just sang a song into my ear because we were looking for that. So I called him up, and bam, he was on it. He had Zach call me, and they formed a group of 13 people to come down just to have dinner with us and meet us. We were so shocked that that many people loved God enough to invest in complete strangers. My kids walked away from that dinner excited and wanting to go visit the church.

Well, here we are now, standing before you with all that the church has done for us: a changed family, kids that know why we love God and why we serve Him, and they do too. One gigantic family. A new love for God's Word. A family who wants to do better and be better. Answers to back up what we believe. Principles to live our life by. Being stretched way beyond our comfort zone and liking it. Truly having every answer to every problem in life. I have always heard the Bible has got every answer, but no one knew how to give it to us. Pastor Bob did. But most of all, a love, a patience, and a passion for people that we have never had before. So thank you for being a blessing in our lives, way more than we could have ever, ever imagined. Thank you. I love you. I love you, kids. I love you, Joey. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.

➤ Michelle and Joshua's Testimony

The next lady and her son have come up. This is another dimension of our church. Michelle and Joshua, come on up here. Now, this is what I talked about a couple of weeks ago. They started coming to our church here in the last six or seven months, but they played volleyball and softball with us for years. It was because of the faithfulness of you guys here, always inviting them. They come out to eat with us at Jason's Deli. The investment that you made in their life of staying faithful to them is why they are here today, and they are just a sweet couple. I will tell you, a sweet mom and son, just a sweet one. Mike is her husband, and he is a great, great guy too, so I was speaking in that sense. He is not here this morning, but Mike does not come any better than Mike either. I just appreciate so much them being part of our church, but I appreciate all the work that all of you did of making them feel special and loving them. Michelle, you come on over here, and you can have that.

Michelle: Well, first, thank you for the patience, really. I did not find out about how much everybody was praying for us as a family until recently, but I swear I was not going to cry. So we actually met the Brackenes when Joshua was in kindergarten with Amanda, and a few years after, Nicole and I got involved in PTA together and became friends. They started inviting us to outings and invited me to play volleyball and softball, and I love sports, so I could not say no and just kept playing. She invited other gals to play with us that kind of dropped off as we went, but I just kept coming.

We had been what I would call church hopping forever. My mom and I and Joshua, well, Mike too. Mike is working; that is why he is not here. But we were going to a church in Lee's Summit, just kind of sporadically, not on a regular basis at all. When my mom passed away, we kind of stopped going there. So a few years ago, we started going to another church in Lee's Summit, which I will not name the name of it because everybody knows which one it is, and we just never felt at home. We went, and there were lots of people, lots of people I knew, but just never felt like a family. So Joshua got involved with the youth group, and one day on the way home from church, he is like, "Why do not we go to Old Paths?" And I said, "I do not know." I said, "Maybe we should check it out." So really from that point on, we started coming, and Joshua did the camp, and Joshua started a discipleship with AJ and Josh and cannot thank them enough, and Aaron? No. No? Okay, Jared. Cannot thank them enough for all they did. Joshua was saved on August 16th. Then I started discipleship with Nicole and Nikki and Pam and Kelly, and these ladies have just been wonderful. So then I was saved on September 19th. But I really cannot thank you all enough for always being so friendly and just embracing us.

I say all of this goes back to you guys. I mean, you guys make the investments, and you are the greatest people on the planet. You just never say no to anybody. You always extend yourself. You give them not only the Gospel, but you give them your own selves, and that is really what makes the difference.

➤ Kim and Scott Hughes' Testimony

Our fourth couple here is again a completely different story, how they got here, but an amazing story. Kim and Scott Hughes, you guys come up here with your family while I am talking about you. Corin, their oldest daughter, is a soccer wrestler. Where is she? Oh, there she is. And where is the little guy? Oh, okay. We have Colton and Keaton. Keaton is in the thing back there, and this is Scott. Corin played on Chris Schmidt's soccer team. They are quite involved in soccer, and she is great. She just got a scholarship, full ride, for soccer. It was through that that Chris invited them to church and got the hookup with the youth group again, and then mom got involved in the discipleship. Scott is one of the greatest guys out there. Colton plays baseball. He is a great ball player. And you play with Zeke, do not you? Yeah. Your turn is New Year's. You know that. Kim, you have not told that yet. But anyway.

They came into our church through that because somebody invited them, and then everybody just takes over. It is like once you get here, you do not have much, unless you just got a really bad heart and do not want the truth. You have not got much of a chance here. I mean, they will just come at you and love on you. I have been out to watch ball games, and I enjoyed these kids,

and I will tell you, Kim and Scott are two of the nicest people on the planet. So I am going to let them just say, who first, you or Scott first? Okay. Come on, Scott.

Scott: I got elected to actually speak today, which is unusual for me because that is not the case at home. So. Next time also. Oh, blood on the pulpit. I asked that, Bob, when you want us to do something like this, you do not give us a week's notice, please. Just pop it on us. You can handle it, buddy.

You know, God works in mysterious ways. It is funny. We have been involved in church for years. One of our older sons actually is in ministry, and we have been going off and on for years, reading the Bible, but something was missing, and we just could not place it. We could not figure out what it was. Corinne, actually, it was funny how it worked. Corinne was looking for a soccer team. I Googled the Internet, came across some teams. She wanted to go back to Kansas, and Chris's name popped up. So I called Chris. She got involved. Caleb and Steph, I think, actually invited her to youth group. She started coming, invited Colton. Colton started coming, and then they got mom to come. The mom comes home, and she is telling me, "You got to listen to this guy, Bob. He is awesome." And I am like, "Oh, really?" Well, I am going to go online and check this out myself. So, you know, I am lucky at work. I can listen at work while I am in my truck or something. So I pulled him up, and I am listening. I am thinking, "He is not bad." You know. He was saying some things that I really did not want to hear, though. It took me a little while to realize that is what I need. That is what we were missing all these years. Something has been missing. You know, we have been listening to the same old thing over and over again, but nobody ever told us the things we did not want to hear. That is more along the lines of what we needed to hear than what we want to hear.

The most important thing, I think, as a family, we have gotten out of this church is doctrine. I have been saved since I was a teenager. I know Kimmy too, and over the years, we have read the Bible, at least personally, I have several times, but I have never understood it. You know, I try to apply everything in the Bible to my life, not realizing that is not the way the Bible works. It is written to different people: Jews, Gentiles, church. I mean, there are several things you have to realize when you try to interpret the Bible. It is like a new book to me now. I never put the emphasis on the manifestation, the number system. I am a big numbers guy. The numbers just blow my mind, going through all the numbers, but I never looked at that. I mean, there is just so much that I learned now. It is like a brand new book every time you open it now, and now you just cannot get enough of it.

Kimmy was telling me about the people in the church and how caring and interested they were in your things, and I am kind of a skeptical guy. I am not a people person, so to me, I am like, "What do they want?" You know, it is kind of like, "What is going on here? Why would people care about what we are going through?" That does not make sense to me, but it is just amazing to me, the caring nature, and we have never had a pastor that is so approachable. We have always had the pastors that, as Bob had said, if you want to see him, they give you somebody else. You never actually have time for him. You can call him personally on his phone if you need to. I mean, he will make time for you anytime, anywhere, and it is just amazing to me, and it is taking

me a little while to warm up, but we appreciate each and every one of you all and everything you do for my family. Since I spoke, my wife agreed she is going to sing a song. Thank you, guys.

> Jeffrey and Cheryl's Testimony

Our last testimony before we finish out this morning with the Lord's Supper and put a closure to this great morning is Jeffrey and Cheryl. You guys come on up here. Now, I end with Jeffrey. He has been in our church longer than a year. Watch the cords there, guys. That is right, come around that way. He has been in our church a little over a year, but Jeffrey means the world to me, and I love him and Cheryl very, very, very much. Even though he has been in the church longer than a year, one of the great things that God has done because of his commitment to prayer and commitment to the Word of God is God put his marriage back together this year. Cheryl, we love you very much, and we thank God for both of you being here. I will not mince any words. Jeffrey is one of my heroes, just plain and simple. He is one of my heroes, and I thank God for him and what he does.

If you look up in the dictionary the word "faithfulness," his picture will be there. He is blind, as Cheryl is, and most people think that limits you, and for many people, it does. We do not let him drive unless it is foggy nights. But I have never seen someone love the Bible and want the Bible and want to serve God more than he does. You will see him on Thursday night with his big magnifying glass trying to look at the words, and yet we have got people in Christianity in our own church that have got two good eyes, and you will not even waste the time to open up the Bible to look at it. See, that means something to me. He is down on the street with Will's team, passing out tracts and witnessing to people. For me, Jeffrey redefines the word "disability." The real disability is not found in Jeffrey or his wife Cheryl. The real disability is in the coldness of our hearts that we do not want to do with the Word of God God has saved us for. He means the world to me, and I want to say just publicly here, I want to thank each and every one of you for picking them up for Bible study and picking them up for Institute. He lives, they live for those times to come here and learn the Bible, and they cannot get here without our help. So many of you just give up and go down early and pick them up and bring them here and take them home. If you want a blessing in life, if you want a blessing that surpasses most blessings, it is just picking them up and bringing them here and then watching what God, watch what they do with the Word of God because you care enough to come and get them. I know Lauren told me that the sign-up out there is for January, and you need to do that. It is one of the greatest things that you will ever do. So Jeffrey, I want you to come, and I want you to take a few moments, and I want you to know I love you and your wife very much, and I am so glad that you are here, buddy.

Jeffrey: At the end of 2015, Cheryl and I were married about seven years. We had been looking for a church, and we were in Kansas City, glad to be married, and we checked out a lot of churches. I could not find anything that would have an impact on my life. I had been doing a lot of worldly Christian things, and that is what I thought, just being saved was enough. But there was a time when there was an issue between us, and we had to separate, and she left for Columbia and left me alone, and I really did not have anybody out here. But I did know Linda and Donnie Bradford, which Linda and Cheryl are sisters, and I knew them, and I had been to the

church, your past church, the first time, it was actually Christmas time 2007. I know nobody remembers me, that is okay, I am fine with that.

Anyway, knowing that the church was here and the family was here, I reached out to Donnie and Linda, and I said, "Well, I can get myself up to the Blue Ridge Mall and Blue Ridge shopping area, and you pick me up, take me to church, and then take me back to the Blue Ridge, and I would take a ride, go back." They graciously did that for me for over a year, and if they were not able to do it, they got their kids to do it, even Earl for helping out. The Bradford family really made the first, you know, made it easy for me to get here, and it is not easy not driving. Buses do not get out here, so I just wanted to commit to a church. This one just blew my mind because it is just like I have been in so many. I have been saved for 32 years. It just blows my mind to see the love and compassion that you all have.

When I decided I am going to be a willing servant and start doing some of the ministry, as Bob mentioned, on the street and stuff, I got to know some of you. I got to know people, getting to talk with you and getting to know one another and sharing our burdens, sharing the joy, sharing the Word, and it really put a fire on me, saying, "I want to keep coming." While I was still alone, Cheryl and I were still talking to each other during that time, but we talked to each other over the phone and through text, and I used Facebook at the foundation, helping getting words out and stuff, and she would see some of it, but she offered, "All there was a change in my life." I changed to be more like Christ, and that is what really was the first thing God taught me, that first of all, you got to stop being in the world, you got to start being like Christ, that being like me, showing everything. So I started to learn how to do those things. Those things were important to me because it was important to God for us to do, and Cheryl started changing. None of you would know this, but I am totally impolite, not a person staying up in front of here. Cheryl can vouch for that, but none of you will believe me, but just one-on-one with a person, I was talking with someone, I am great, but get me in front of the crowd, that is another story.

But I was able, and because Cheryl seeing the change in me, she said, "Well, maybe he has changed enough so we can get that back together for our marriage." So this year in March, she said, "I am ready to come back and give it a try again." I called Bob and said, "I need some help to help get Cheryl back." I swear, that weekend or the weekend after it, 12, 15 people of you guys, you all know who you are, you all came out. We took a tour. We call it the Columbia Mid-trip, though it was just coming to go get her, and she was just overwhelmed by all the people there helping and talking with her and packing everything, getting everything in the car, and got her back. It is really the great thing that you guys stepping in and helping Cheryl and I get back together. It was not an easy thing because the devil was talking to both of us, thinking, "You cannot make this marriage worse. It is not going to work. You cannot be forgiven for what you have done. You are no good. Do not even try going back to that church. Do not do anything." That really was ringing in my heart and ringing in Cheryl's heart and helped her, may have hurt her more, and she had to back up and understand that she really needed the Lord more than she needed to be where she was at. She had to make a decision, that is basically what we had to do, make a decision. But because of you people, because of what you have done, helped me to get her back in my life, I praise God every day that she is back together, and we are permanently

back together. The day she came back permanently, I had the ring ready to do our vows over again and everything. I just wanted her to know I was totally committed, but I wanted her to know that she needs to be committed to the Lord first, then to me, because that did not work. I do not want her committed to me first. I want her committed to the Lord.

Because of you all reached out and helping us getting to church, I have found it the blessing that the Lord is going to give us the right day. That is going to be great. We are going to be able to see you, see them, and it is just signing up and helping us getting through everything we need. Sometimes a special event comes up, and we may have to ask someone because it is not anything planned, but you guys are also willing. I have got a half a dozen people instead, I can call them on a moment's notice that if you need a ride, you are there. So I am so grateful for this church, this family, to help us with our marriage and help us to a better relationship with the Lord, and that means more than anything at this church. I am here for the long haul, folks. I am not, I do not give up what God, you know, He would never leave me nor forsake me. I said to Him, "I will never leave Thee nor forsake Thee." I took His promise and gave it back to Him, and that is really what I have been doing, and He has definitely been pleasant in my life. Bob Alexander, man, I did not know what a pastor like him. We all know that, but I have seen many of them, and that is just this. I love him so much. He did the kabata to me. It is just awesome. Thank you so much. You can have the pulpit.

IV. Principles of Ministry

In building people, building in the right way, it is just simple trying to help them develop three areas of their life. I do not know why pastors try to make it so complicated or try to make people make it so complicated, but it is not really. You just focus on helping them develop just in three basic areas:

1. Sensitivity: First of all, to the things of God and the Word of God. If you can get a person to begin to be God-conscious or God-aware in their life, you are on the way of really fixing just about anything that is in their world. Once they get sensitive to the things of the Lord, then it is just a matter of getting them sensitive to the situation around them and understanding what they have got to do and how the Word of God will change everything about them, building them a relationship with the Word of God and being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit of God.
2. Responsibility: Then I try to build in them and develop a sense of responsibility. I try to get them to see that God saved each of us for a purpose, for a reason. You are not here by accident. You are not saved by accident. God had a design. God is not willing that any should perish. You decided in your heart, in your mind, that you wanted to trust God as your own personal Savior. When you have done that, then there is a responsibility that comes with that. That responsibility is you are responsible through this church to find the reason that God saved you, the purpose that He has for you within this body, this ministry. You walk away from the world and all the things that are in it. You cannot have one foot in the world and one foot in the church. It just does not work that way. I mean, you can, but not to the place where God is ever going to use you. You have to come to that place where you personally

understand your personal responsibility to the death of Christ on the cross and Him saving you and why He saves you, and then being sensitive to that.

3. Accountability: Then the aspect of accountability, accountable to each other as we are both accountable to the Word of God. God's program in the New Testament is the local New Testament church. It is through that body that God wants the accountability through the Word of God. We work together. We help each other. I would never ask you to be accountable to me without me also being accountable to you, that we are there for each other. We realize that this is why God saved us. This is what God does with us. This is where we are at. There will be no real relationship with God. We can talk about it all we want. We can use the empty words. We can kid ourselves in our minds, but there will be no real relationship with God. There will be no real sensitivity to God till there first has to be an accountability. Everybody needs to be accountable to somebody, and for us as Christians, it is this church and through the Word of God, through this church, of being accountable to the structure that God has put in our lives. Then we work together as a team.

V. The Lord's Supper

Today, in closing out our time together, getting ready here, we are going to take the Lord's Supper here in just a second. We practice open communion here. That means that if you are saved and you are a baptized believer, and you may go to another church someplace, you are more than welcome to partake of the Lord's Supper with us. We believe the Bible teaches that the Lord's Supper is for saved people who are baptized. This is one of the two ordinances in the Bible, the other one being baptism.

I know that many of you are going to be baptized this coming weekend or next weekend, and I want to tell you now, based on your attitude of heart and where you are at with the Lord and your commitment up to this point and your commitment to be baptized, you feel free to take communion this morning. I give you that based on your attitude of heart, the fact that you have already committed in your heart to be baptized. I would not deny you that, so please feel free to do that if you so desire.

The Lord's Supper is based on the Last Supper in Matthew chapter 26. It is right before Christ is crucified, and it was where He would gather together with the twelve, and they had this last time together where He instituted a memorial of Him going to the cross in just a little while. He did that by the breaking of bread and the drinking of the new wine or the grape juice. He made it very clear in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. Here again, the church at Corinth was having some issues with the Lord's Supper, so he takes the time to explain it, and in doing so, for us, gives us one of the greatest, complete understandings of what the Lord's Supper is, who should take it, how we should approach it, and just about everything.

The first thing I want to say is that the Lord's Supper is a memorial. There is no salvation found in the Lord's Supper. People who believe that it is a sacrament or that if you take the Lord's Supper that they are somehow communing, that it saves you, you are sadly mistaken. There is no salvation to it at all. The Lord's Supper was given to believers after they were saved to commemorate what Christ had done for them on the cross. For you and me as a believer, it is

without a doubt the most special, intimate time in your life and my life. It is a time that should be approached with everything in your life as clean as it can be, getting rid of everything in your life. That is why even while I am speaking, and while in a little bit we will have time, you can go to the Lord and get it all put together the way that it needs to be.

The bread that we are going to serve here in just a few moments will represent the broken body of Christ. His body was broken for you and for me on the cross of Calvary. The wine, as the Bible calls it, is very clearly divine in Deuteronomy chapter 32 as the pure blood of the grape. It is not fermented hooch or alcohol. It is what represents Christ's blood, grape juice, what the Bible calls His new wine. As I said, it should be done in a situation where everybody is right with God and where you are at. If you folks are on YouTube who follow us, as I said already, you can go ahead and take it with us there at home if you want. If you live away from the city, again, it is for saved men and women who have been baptized. Your children, if they have not been saved, it is a tool to teach them what it is and to use it without them taking it. As I said, if you are going to be baptized, you feel free to partake in it. We all take the bread first, and we eat it together, and then we take the wine, the new wine, and we eat it together. It is something that we do as a church family.

Paul says that there is no time frame to it. He says, "As often as you will." He wanted to make sure that it did not become a tradition, that its true value was lost in the tradition that happened so many times. So I want the guys to come on forward now and pass out the bread.

1 Corinthians 11:23-29

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

For this cause many are sick, many are weak, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. The Bible makes it very clear as we read this that the Lord's Supper is a time that we are to have a reflection in our own hearts and our relationship with Him. I know of no other time in all of a Christian's life that is probably a more holy and more precious

and more complete in our communion with God, our togetherness, than our commemorating His death on the cross for you.

I purposely did this this morning after the testimonies that you could see the life-changing power of the Word of God in people's lives, what it will do for you, how it will bring you to the point where it really helps you understand what Christ did for you on the cross. We had a great cross-section of people this morning that came into this church from different ways, but all of them have fallen in love with the Lord, the Word of God, and all of them have chosen to be part of the ministry of this church and are serving God in one capacity or the other. That is the difference. Too many of God's people today claim to get saved, but nothing ever changes in their lives. Nothing ever changes. They still drink, they still smoke, they still do the things of the world, they still run around with the unsaved crowd. They give God out of the convenience of their life, and they will show up to church whenever they do not have something else that keeps them away, and that is the norm today. It is so refreshing for a church of people who actually commit themselves to this church through the Word of God and the accountability and the responsibility that they feel through the sensitivity that they have to the things of God.

As we take the bread here in a moment, he says:

1 Corinthians 11:23-24

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

Jean Geisinger, would you stand up and ask the blessing as we partake of the bread here in just a second? Take, eat.

Oh my gosh, come on up with the grape juice. The Bible says, "Let every man examine himself," and that means that you look inside and you see where you are at with the Lord, and you make things right. When you take of this cup and the bread, that everything is as clean as it can be between you and the Lord, and how important that is. Again, we appreciate you being here, and we are here for you, whatever needs to be. We hope that out of this morning, if you are looking for a church, that you come and consider us. We would love to have you be part of our family here. For all the visitors who are up here in town, you live up here, you are welcome to come to our New Year's Eve, or I would love to have you as my guest at the buffet on Sunday or Monday. I would pay your way as my guest to come and be part of that with us. I just want you to know that we are here for you, and we take the Word of God very seriously and how it changes our lives. Again, you saw the testimonies this morning. It would have been an easy thing for me just to preach and to tell you what the Word of God will do for you. It is more impacting when you have somebody else tell you what it has done for them, and that is really the key. That is really the key. Do God, everybody got it? Okay.

He says:

1 Corinthians 11:25-26

After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

Donny Bradford, would you stand up and ask God's blessing on the cup, please? Thank you all of it.

VI. Closing Hymn and Prayer

The Bible says in Matthew chapter 26, verse 30, after they partake of the bread and the cup, that they sang a hymn, and then they went out, and of course, the Lord went to be crucified. So let us all stand up and let us sing a hymn as we leave here today, and just sing the chorus of one that we all know. In need of hymnal, I think it is page 132, we are just going to do the chorus.

It will be worth it all when we see Christ. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus. Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ. Oh, one glimpse of His dear face, all sorrow will erase. So bravely run the race till we see Christ.

As we are dismissed here in just a moment, Jack wants to meet with all the parents right over here that have got kids going to St. Louis. Please take the time if you want to come to our New Year's Eve or anything that we have out there, progressive dinner, to sign up for that. Thursday night will be the last night to do that, but if you are here this morning, go ahead and get that done. Again, thank you for being here. Thank you for all the visitors being here. Let us have a word of prayer, and then we will be dismissed.

Our Father, we do thank Thee and praise Thee for the Lord Jesus. We love You, Father. We thank You for the great folks that are here today. Thank You for the great word that we heard from these folks, given the testimony today. Lord, it is not about, I mean, everybody in this church has labored to help people, and they do such a phenomenal job. But Lord, at the end of the day, it is all because of the power of that book that You have given us. Without the Word of God, we would all be nothing. Without that book changing our lives, Father, it makes the difference. Lord, I know that there will be those who will be indifferent to it. There will be those who will leave here today and go right back to their lifestyle of doing whatever they want to do. That is the way it is all the time in Christianity. But I thank God for those that, Lord, have committed their hearts and their lives to finding out what God has saved them for and investing the rest of their lives into the two things that will last for all of eternity: the Word of God and the souls of man. Help us do a better job this next year. Help me be better in my dealing with these good people that You have given me. Thank You, Father, for our privilege of ministering together for You. Let us hold that line until Jesus calls us home. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name. For His sake we ask it, amen. God bless you. You are dismissed.