

“2015 Wrap-Up”
By Brother Andy Giebler
Sunday, December 27th, 2015

A few years ago the thought of me, in my mind, standing behind a pulpit was quite foreign. It's a humbling thing. It's a humbling thing to—what's it been? Three years in February. Pastor Paine called us up, and said, “Let's try this out for a year, and see what happens.” They couldn't get rid of us, though. But, I count it a privilege to be a part of this group of people. I count it a privilege to be a fellow-servant, you know? It's easy to stand up here and say, “Yeah, I'm a leader, and I'm a fellowship leader, here.” All I know is sometimes, it's just listening to God, and being a traffic cop. Sometimes it's just coordinating, and it's a privilege to know that God is using me.

So, we're closing out 2015. I'll tell you, we were debating on how we want to do some of this stuff, and we want to talk about some of the things we've accomplished this year. We're not going to do it this Sunday, but we're going to talk about things going forward. We normally do our State of the Church address, which will be coming from our headquarters church, and this year, we'll key off of Virginia, our headquarters church, our home church, and we'll be talking about the State of our Fellowship, and we're going to talk about it. And I'm kind of giving you a heads up about that right now, so that we can think about it when it happens. Think about, as a whole, as a ministry, what are the ministries that we have? We have our men's ministry, our women's ministry, we have those that are dedicated to working on the navy base, and that's an awesome thing. Some people may say I'm biased towards that, because I won't miss a chance to tout that, because God didn't leave us with this amount of people here, with men who have a burden for that base, for no reason. He didn't leave here for no reason, on what we call the quarterdeck of the Navy. Every single sailor that comes into the Navy, comes through this base. And, a large percentage of them stay here for, you know, a few weeks, up to a year or more, just for their training. Not to mention those who come back as staff. Sometimes I tell the story that, I'm from Illinois; I grew up in Southern Illinois, and I joined the Navy to see the world; to get out of Illinois. What happens? I come up here to Great Lakes, and I wind up staying here for an entire year, without even leaving the state of Illinois, in the Navy, before I get to see anyplace else. It was not my plan; it wasn't something that I would have asked for, but, it was something that God did for me, because, when I had—I remember in high school, that there was a time when I sat in my room, I had contemplated, two weeks before, my friends had gone out and done some things, they had fun, they talked about it. I'm in the conversation, and it sounds like they had such a blast; fun times. And, the next week, the next Friday night, I replayed that conversation, and, we went out that weekend and did exactly—to the 'T'—the things in my mind that I had set up to say, “That was a lot of fun,” but, yet, we did those things, and it was all different. There was more joy in listening to them, and anticipating the fun that they had, than when I actually went out and did it. That was the point when I realized that there had to be something more than this. There had to be something more than that. More than just driving the cars around, chasing the girls, going to the movies; there had to be more to it than just that. And that was when I said, “God,” and that was a scary moment, it was then, I had gone to bed, and I said, “God,” because God had been really dealing with me, and I said, “God, if I were to die tonight, and not go to heaven, don't let me go to sleep.” I did not sleep that night. I did not sleep that night until I said, “God, okay, I get it. Something's not right,” and God let me go to sleep at about three in the morning. But, it wasn't until I asked God to let me go to sleep that night, I did not go to sleep. And, I really believe that's what set the ball in motion, because, I don't believe it's a coincidence I came up here. And I say that; I know I started out talking about groups in our ministry, and I say that to encourage those in our ministry who are taking a personal passion and a burden for that, and those that, even if you can't go to the base, when you see the sailors come in, and you get a chance

to share with them, because, we're not building our ministry on sailors. We're not trying to shake them upside down and take money from them. That's not what we're about; we're about ministering to them. I was talking to Pastor Paine about that, because that's something that's been on his heart, and we've been praying for. I know he's been talking to you a lot, Phil, about praying that those that we see saved, and those that are saved elsewhere, you know, in our other congregations, come back here as staff, you know? It's not enough just to say, "Okay, this is something that God put for us to do." It's not enough to say, "God gave us that gift to do something with." And, this month, we talked about gifts. You've got to do something with a gift, sometimes. I mean, how many have ever received a musical instrument for a gift? How many could play that musical instrument as soon as you got it? You could stand up, and you could play in a band as soon as you got it? No; you had to learn, you had to do something with that gift. And the same way with our talents of God.

Veering off from what I was talking about, but it's very pertinent: the gift and callings of God are without repentance (Romans 11:29). God's going to hold us accountable for them no matter what. One thing is faith and prayer, and when it comes to this area of the base ministry, I keep touting this, because it's important. It's not a matter of building our ministry, it's a matter of God gave us a responsibility there. A responsibility to minister to anybody that comes across that Navy base, comes across that quarterdeck. And that's not to say that the rest of our ministry is not important, because we're not just a military ministry. Yes, we have been given a great responsibility to that, but we minister to whoever we can, wherever we're at. We have those that are dedicated to ministering to our seniors. And, 'Seniors' is kind of an overused term. We have a lot of people in our society, you know, when we say senior, well, senior is fifty-five or over. We have people that are older, that are really functioning well, fifty-five, sixty-five, seventy-five, and we've got people that are younger, in their fifties, that physically don't function well. And that's not being critical, that's just a reality; those are people that still need to be ministered to. And we have people in this room that are willing to take out time for people that have disabilities, that have physical challenges, that need help, that need help getting up and down the stairs, that need help taking care of, you know, just combing their hair sometimes. Just their physical things, you know, getting them to a doctor's appointment. And I want to say that that's something that I appreciate seeing that; that blesses me, because I don't have to go out and say, "Hey, somebody go do this." I might suggest it sometimes, but, all of the sudden I get texts on my phone, on Christmas Day, Jose and Nazira are down in Evanston, visiting a man who's in the hospital. That's a blessing to hear that. I didn't have to ask them to do that. They took it on their own to go down there, because they wanted to minister to him. And they're not the only ones, but those are the ones that stick out in my mind, because they told me they did that. Not that they're trying to vaunt themselves, or lift themselves up, but they're communicating, and it's a blessing to hear that. There's a few others that do that. Terry lets me know about the Bible studies at the nursing home. Jeff I. let's me know when he goes and visits people, so that's a blessing. And we have those who are dedicated to our kids, and we put out a plea for that a few weeks ago, and we're going to continue to do that, because our kids deserve to be taught well. We don't do that; we don't teach them what other people teach. It's the parents' responsibility to teach them at home, yes, but there's no reason we can't reinforce that. There's no reason why we shouldn't reinforce that. There's no reason we shouldn't have events for them, because the world bids for their souls. And they are very precious. That's the future of our ministry. And, we keep them on track; they'll bring their friends in. And it can't be just about ministering just for the sake of them, we're ministering because, you know, they can bring their friends out just as we can.

So, we have quite a few areas of ministry. We have music. That takes a burden, and I'm glad for people stepping up. I'll be looking forward to some more of our youth stepping up into music. Why? because I love playing the guitar, but I'll be happy when these guys come up and start playing it better than me. That's not going to hurt my feelings one bit. There's a lot to be done.

We've been able—because of the things that you do, we've been able to do a lot this year. I don't like to talk about it; I don't like to ask for money. That's just one of my personal things that I cringe on when someone walks in my door to try to sell me something. I just—that's kind of my own personal phobia. I see someone by the side of the road with a cup out, just, in my own personal flesh, that grates against me. So, I'm just being honest in sharing that, because, because of that, I don't like to ask for money, either. Now, there are times when God says to do something, and I do it. I do buy those things; why? because there's many times in life, we have to get past our flesh, and say, "This is how I minister." And, yeah, maybe, sometimes that guy I'm looking at is just going to go buy alcohol with it, but I don't know that. And I'm not saying that every time somebody rattles a can in your face, you've got to put something in it. I wouldn't say that. But we've got to be faithful and listen to God. But, we have had this box. Now, I can't speak to our tithes and offerings on the international level at this point. I know that earlier this year, there were a lot of you that were supporting electronically, on-line, or mailing checks in, and that's awesome, because that shows that people are supporting ministry. But, what I can speak directly to is, I know what goes in this box. I get a report from Rob every week, and I know what goes out of it, and I wanted to let you know some of the things that we're able to do because of that. We're able to help; you know, there's people among us that need help, financially, whether it be, just for a place to stay, and maybe for food, for a vehicle... Sometimes we help people with that stuff. Christian Fellowship Great Lakes wouldn't be able to do that if you didn't help us in that area. We're blessed to be able to have our pastors come visit, and, not always, but sometimes, they need help in their budget, and we fund their trips to come down here. We've had Pastor Paine come down here, and his wife, a few times, and we had Pastor Ulysse come. That was definitely a good message to hear. We were able to help them with their transportation.

We had our humble beginnings celebration. Without support for that, we wouldn't have been able to do it, because we had to rent a building. We had to have food for it; we had to have a lot of things to go into that. And I'm going to tell you something, just a side note to that: That Humble Beginnings, I was blessed by that. It was kind of our own revival time. But, I want to tell you that, just from talking to people, Pastor Paine, Debbie, Jim B., Jim O., Holly and Heather and Sis were all so blessed to see this here. They were blessed to see a foundation. They were blessed to see that, when the headquarters, when the bulk of all the headquarters people left, when pastor Paine left, when all the pastors left, that there's still a foundation here, and that's not built on me and Parrish. That's built on the Gospel, that's built on Jesus, and that's you guys; you guys are doing that. That's something that they were blessed to see. They were blessed to see that the things that were taught were, you know, the Biblical principles that were the foundation that was laid, that we're not letting it slip, that we're still doing those things. That really blessed them.

I know we took up one offering, a few offerings, particularly for our Thanksgiving celebration, here at the Grandwood Park District. With that one donation, and then the donation that you all brought with food and money, we didn't have to go back in to the budget to fund anything for that. That is a testament to the figure of your generosity and your faithfulness. We didn't have to go back. Normally we had to go back, "Oh, we didn't get this, this, this and this," and we'd have to go back and take it out of our fund. No, there was none of that. It was funded straight up. Well, it may have been—I take that back, it was thirty-five bucks, out of the whole thing.

And, just another blessing, how God's blessing us, because of our testimony, because of you, how long have we been doing this now? four years. Grandwood gives it to us for free, for the entire day, for Thanksgiving. To the point, I had Ed call this year, just to check on it, to make sure that we had a reservation, and she said, "Oh, no, somebody's already got it reserved." Well, that somebody was us. Because, as soon as the previous Thanksgiving was over, they put it on the calendar.

And, just a couple of other things that come out of our, call it our benevolence fund: We're able to support our picnics out of that, flowers for funerals, and there's probably a dozen more things that I'm

not thinking of right now, but it's ministry that's able to happen, because of your generosity, and that shows me that we're growing as a ministry.

Switching gears, here, the sermons for this year, the monthly themes, everybody liked having themes. Having a whole month of a theme, and then switching, it gives us something to look forward to; we're going to keep doing that for next year. Parrish is very diligent about working with the preaching team, on setting a direction for those, and, not just random sermons, these are things that we get together and do for a purpose. I'm going to kind of walk through a few of them, here, just to kind of bring them out, of the year. Just to do that, and not keep us here all day, but I have to keep it short. I've been blessed, just a little commercial, here: How many have been on MyChristianFellowship.org? How many have actually seen the sermons for Great Lakes? Just to have that to go back and refer to is very key. We don't have the audio up there, but we do have a write-up of every sermon, every—pretty much every comment and every Scripture is on there. That's a good tool to go back and refresh. And, I want to put a plug in, it's a good fellowship-starter. If you're ever in a fellowship time, go through and listen to those before you have your fellowship, and use that as a springboard, because I am amazed when I sit with people and listen and talk about a sermon, a Bible study, and hear the things that Phil or Ken got out of a sermon or Bible study that I didn't catch. You know, the things that we bounce off each other, and I learn even more from that fellowship and talking about it than I would have, even if I listened to the audio again, just to hear other people's experiences.

So, 2015. We started out in January with A New Walk. And, the key ideas we talked about were a man who was lame, who was sitting by a pool. And Jesus told him to take up his bed and walk. And, one thing I drew out of that was he got up and did what Jesus told him to do, and all the religious people around him did not like it. What I took away from that is, we have a new walk. If we're following the Scriptures, and we're talking about those things... You know, it's amazing, how many people you see in your workplaces, and they talk about football. They know every stat, every score—and there's nothing wrong with following that—and everyone wants to hear that, they feed off of it. But, when we come in, and I'm excited, and I want to talk about, "Yeah, I had a good time this week-end," they don't want to hear it. They get to the point where they don't even ask us how our week-end was, because we're going to tell them, and they don't want to hear it. They don't want to know how our week-end was, because it's convicting. They don't want to hear anything about Jesus; they don't want to hear anything about the Bible, and that's our new walk. And people aren't going to like what we're doing, even the religious people. And, if I walk in, and I know it's not me, it's a light. It's a light that shines in darkness, and darkness comprehends it not. And we've got a light that shines, and people look at us and say, "Oh, you're judging us." If there's any conviction, and I can't always tell them this, but there's a time and a place to share it, and I've said it, "You know, if you're feeling a conviction, it's not me. I'm not standing here judging you. I'm not trying to lay a conviction on you." I can remember, one time, and this is me, I'd shortly been saved, and this kind of a spirit or a mindset came across me, "Oh, they're just trying to lay too much of a conviction on you," and I realized it was not Pastor Brand, it was not any of those guys in the Servicemen's Center, it wasn't Joe Watson, it was a conviction that, okay, there was a step I had to take to put away my flesh and what I was doing, that I didn't want to do. But, in my mind, and in my heart, and in my spirit, it was, "Oh, they're laying a conviction on you," but that wasn't it. It was just their life, and what they were doing. So that's A New Walk, and one of the scriptures that was used was

James 1:22-25 *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

How do we get that new walk? Look into the perfect law of liberty. I can try to be as good as I want, but unless I have something to guide me, unless I study the Scriptures and I seek God and His Spirit, it's just vanity. But, being a hearer *and* a doer of the Word.

All right. February. We find all kinds of things that don't last, sometimes. Things in this life are temporal. Our theme for February was, A Victory that Lasts a Lifetime. The Scripture was used, 1Corinthians 15:57, and I'm going to read verse 57 and 58:

1 Corinthians 15:57-58 *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

And, some of the topics in the sermons were Seeking God Early in the Battle. The Scripture says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Corinthians 10:13) But that thought of seeking God early in the battle, you know, when you're in the fray, when you're already in the middle of it, you might have missed what God had for you, because, sometimes, it's near the beginning, or before the battle even starts. The Bible says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added..." (Matthew 6:33) Seeking God first. Sometimes, you know, there's a way out, and we find ourselves in the middle of something, and we're faced with a temptation, and we say, "God, how do I get out of this?" and we missed the off-ramp already, you know? We got caught up in traffic, and didn't see the signs. Seek Him early in the battle. Listen to God's battle plan and obey. Sometime we seek Him early—I can put it personal—sometimes I seek Him early, "God, this ain't the way I see this happening. That ain't the way I want this to go," but this walk is spiritual. You talk to some people, and you say, "God spoke to me. God put this on my heart," and they look at you like you've got four heads, but we know that God speaks to our hearts. Let me say that again: God speaks to our hearts. And it's not always what we want to hear, but it's the best thing we could hear. It's going to put us where we need to be. You look throughout the Old Testament, when God gave them a battle plan, it didn't seem very, you know, when God says, "Just stand, and let Me take care of this." "No, I got my sword here. I've got to do something with it." "No, you just stand here, and these people will come here, and they're going to kill each other." "That don't make no sense." Or, you know, "Go march around Jericho. March around it seven times. Go march around. And then you're going to blow your trumpets, and then the walls are going to come down." "Yeah, right." No, sometimes the things God tells us aren't going to make sense to our flesh, but the times that God says, "Do this, not that," okay, and it's just amazing to know, when God orders your steps, when God gives you the battle plan, when you obey that battle plan, things turn out in ways that you couldn't have even comprehended, because we go through a situation—"All right, this is going to happen, this is going to happen, I'm going to say this, he's going to say that," and there's only one way we can see the outcome of this. But, yet, God does it in a way that brings it out, kind of, you know, we think of a good outcome and a bad outcome, and God brings an even better outcome that we could never have comprehended. Things that we didn't even ask for. So, listen to God's battle plan and obey.

How God brings the victory, and thank and praise God for what He's done. And that's a big one. Sometimes I think we miss our blessings because we don't thank God for what He did. I want to be quick, and I don't want to be slothful. When someone says, "God did something for me," I want to stop and say, "Thank You, Jesus," and not be ashamed to turn around, and say, "Thank You, God." Because, sometimes it's easy to not acknowledge God, and that's our flesh. When we acknowledge God, when we acknowledge Him, we get even more blessings. But, even outside of that, God is worthy of our praise; God deserves our praise. God deserves for us to take the time to stop and say, "Thank You for what You did."

In March, we talked about God's value system.

Jeremiah 9:24 *But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.*

Just a couple of sentences there, but, "...in these things I delight..." That's important. When God says He delights in something. What are those things? Let him glory in this, that he understandeth... So, we have lots of things to glory in. But, it delights God that I understand, that I would glory in the fact that I understand God. There's a lot of things to glory in. I can glory in the fact that I was able to fix my truck, that I was able to put a wrench to it, put this part on it, and make it run. But that's not what we're talking about here. I can glory in the fact that I got an education; I got a good job. But, "...in these things I delight, saith the LORD." "...Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me..." Just to know God, that pleases Him. It's such a simple thing. I mean, we look at relationships, and look at just the relationship with my family, my dad; I look at my mom, and she died way too young, and I, if I have any regrets in life, it's that I never got to know my mom well enough, but that has fueled the fire to get to know my dad better, to know my sisters better. And that takes work. It doesn't just happen. For me, I had to travel three hundred miles or so to see my dad or my sisters. But, even if we lived close to each other, it's still work to get to know your family. It's work just to get to know your brothers. You could be sharing an apartment, living in the same house; it's still work. Your wife, your husband, you're sharing the same tube of toothpaste; you've still got to work at knowing each other. Especially the longer you've been together. It's something that takes work. It says, "...glory in this, that he knoweth and understandeth Me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth..."

Love is the greatest gift of all.

1 John 4:7-8 *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*

God loves us. Sometimes, we can lose sight of that. We can easily forget that. Sometimes we mess up. Sometimes we do things that are wrong, and then say, "I could never get back. I've done something too wrong; I've gone too far." You know what? If God's dealing with you, follow that voice. Don't ever give up on God's blessing, don't give up on His love, don't give up on what He's got for you.

May we talked about women in the Bible. We packed a lot in May: It's our Mother's Day, it's our women in the Bible, we take the time to learn about women, and their role in history, and in Scriptures, and it's a blessing to hear those things. And, our last sermon, Pastor Paine visited us, and the title was, "God Is Good, But Life's Not Fair." And the Scripture that I took out of it was:

2 Corinthians 12:10 *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong*

If you're feeling weak—and this is a comment he said, I just want to read it the way he said it, he said, "If you're feeling weak today, then I've come to tell you that's good news, because that's when God can be the strongest. When we think we're so strong that we don't need God, we're like the fifteen-year-old who says to his mom, 'I got this.'" I didn't say that, Pastor Paine did. Yeah, when we're young, we kind of think we know more than we do sometimes. Not that we don't know anything, it's just a reality of where we're at. And, sometimes we're like that with God; we say, "God, I got this." And, sometimes, we don't even get that far; sometimes we just, in our mind, don't even seek God on it. But, in my

weakness, God is made strong. It's when I get to the point where I surrender, and say, "God, I just can't do this." That's when I know it's not in my flesh. When we move forward, and say, "God, okay, I'm going to put it in Your hands. I know that I can't do this; I'm going to put it in Your hands," and that's when God says, "Stand back, and behold the glory of the Lord." That's when God can do things in us. Because, when I am strong, when I'm puffed up, when I think I'm all that, when I think I can do this, that I don't even bother to seek Him.

Sometimes we go out to find things on our own. Now, the Scripture talks about all the things, how the grass, the lilies, how beautiful everything is, how the birds, you know, God provides for them. But, yet, we look at all the things we think we need sometimes, and say, "God, I want these things," but we go out to get them. Sometimes, instead of waiting on God, we say, "Oh, I can do that. I can go out and finance a new car. I can finance a new house. I can do that." And there's nothing wrong with that; there's a time for that. Or, "I can go out and get this job. Yeah, I can do that. I can go out and do this. I can go out and get this education." And there's nothing wrong with getting an education. But, it's a matter of, what does God want us to do? God gave us this flesh, this amazing temple, this amazing body, that can do a lot of things. That doesn't mean it's profitable to do it. It doesn't mean it's God's way; just because I can do something, doesn't mean I should do it. The Bible says, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness..." (Matthew 6:33) Sometimes we say, "Seek ye first the kingdom," and stop there. You know, seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. The thing that I'm going to do, am I making it hard, because I'm not seeking His righteousness? Am I seeking *some thing*, or am I seeking God's righteousness? ##32:44##

All right, June. That was our men's day, we had our Father's Day, and Pastor Paine visited us once again, and that was our month, we also had our Humble Beginnings. Once again, that was a blessing, just to hear people tell of where they'd come from, where this ministry's come from, and what God has done for us. And, I couldn't do this justice, Pastor Paine and the story that he told. I'm going to read it verbatim. The title of the sermon was, "Long Distance Runner."

I heard a speaker say once, "How many in the audience would like to have a perfect past?" and I thought to myself, "Well, that's a ridiculous question, because it's impossible." The Bible says, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Can the church say amen?

I'm trying to read this.

And, if you're not a sinner, you're a liar, and that's a sin, so... I think we're all covered; all right? He said, "How many would like to have a perfect past?" I thought, "Sign me up." I was skeptical at first, but I wanted to hear what this man had to say. He said, "So, you live today, and you do everything that God has for you to do," and he went down the list, and talked about how we can bring every thought into captivity, and so on, and so on, and so on, and so on. I thought, "I could do that," and he said, "You've got one day of a perfect past. And then you do it again tomorrow." And he put it together very well, but the short version is, he said, "And then you'll have two days of a perfect past."

And then three, and then you've got a month. It's one day at a time. You know? I'm going to brag on Steve for a second here. Steve's been telling me—how many days has it been smoke free? Eight weeks. He didn't get there but by one day at a time, and I'm proud of that. I hope you don't mind me sharing that, but I think it's an awesome thing. And, we're living in Christ, it's one day at a time. Yep, we're going to mess up. "I did it again!" So, what do we do? We pick up, and start day one again. And, eventually, the beauty of that is, when you start being conscious of that frame of mind, conscious of that, what's right and wrong, what God wants us to do, you start getting to the point where God strengthens

you, to where, this thing over here that used to bother me, well, that's not a bother anymore. Why? because I've already conditioned myself to it, because every time that comes up, I'm looking over here, I'm not looking at that. I've gotten beyond the fleshly addiction to whatever that is. And it's one day at a time, because it's always going to be there. If I go back and entertain that again, it's going to grab me and suck me right in. It's one day at a time. One day at a time of saying, "God, I'm not going to do that."

July was our month of Sound Doctrine. I think one of the biggest things I got out of that was Jesse talking about the importance of knowing and speaking God's Word, and the importance of prayer and fasting. And those are topics that I'm sure we're going to bring up again next year. Prayer and fasting, and just knowing God's Word, the importance of that. And, I remember hearing something, years ago, people looking at men and women in our church, and saying, there's a church that knows their Bible. And I'm going to keep that alive. Now, there's some of us who have been around here for quite a few years, and we've been taught a lot of things. And some of us, not as long, but still learning. I'm going to kind of put a plug in on this one. A lot of us have a foundation that we gained from Pastor Davis and Pastor Paine teaching us. You know, Pastor Saniatan, when he was here, and Pastor Brand, and I could name a bunch of teachers that sat, and that God used to teach us. And the sad thing is, some of them decided to go do other things. God gave them that talent. God gave us that talent. God gave us the ability to learn. And, we gained a foundation of knowledge, and we were taught very well on baptism in Jesus' name, and very well on who God is, and many foundational topics. But, now it's our responsibility, not just to rely on, "Okay, here's my foundation," and, in a lot of circles, that foundation is good. In a lot of circles, just that foundation would be revered as, "Wow, he knows a lot!" "She knows a lot!" But, where do we go with it from here? Just the general statement on learning, you know, we can't ever stop learning. You're going one direction or the other; you're either getting better, or you're going the other way. God has so much for us to do, and learning more. That's why I'm blessed when I hear about the Bible studies we're having. Wednesday night, we have a coffee shop, some of the guys get together at their apartments. I'm missing one. Where the other one? Oh, the Pavilion. Terry has a chance to minister there. And there's probably some other ones that come and go that I don't know about. It's good to know that people are getting together and building on that foundation, to grow that, and learn more.

August was just a walk through the Book of Philippians. Paul said:

Philippians 1:6 *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:*

There's a whole—they did that in a month, and they still have a lot to go, so I'm not going to try to tackle a whole lot of it now.

September was our month of sanctification. You might ask, why do we do that? Why do we have a time of sanctification? Well, we should be doing that every day. We should be sanctified, holy—this is our royal priesthood, but, yet, this is the month that we've taken, set aside as our time of sanctification, a time of remembrance, a time of awareness, that these are the things we need to do, you know? If we've kind of strayed a little bit, to get back in here. If we're in a good spot, and God wants to take us up higher, that's a good time to take that time to fast and pray and say, "God, how do I come up higher? What more do you want me to do? What would you have me to do? What would you have me to learn? What area of my spiritual life am I neglecting?" Sometimes it takes a time of prayer and fasting just to get through that. Sometimes we've got to put our flesh aside. I know, you know, that Scripture we talked about earlier, when I'm at my best strength, that's not when God's using me; it's when I'm weak, it's when I put aside, and it could be weak in the flesh, it could be setting aside something that my flesh wants. I've got to put it away, because, it may not be wrong, but it's something that I want to do, and as long as it's in the forefront of my mind, that's a part of my mind that God's not occupying at that point. God wants to use us. We're doing good things, but God says, I want more. That's something that God's shown me,

“You need to set this aside.” There’s nothing wrong with it, but, u know. That one hour of TV, do you really need that? One of the programs that I really got into was ‘24.’ That was mine. It got to the point where I was, you know, I would make fun of people that I would see watching their soap operas. “Oh, you’ve got to watch that goofy soap opera?” Even as a kid, I would make fun of that. And then I find myself, it’s no different, I’m watching this stupid show. Whatever night it was, at seven o’clock, I had to be sitting there, glued to my television, watching my show. And it’s something that sucks you in. It’s something that’s a real—it plays to your mind, and you’ve got to know, these people in Hollywood, they know what they’re doing. They set this show up, on purpose, and it’s every single one of them, they set up a teaser at the end of every show to make sure you watch the next one. And sometimes you have to get away from those things to get it to let you go. Sometimes you’ve got to just turn that TV off for a couple of weeks straight. And, it may be gritting your teeth to do it, “Oh, I want to watch that!” But, yet, sometimes you’ve got to get away from that to let God speak to you.

October. Working the Field of Souls: Lessons in Evangelism. One of the pieces I took out of that: Jesse asked us a simple question, “What’s my part?” There’s a whole lot to that, and I encourage you, go back and read those on line. Go back and find your notes. There’s a whole lot to that; what’s my part in evangelism? Because, there’s a lot of pieces of ministry that need to be done, and evangelism is one of them. We all have a part in it.

November was our time of giving thanks. And the topics for the sermons were—they kind of speak for themselves—“My Words Are Spirit and They Are Life,” “Do We Recognize What God Did for Us?” “Sacrifice of Thanksgiving,” “Be Ye Thankful,” and, “Last Words,” it was a sermon by our Associate General Pastor, Pastor Ulysse. Paul, knowing where he was going, that he may not be back to minister to these people again. Sometimes we’ve got to look at our last words. I may get a chance to minister to somebody, and I may never see that person again. I need to do what God has for me to do right now, not say “Ah, I’ll see him again tomorrow.”

And December. “God Gave Gifts to Men.” I kind of touched on gifts earlier. You know, our gifts. God gives us gifts. God expects us to do something with them. But, there’s seems to be some, you know, if you look on a space of Christmas sermons, I don’t think these are the ones you would have picked out. But, they’re facts that are important. We talked about the blood. We talked about the blood on Christmas! But, it’s important, you know? In the Old Testament, without shedding of blood there was no covering of sins. Without shedding of blood, there’s no sacrifice. Recapping some of the sermons, God’s got things for us. Parrish compared it to an ATM. I go to an ATM, and put the card in, I’m only going to get out of it what’s in my account. If that’s five bucks, that’s it. But, God’s not limited. Whatever He has for us is what He has for us. I don’t have to worry about a limit, I just have to ask God. If God doesn’t want me to have it, He doesn’t want me to have it, but I don’t have to worry about limits.

Ephesians 4:4-12 *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

We talked about grace. This is the Strong’s definition: [H5485] Graciousness (as gratifying), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including gratitude):--acceptable, benefit, favour, gift, grace... God gives us His grace. Grace is more than—what is this act of grace that He did for us? The act of grace that

we talk about at Christmas is His Son. And it says that grace is a divine influence on the heart. It's a reflection. I—we have to take on Christ. It says we are buried with Him by baptism, and we take on Christ, we put on Christ. We take on—that's God's grace in our life. And, because we have that grace, because we take on that sacrifice and that blood, we're covered, just as, in Egypt, Israel had to shed blood of the lamb for the Passover. They had to strike it on their doorposts. And they were given very specific instructions on how to do it. It wouldn't have been enough just to kill it. It wouldn't have been enough just to eat it; they had something specific they had to do. They had to strike the blood on the doorpost. That was their grace. That was their salvation, at that point. But that was temporal. In the temple, they were commanded to sacrifice. It was blood. It was a sacrifice that had to be made. And, without that sacrifice, there was no covering of sins. But, it was temporal. This grace that we have today is the one that lasts forever. This was the final sacrifice. There is no other sacrifice needed; none whatsoever. Because this was the covering of sins. Because this was our perfect sacrifice. And, as we talk about Christmas, you know, we talk about nativity, and the Christmas story, and we talk about the Wise Men, the Magi, coming, and they're looking for this Savior. They're looking for this Jesus, and they come in, and Herod, and all Jerusalem are troubled. This wasn't the Savior they were looking for; this wasn't the King they wanted. They were worried about this; this was a change. They've got a king! Who's this other king they're talking about? But, the thing is, they knew. They may not have known exactly what was going on, but they knew something. You know, all of the sudden, this group of people come, looking for a king... Of itself, yeah, that would be a spectacle, but to say all Jerusalem was troubled with them. That means they knew the prophecies. That's how, in those days, things were passed down by word of mouth. They were taught, handed down, from generation to generation. So, they've been taught. I'm sure it was something that mothers taught their kids, and fathers taught their children and grandchildren. So they knew of this, and they were troubled. And, then, when they finally get to Jesus, they bring Him these gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It shows, once again, they—these gifts told what Jesus was all about, who Jesus was to be. Gold was something very special; it had to be dug out of the ground and it had to be purified, and a lot of things had to be done to bring someone a piece of pure gold, today, is not an easy task. They didn't have all the technology we have today. That was something, not only do you have to find it, you had to find enough of it, and you had to purify it. And, to receive that, it was somebody special. Frankincense had a very specific odor. It wasn't given to just anyone; it was given to royalty. It was given to somebody of stature. Not just anybody had that scent. Now, if you've got enough money, you can go out and buy any perfume you want, but, there are certain perfumes out there that, even these days, you've got to spend big money to get an ounce of the stuff, you know? So, it's only people with that much money that have it. Well, unless you were of that stature, you didn't get that. And myrrh. Imagine Mary, watching them open the myrrh. Myrrh is something you give—it's used in the embalming process. That means somebody died. Imagine the mother, watching them unfold a package of myrrh. And it foretold what Jesus was about. They were preparing for His death, even there. They were foretelling His death, even there; they were foretelling what He was all about.

And, as I start to wrap up, here, a little bit, we talk about the gift, and the sacrifice, and the blood. What is that today? What does that gift mean for us today? There's no Jesus hanging on a cross. We can go to Israel and see about three different places where they say the tomb of Jesus is. But, they're physical places. Sure, you can gain—there's sentimental things, and, sometimes, just being in a place, just like going home for the holidays; there's nothing special about your house, except for the memories that you have there. And, other than that, it's just a tomb; just rock. But, what do we have today? The Bible talks about Spirit. It talks about walking after the Spirit, living after the Spirit. Talking about the fruit of the Spirit. Today it's spiritual. The Bible talks about having those things manifest in our lives, talking about, if you live after the flesh, you're going to fulfil the lust of the flesh; if you live after the spirit, you're going to fulfil those things. The Scripture talks about doing by nature the things of the Law, not having the Law, you know, because of God's Spirit. God will show us the things that we need to do. If I can add anything

onto the end of this last sermon of 2015, it's walking spiritually, walking after the Spirit, living after the Spirit, because that's what's going to keep us on a day-to-day basis. We talk about, sometimes, you know, the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, longsuffering... "Well, I need those things." But, the cold, hard reality is, how do you get those things? The Bible says, you know, it's the fruit of the Spirit. How do I get fruit of the Spirit? How do I get that fruit? How do I have that in my life? You sew to it. If you have an apple tree, you learn the things that pertain to an apple tree. You learn what kind of food it needs, what kind of soil it needs, what kind of light it needs, here it needs to be planted, you know, what other things to put round it, to keep down certain kinds of insects. You learn how to take care of that plant. And, if you want love, peace, joy, longsuffering, gentleness, kindness, sew to the spirit. Find those things which are spiritual. What are things which are spiritual? Fellowship, studying God's Word, being on your face. Straight up. Those are the things that will enhance love, peace, joy, longsuffering. Amen. Thank you.

