

As we stand on the threshold of a new year, it is both meaningful and spiritually enriching to pause and reflect on all that God has done in the year behind us. The intentional practice of recognizing God's presence and faithfulness in every season, every circumstance, and every detail of our lives. Today, we take time to remember and give thanks to a faithful God who has walked with us through moments of joy and seasons of hardship alike.

Psalm 77 "I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me. In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted. I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints. Selah You keep my eyelids from closing; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I consider the days of old, and remember the years of long ago. I commune with my heart in the night; I meditate and search my spirit: "Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love ceased forever? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" Selah And I say, "It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed." I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; I will remember your wonders of old. I will meditate

on all your work, and muse on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy. What god is so great as our God? You are the God who works wonders; you have displayed your might among the peoples. With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters; yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.”

Christopher Ash wrote, “Remembering is the crux of Psalm 77—remembering “works” because God is beyond time. Unchanging in his attributes, eternal in his love, he has entered time in redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason why remembering the acts of God is so significant is that what God did in the past God continues to do in the present and will do in the future. Remembering is not to say, “Well, God did this before, so maybe he will do it again.” Rather, it is to say, “What God did before expresses who God is, was, and will be and what God has done in Christ, and therefore he is sure to do this again.”

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father,

We come before You today with grateful hearts, remembering Your unwavering faithfulness throughout the seasons of our lives. From the moments of joy to the times of trial, You have been constant, unchanging, and always present. We thank You, Lord, for Your steadfast love that never falters, for Your mercy that is new every morning, and for Your grace that has sustained us in all things.

As we gather in Your presence, we pause to reflect on the many ways You have shown Yourself faithful. We remember Your promises, Lord, promises that are yes and amen in Christ Jesus. Your Word has been a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, and we stand in awe of Your goodness.

Today, we lift up our hearts in praise, knowing that You are the same yesterday, today, and forever. May this time together deepen our trust in Your unfailing love and renew our spirits to walk in Your ways. We ask that You fill us with love, peace, hope, and joy as we remember all that You have done—and all that You will continue to do.

In the precious name of Jesus,  
Amen.

So this morning we will pause and reflect, and sing

Christmas carols.

- **Sing 2 Christmas Carols**

**\*\*1. Remembering God's Faithfulness in the Past Year\*\***

Joshua 4:1–7 says “When the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua: “Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, and command them, ‘Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight.’ ” Then Joshua summoned the twelve men from the Israelites, whom he had appointed, one from each tribe. Joshua said to them, “Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, one for each of the tribes of the Israelites, so that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, ‘What do those stones mean to you?’ then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever.””

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly calls His people to remember. From the Israelites setting up stones of

remembrance after crossing the Jordan, to David recounting the mighty works of God in the Psalms, remembering is central to a life of faith. Yet in the fast pace of everyday life, it is all too easy to forget what God has done for us.

I want you to remember this passage from Joshua as we will focus on stones between now and Easter.

As you reflect on the past year, recall the moments when you faced uncertainty and God brought clarity; when you felt weak and His strength sustained you; when you were broken and His healing restored you. God's faithfulness is present in the very breath we take, in the relationships that support us, in the opportunities He places before us, and even in the trials that shape us. It is found in quiet, ordinary moments as well as in significant, life-altering ones. Whether we recognized it at the time or not, God has been faithfully with us every step of the journey.

I want to repeat what I recorded on the Sunday of Advent Hope:

Someone once wrote, "It's in our victories that we most often see God working. His blessings and gifts are evidence of His love. But when we are in the midst of suffering, can we see God's hand?" As I read this quote, I thought about it for a moment. Maybe a different year I might have had the same outlook but I didn't at that moment. Sure, I see God

in my victories, in how God has put things in place but, these last 365 days especially I have seen God in the suffering.

In the loss of my uncle exactly a year ago.

In the loss of my father-in-law in the spring.

In sitting beside my best friend in a hospital room, waiting to see if her husband would survive.

In flying to my sister as we waited to learn how or if she would recover from her medical emergencies.

And now, as I travel across the country with my dad to say goodbye to his brother—another uncle—whose memory still fills me with warmth and joy despite the distance, with a huge smile on my face for the character he is, thankful for the moments I, along with Mark and the kids, got to cherish with him on his many visits back East.

In all of this, I have seen God.

I have seen God in the strength I did not know I had, in the peace that settled when fear should have overwhelmed, in the compassion that drew us as a family closer together, in the small mercies that met us day after day. I have seen God in the love that held me, the presence that never left me, and the quiet hope that rose even in the darkest moments.

I have seen God *in* the suffering—not because the suffering was good, but because God was there with me in it.

- Sing 2 Christmas Carols

## \*\*2. Gratitude in the Midst of Trials\*\*

I was reading the book of Philippians the other week, and something stuck with me more than it has in the past. While we often remember Philippians 4:4–7 it was what followed in Philippians 4:10–14 “I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.”

As Paul is writing this letter he is in jail. And he says he has learned to be content with whatever he has.

Shortly after this I was watching a video that really stuck me called, Why Nazi Guards Refused to Enter Cellblock 28 . A gentleman was talking about reading the book, The Hiding Place, which detailed the experience of Corrie Ten

Boom and her sister Betsy, during World War 2, as they were hiding Jews in their house because of their Christian convictions. Corrie Ten Boom tells the story of eventually how they are caught, arrested and sent to a concentration camp. As they are sent from one concentration camp to another, they are put in a new cell block, and they realize they cannot sleep, because this new cellblock, cellblock 28, is infested with fleas. This becomes Corrie's breaking point, she tells her older sister, Betsy, I can't do this anymore. Her older sister, Betsy, who ends up dying in the concentration camp, tells her sister Corrie, "I know what to do, I read it in my Bible last night, 1 Thessalonians 5 tells us to rejoice always, pray without ceasing and give thanks in all circumstances. Corrie, let's pause right now and give thanks. Let's give thanks for the guards, that we're in here with all these women than we'll be able to tell them about Jesus, let's give thanks for these beds we're in, and let's give thanks for the fleas." Corrie was like, I've got a breaking point, I can give thanks for a lot of things but I can't give thanks for the fleas. Betsy said, "No, Corrie, it said to give thanks in all circumstances. Let's give thanks for the fleas." And they did. Over the next few months they started a Bible study in Cell Block 28, and it grew, until they were having worship services in Cell Block 28 with lots of women, which was illegal in Nazi concentration camp. They always wondered why they were allowed to do this, that no guards came in to stop their worship services. They

didn't find out until Corrie was released from the concentration camp and she asked a guard. The guard said that guards wouldn't go in Cell Block 28 for one reason.....the fleas. The thing they most wanted God to take away was the thing God used to lead the entire Cell Block to Christ.

The past year may have been difficult for you. You may have faced health challenges, loss, disappointments, confusions, among many other trials and tribulations.

So, if you're going through things right now, remember, God is for you, God is with you. Remember what is written in Romans 8:28 "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

It is easy to thank God for the blessings; it requires a deeper faith to give thanks in the midst of trials. In this life, there are moments when we can lose everything—truly everything. Yet there is one thing we can never lose: God's presence. He has promised, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" (Hebrews 13:5). He is Immanuel—God with us—and He remains steadfast, no matter what we face.

## PRAYER

Gracious and Almighty God,  
We come before You with grateful hearts, pausing to reflect on the year behind us and the countless ways You have

shown Your faithfulness. In every season, You have been our rock, our refuge, and our strength. You have walked with us through joy and sorrow, challenge and celebration, and we have seen Your hand at work in our lives, in our community, and in our church. We stand in awe of Your steadfast love and generous provision.

For every blessing—seen and unseen, great and small—we give You thanks. We praise You for lifting us when we were weak, guiding us when we lost our way, and comforting us in moments of pain. As we look back on this past year, help us to recognize the lessons You have taught us. May we carry forward the wisdom we have gained, the love we have shared, and the faith You have strengthened within us. Teach us to forgive where forgiveness is needed, to seek reconciliation where there has been division, and to receive the hope You offer for new beginnings.

We bring before You the struggles we have faced—the times of doubt, fear, and loss. We ask that Your healing hand would rest on all who are weary, discouraged, or brokenhearted. Surround them with Your comfort and restore them with Your peace.

As we look ahead to the year to come, we do so with hope and confidence, trusting in You who are the same yesterday, today, and forever. We rely on Your grace to guide us, Your mercy to renew us, and Your presence to sustain us. Whatever this new year holds, we place our

trust in Your unchanging faithfulness.

We place the year ahead into Your hands, O Lord, trusting Your will to be done in and through us. Your faithfulness has been our constant, and we rejoice in Your goodness. We thank You for the year that has passed, and we entrust to You the year to come. May Your glory be revealed in all things.

In the powerful and precious name of Jesus Christ, we pray,  
Amen.

- **Sing 2 Christmas Carols**

**\*\*3. A Call to Trust in God's Continued Faithfulness\*\***

Proverbs 3:1–6 “My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you. Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of people. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

There is a band called, For King and Country. I especially

love some of their Christmas carols that they'll take a bit of a twist on, with lots of instruments, that they perform at award shows.

Courtney Smallbone, wife of *For King & Country* singer Luke Smallbone, shared a testimony this year that weaves together her past struggles, God's healing power, and a dramatic miracle involving her son, Leo.

Before this experience, Courtney had already walked through significant trauma. As a teenager, she suffered from a rare and life-threatening health condition that nearly took her life. Though God healed her physically, the aftermath left her battling severe anxiety, panic attacks, and an addiction to prescription medication. Over time, through God's grace, she experienced freedom and healing from both the addiction and the anxiety. Those years shaped and deepened her faith, teaching her to trust God not just as Savior, but as healer and sustainer.

Years later, on the anniversary of the very day God had spared her life, Courtney sensed a quiet expectancy—gratitude for life and an awareness that God was present. That same day, after putting her three children down for a nap, she felt an unexplainable prompting to check on her eight-week-old son, Leo, accompanied by a warning: “Go check on Leo, and don't believe what you're going to see.”

When she found Leo, he appeared lifeless—blue and gray,

cold, limp, and not breathing. In panic and grief, she ran to Luke, who immediately called 911. Courtney attempted CPR, but nothing happened. In the midst of unimaginable fear, she began praying and then quietly surrendered the moment to God, saying, “Only You can do this.”

At that very moment, Leo’s chest expanded, his color returned, and he began breathing and crying. What paramedics had been preparing for—a dead infant—became a clear and immediate reversal of death. Courtney describes it as a moment when heaven and earth collided, when she saw Jesus meet her in her deepest fear.

At the hospital, doctors discovered Leo had craniosynostosis, a serious skull deformity that required surgery. Yet Courtney was filled with peace and trust, convinced that God’s hand was on her son’s life. That surrender removed fear and replaced it with confidence in God’s sovereignty.

Leo is now eight years old and thriving. He has a deep love for Jesus, boldly shares his faith, and even preached a sermon at his church—becoming the youngest to do so. Courtney describes him as having a tender, intercessory heart, deeply moved by the spiritual needs of others.

Courtney says the experience changed her forever. It reinforced her dependence on God, her awareness that life is a gift, and her conviction that nothing is possible apart

from God's presence. Through healing, surrender, and resurrection, her story bears witness to a God who is faithful, present, and powerful—yesterday, today, and forever.

As we look to the year ahead, we do so not with fear of the unknown, but with confident trust. We trust that the same God who has been faithful in the past will remain faithful in the days to come. The God who provided for you, healed you, protected you, and guided you throughout the past year does not change. His mercies are renewed each morning, and He has promised to never leave you or abandon you.

One antidote to fear is: Remembering.

- **Sing 2 Christmas Carols**

**\*\*4. Responding with Worship and Gratitude\*\***

This summer, at the general council of the Assemblies of God, there were testimonies of how God brought individuals through difficult times:

Pastors Doug and Janet Roberts of Calvary Temple in San Antonio shared a testimony of God's intervention in Doug's life after a near-death encounter with necrotizing fasciitis. Doug, while visiting an amusement park with his

grandchildren in May 2023, developed a deep, rapidly worsening bruise on his thigh, which doctors later traced to flesh-eating bacteria, likely contracted from contact with a ride. The infection spread aggressively, threatening his life and leading to kidney failure, with creatinine levels reaching a critical seven—far beyond normal. Doctors warned that he would either lose his leg or die.

During Doug’s 12-day sedation in the ICU, God’s presence was profoundly evident in ways that could not be explained medically. Against all expectations, his creatinine levels dropped from seven back to one in a few days—a reversal doctors said “does not happen” and had no medical explanation. Janet also sensed God’s guidance in the midst of uncertainty, realizing that Doug’s medical team consisted of the best specialists in their fields, each brought together at exactly the right time.

Prayer played a powerful role throughout Doug’s recovery. Janet recalls that while Doug was wheeled into surgery, she told the anesthesiologist, “*Many people are praying for him,*” to which he replied, “*We know. We can feel it in the operating room.*” This testimony highlighted how God orchestrated both human and spiritual intervention. In addition, pastors and family members sang in Doug’s ICU room, and staff noticed that his vital signs actually improved during the singing, further pointing to God’s miraculous hand.

Financially, God's provision was also undeniable. Doug's insurance coverage was initially insufficient for the more than \$1 million in medical expenses incurred in just the first week. Yet, when they applied, the insurance company retroactively covered all costs starting June 1, seven days after the amputation—a decision that seemed impossible by human standards. Additional expenses were largely met through the generosity of friends and strangers.

Doug and Janet attribute every aspect of this survival and healing to God's power. They emphasized that while life is uncertain and no one is guaranteed tomorrow, God's faithfulness and presence remain constant. Doug said, *“God does not promise what tomorrow holds; what He does promise is that no matter what tomorrow holds, He's going to be there with us.”*

Our response to God's faithfulness should be one of worship. Worship is not limited to songs we sing in church, but also the way we live our lives, the way we serve, and the way we express our gratitude. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 107:1, *\*“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”\** Gratitude isn't just a feeling, but a choice—a choice to recognize that every good thing in our lives is a gift from the hand of a loving Father.

So, how do you worship God? Is He the first one you talk to in the morning, the last one you talk to at night, the first go to in the day throughout various circumstances.

God invites you to worship Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Take a moment to truly look around you. Notice the presence of God in the faces, the lives, and the hearts of everyone gathered here. See His hand at work in this community, in every challenge we've faced and every triumph we've celebrated together as a church over the past year. Reflect on the countless ways He has provided for us—physically, spiritually, and emotionally. From the moments of encouragement and support to the answered prayers and unseen blessings, God's faithfulness has carried us through. Let us recognize that none of this happened by chance; it is the evidence of His steadfast love, His guidance, and His unending care. As we gather, let our hearts be full of gratitude, aware that His presence has been with us every step of the way.

My prayer for you – May you grow to respond to God in spirit, the attitude of your heart, and worship God in truth, through your beliefs and actions, as an expression of true worship of God in all things and for all the days of your life through seeking to know God more and more so you can ascribe to Him all the praise, honor, and glory that is due Him.

In the year ahead, commit to a life of worship. Let your actions, attitude, and words reflect the depth of our gratitude for the faithfulness of God.

Heavenly Father,

We come before You today with hearts overflowing with gratitude and praise. You are the Creator of all things, the Giver of every good gift, and the Sustainer of our lives. We honor Your greatness, Your holiness, and Your boundless love. There is none like You, O Lord, and we lift our voices in worship and thanksgiving.

We thank You for the gift of life itself—for the breath in our lungs, the beating of our hearts, and the beauty of Your creation that surrounds us. In every sunrise and sunset, the songs of birds, the rustling of autumn leaves, the falling snow, the life-giving rain, and the warmth of the sun, we see Your handiwork and are reminded of Your goodness. Thank You for the blessings we often take for granted—the food on our tables, the shelter over our heads, and the relationships that bring joy and comfort to our lives.

Above all, we thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us never to forget His sacrifice. Through His life, death, and resurrection, You have made a way for us to be reconciled to You. May our worship flow from love and gratitude for all that You have done, and may we continually find forgiveness, peace, and hope in Him.

Lord, as we gather today, let our worship be genuine—not mere words or ritual, but a heartfelt offering of our minds, our actions, and our very lives. Teach us to honor You in all

we do, both here and in the world beyond. Forgive us for the times we have fallen short—when life’s distractions, struggles, and our own desires have drawn us away from You. Restore our hearts, guide us into Your presence, and help us live with continual gratitude.

As we worship, remind us of Your faithfulness and love. Fill us with Your Spirit, renew our hearts, and inspire us to live lives that glorify Your name. May our thankfulness extend beyond this moment, shaping all we do, so that others may see Your goodness reflected in us.

We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

Amen.

- **Sing Go Tell It on the Mountain**

Benediction:

Let us remember that God's love and mercy have been with us every moment. In the highs and lows, the joys and sorrows, He has been faithful. As we step into the new year, let us do so with hearts full of trust and gratitude, knowing that the same God who was with us in the past, is with us today in the present, and will continue to walk with us into the future.

Numbers 6:24–26 “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you, and give you peace.”