

## Blessed to Bless the Peoples

“May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.”  
Psalm 67:3 (NIV84)

**Before sermon:** Redeemed people...SING THE WORD (January Scripture Song is **Jonah 2:8-9**)

I love this Sunday. Every year since I have been your pastor we have begun the year with what we call “The State of the Church Address.” There is no sermon outline to fill in today. In this sermon we’re going to look back, and then look ahead, and we’re going to do through the lens of a passage of Scripture.

*Scripture Reading: Psalm 67*

Why does God bless us? That’s a fitting question to ask ourselves as we begin this year’s State of the Church Address, for indeed we are a blessed people.

We live in a land of abundance. Here we are today worshipping in freedom. To get here, we probably didn’t walk but drove comfortably in cars. We’ll have plenty of food to eat today, and not just today either, for our cupboards are stocked for the days and weeks to come. We have plenty of good drinking water. We have warm clothing. We have a government that protects us as citizens. When we flip a light switch we expect the lights to come on—and they usually do. Millions (even billions) on this planet do not enjoy these blessings, but we do.

And it’s not just material blessings we enjoy. God has privileged us to have the truth of His Word. We have Bibles in our language. We can read our Bibles because we have schools where we learn. We have church buildings and Sunday School classes and good curriculum options.

And most of all, we have learned there is a Savior, and if we know Him personally, we have eternal life, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the fruit He alone can give—love, joy, and peace—virtues which are ours regardless of circumstances.

Who can deny that we are a blessed people? God has given us so much. But the question is, *why?* Why does the Lord bless people anyway?

I’m afraid that far too often I don’t think rightly about God’s blessings. I develop an entitlement view of His blessings, and the evidence of that wrongful thinking is what happens when He withholds the blessings, or at least withholds the particular blessings to which I think I’m entitled.

So what’s the right way to view God’s blessings? God Himself gives us the answer in Psalm 67. We want to look at this psalm this morning and then consider the state of the church in light of it.

Psalm 67 was written for use in Israel’s public worship services. You’ll note the heading, “For the director of music.” God used music then and now to teach truth to His people, and to help them respond rightly to truth. And this psalm was intended to be sung, “With stringed instruments.” So here’s a God-inspired song that the Lord in His grace gave to His people to help them respond rightly to His blessings.

There was no question that God had blessed Israel. But why? The Spirit of God gave this psalm to the Israelites, and to us, so we’ll remember where the blessings come

from, and *why*. There are three movements in this psalm and they show us three perspectives regarding God's blessing.

- I. The Request for God's Blessing (1)
- II. The Reason for God's Blessing (2)
- III. The Results of God's Blessing (3-7)

### I. The Request for God's Blessing (1)

Notice verse 1, "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah." Throughout the psalm the psalmist refers to "us." He asks God to do something for "us." The "us" refers to the community of Israel, the people of God. He wanted something for God's people, namely this. He wanted God's blessing.

Blessing comes from God. Blessing comes to people from God because He is gracious. The Israelites didn't deserve God's blessings any more than we do. Yet in this psalm they asked for it, and they asked in dependence upon the fact that He is indeed gracious.

In verse 1 he states his request. It's a threefold request, but in typical fashion for Hebrew poetry, the three requests are parallel. They are three ways of asking for what is in essence the same thing. *May God be gracious to us. May God bless us. May God make His face shine upon us.*

Please notice again that this isn't a prayer for personal blessing, but community blessing. The psalmist wanted God to bless His people. So it's okay to ask for the blessing of God. God is gracious and delights in giving good gifts to His people.

**A. We have needs.** And...

**B. What we need the Lord alone can provide.** And because He knows these two things, and because He's so kind and generous, He wants us to ask. Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you (Matt 7:7)." James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." God invites us to *ask*. But He wants us to ask with a proper understanding of why He blesses.

That brings us to the second movement in the psalm. First, the request.

### II. The Reason for God's Blessing (2)

Verse 2 says, "That [here's the reason for God's blessing] your way may be known on earth, your saving power [NIV 'your salvation'] among all nations." Why did God bless Israel? God never intended Israel to be a bucket, but rather a conduit. The blessings He sent Israel's way were a means to a greater end. He chose to bless Israel so that through Israel something would happen to the nations. He wanted to make His salvation known among the nations, His way to the whole earth.

That was God's intent when He chose Abraham and entered a covenant relationship with Abraham and His descendants. He turned Abraham's offspring into a nation, Israel, and gave that nation a promised land. He invited His chosen nation to ask for His blessing, a blessing He graciously granted them. Why? So the nations would hear about Him and come to know His salvation.

So why does God bless His people? We see two reasons in verse 2.

**A. God blesses His people for His own glory.** "That *your way may be known...your salvation.*" There's why God blesses His people.

*He wants to make His ways known. He wants to make His salvation known.*

But known where? Verse 2 is quite specific. *Known on earth, among all nations.* There's the second reason. God blesses His people for His own glory. But also this.

**B. God blesses His people for the good of the nations.** If God blessed Israel and His ways were known worldwide, the nations would experience His "salvation."

That's why God chose Israel in the first place. To be a trophy for the world to see, an object lesson so that the world would know what He is like. God wanted to bless Israel so the world could know Him.

But they did what we often do. They became *self-focused*. They chose to hoard God's blessings rather than see their privileged status as a means to an end.

Remember Jonah? He didn't want to go to Nineveh and preach God's Word. Why not? As he told God after Nineveh repented and was spared, "I knew You'd let them off the hook even though they didn't deserve it..." As though Israel deserved God's blessing?!

Friends, the reason for God's blessing hasn't changed. It's always about His glory and the good of the nations. This is why He blesses.

*This was true for the nation of Israel. This is true for us.*

Brothers and sisters at WBC, we are a means to an end. Do we need God's blessing? Yes. Should we ask God to bless us? Sure. But why? The request isn't just for us. It's ultimately for God's sake. God blesses His people so His reputation spreads. And it's for the nation's sake. God blesses us so He can use us to bring His salvation to the lost nations of the world.

Remember Jesus' words in John 15:7-8? "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, *ask whatever you wish* [i.e. ask for God's blessing, but remember why]. This is to *my Father's glory*, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." God blesses us so that through us He may produce world-wide fruit to His glory.

At this point I should remind you that God's blessings come in various forms. God's blessings may not always seem to be blessings at the time. God's blessing may come in the form of a trial, like cancer, or a job loss. But whatever God allows into our lives, He allows for our good and His ultimate glory. And that's what the psalmist wanted more than anything, and so should we.

This brings us to the third movement in the psalm. The request—Bless us. The reason—for your glory and the good of the nations.

### III. The Results of God's Blessing (3-7)

Notice the results. Verse 3 says [NIV], "May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you." This is why we desire your blessing, O God. Bless us so that through us the peoples of the earth will come to know and then praise You. Yes, bless us so that ALL the peoples of the earth will praise You.

That's why God blesses His people, my friend. Not so we can hoard the blessings, but so that through the blessings others will become people who praise the true and living God.

Verse 4 takes it a step further, "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon the earth. Selah." God deserves and desires praise from Israel, yes, but not just Israel. His plan is for the nations to be glad in Him.

Verse 5 repeats verse 3 [NIV], “May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.” The Hebrew is, *Yo-do-cha ameem Elohim, yo-do-cha ameem coolam*. Why does God bless His people? The repetition makes the answer clear. God blessed the people of Israel and here’s why, so that *all the peoples* would praise Him.

In verses 6-7 we see the same thought emphasized again, “The earth has yielded its increase [NIV ‘Then the land will yield its harvest’]; God, our God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him [NIV ‘and all the ends of the earth will fear him’].!” God blesses His people. The result is so that the peoples of the earth will come to know, fear, and praise Him.

So when we’re viewing God’s blessings rightly, two things happen.

**A. When we view blessings rightly, we want to see the nations bless God (3-5).** That’s verses 3-5. Notice who the psalmist says he wanted to see praising God. He mentions *the peoples* (3), *all the peoples* (3), *the nations* (4), *the peoples* (4), *the peoples* (5), and *the peoples* (5). The repetition makes it obvious that there was something on this godly man’s heart, something he wanted on the hearts of all God’s people.

*The nations!* Lord, bless us, yes. But the reason we want this blessing is so the nations will bless you. We are blessed to bless the peoples.

But it’s not just this psalmist who says this. The rest of the Psalms are filled with this desire to see God’s fame spread through the nations.

--Psalm 46:10 “Be still, and know that I am God; *I will be exalted among the nations*, I will be exalted in the earth.”

--Psalm 57:5 “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be *over all the earth*.” (repeated in verse 11)

--Psalm 65:5 “You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior, *the hope of all the ends of the earth*...”

--Psalm 72:17-19 “May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. *All nations will be blessed through him*, and they will call him blessed. Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. Praise be to his glorious name forever; *may the whole earth be filled with his glory*.

Amen and Amen.”

And there are many more (Psalm 86:9, 96:3, 10; 102:15; 105:1; 108:3, 5; 113:3; 117:1; 145:10-12). But it’s not just in the Psalms that we see this emphasis on the nations blessing God. It’s throughout the Old Testament.

In 1 Kings 8 Solomon asked God to bless the temple he built. And why? 1 Kings 8:42-43 says, “...for men will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when he comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, *so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you*, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.” And in verse 60, “So that *all the peoples of the earth* may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other.”

Here’s what the prophet Malachi said (speaking for God in Malachi 1:11), “My name will be *great among the nations*, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be *great among the nations*,” says the LORD Almighty.”

We hear the same in Zechariah’s prophecy in Zechariah 8:23, “This is what the LORD Almighty says: “In those days ten men *from all languages and nations* will take

firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”

Let this sink in church family. We can’t escape these two realities. *The nations are on God’s heart. God wants the nations to be on the hearts of His people, too.* This is the reason God chose Israel, and blessed Israel. But for the most part, Israel failed. Israel became self-focused and self-absorbed. Israel ignored the nations.

Then Christ came. The Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ came to Israel, but not just for Israel. He said He came to be the *light of the world* (John 9:5). He said He came to give His life “a ransom payment for many” (Mark 10:45). He said, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen (John 10:16).”

And after He made His ransom payment on the cross, and then rose from the dead, He gave these instructions to His followers. “Go and make disciples *of all nations...* (Matt 28:19).” Literally, “of all the *ethne*,” the *people groups*. And, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and *to the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8).”

The world needs to know that Jesus is the Savior, that He came to rescue sinners from eternal judgment in hell, that whoever believes in Him and His death on the cross and victorious resurrection, will receive the gift of eternal life.

This is why the church exists, dear friends. We are not here as an end, but as a means to something much bigger than us. We exist, not for ourselves, but for the Lord and His purposes. And His mission in this age is to save people from every nation, tribe, and language for His glory.<sup>1</sup>

So why does the Lord bless us? Here’s why. He blesses *us* in order to reach *them*. Blessed...to bless the peoples.

Look again at Psalm 67, and specifically take note of the verbs the psalmist used to express what he wanted the nations to do. In verse 3, *praise* you. In verse 4, *be glad* and *sing for joy*. And in verse 5, *praise* you.

Interesting. What is true of these verbs? These are activities of God’s people, of redeemed people. Pagans don’t praise the Lord. Pagans aren’t glad about the Lord. Pagans don’t sing for joy to the Lord.

Do you see what the psalmist is desiring? It’s his heart’s cry for pagan people to become God’s people. He wants to see the *peoples* praising God. The *peoples*, that’s plural. Yes, he wanted the people of Israel to praise God, but not just this one people group. Indeed, he repeats this aspiration four times, twice in verse 3, “May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you,” and twice in verse 5, “May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.”

O God, You deserve our praise and we gladly give it to You. But You deserve so much more, and that’s my desire, that the *peoples will praise You*, all the peoples.

Do you share that passion? Think of the people groups of the world, not just the people as individuals, but the *peoples*. God’s purpose is to redeem individuals from every tribe, language, people group, and nation (Rev 5:9). Our assignment, indeed our

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 10:34-35 “Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but *accepts men from every nation* who fear him and do what is right.” Romans 16:25-26 “Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, *so that all nations might believe and obey him...*”

passion must be to see *people* reached with the good news of Jesus so that *the peoples* will bless Jesus.

A few years ago, a Scioto Hills Camp summer staffer, Bart Allen, was sitting in these pews. Do you know what he's doing today? I see his emails every so often. He and his wife Emily and their children have invested their lives so that one of the people groups of PNG might know and praise the Lord. Years ago, they moved to Amdu land to live with the Amdu people. Amdu means "mountain," but this was not a sight-seeing venture. Bart and his family moved into this remote part of PNG because there are 800 language groups in that country alone, many of whom still don't know Christ, and they went so the Amdu could come to know and praise Jesus!

According to the Joshua Project, there are over 17,000 distinct people groups in the world.<sup>2</sup> Of these, 7,400 are still considered unreached. To help us put some names to these numbers, let me read from the Joshua Project some of the names: Aimaq, Taimani. Azeri Turk. Berber, Taznatit. Garre. Mazanderani. Najdi Bedouin. Pashtun, Southern. Tihami. Yemeni, Northern. Zaza-Dimli.

These ten people groups are just representative of over 7,000 who are not yet praising the name of Jesus. *May the peoples praise You, God, may all the peoples praise You.* Brothers and sisters, when we view God's blessings rightly, we want to see the nations, *the people groups*, praise God. But something else happens when we view God's blessings rightly.

**B. When we view blessings rightly, we know more blessings will come our way (6-7).** "Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him (NIV)."

Interesting. He says it twice. *Then... God shall bless us. God shall bless us.*

There's a beautiful balance presented in Psalm 67 which we need to maintain. We have needs, and the peoples have needs. We need God's blessing, and we should seek it from Him. We need to give attention to the needs at home. We have kids to raise, doctor's bills to pay, church ministries to fund right here at home.

But we must never lose sight of the need of the peoples. We need a Psalm 67 perspective. *God, bless us so that the nations will praise You.* We need strong ministries at home, so we can have effective ministries abroad.

*God doesn't bless us so we can coast along to heaven in comfort.* That's not why He gives us more than we need. *God blesses us so that through us He may be glorified in the world.* It's fine to ask God to bless your family, your job, your efforts at home. But He doesn't want us asking for these blessings for self-absorbed reasons. God doesn't bless us merely for our comfort sake, but for His name's sake, so that His name will be great in all the world.

Ever since we began in 1878, we (the people of WBC) have asked God to bless us. It's probably one of the most repeated prayer requests in the history of the church. "Lord, bless us!" And He has. He has blessed us with wonderful people and resources. From time to time, He's called on us to give away some of our people and resources for the good of the nations.

About twenty-five years ago, we adopted a new practice as a church. We determined that if the Lord would call someone from our congregation into missionary service, we as their sending church should seek to take on a significant portion of their

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<sup>2</sup> [https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/has\\_everyone\\_heard](https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/has_everyone_heard)

support need. Not long after that He gave us the privilege to do something many churches have never experienced. By God's calling and grace, He gave WBC the joy of being a *sending church* once again.

We had sent Bob and Shirley Litteral to PNG in 1964, but then over three decades passed. Then right after 911 in 2001 the church sent me to PNG for the dedication of the Angor New Testament. At that same time we sent a team to south Brazil to work with the Richners in a short term ministry.

In the fall of 2003 we had a commissioning service for Kristen Wawro who then began a season of ministry in southeast Asia. That same year you sent me for the first time to train church leaders in Chernovsti, Ukraine with Tri-M. We've continued to do this yearly training ever since in Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, and now in Nepal, as well as biblical counseling training in Peru, Albania, Romania, and Lebanon.

In December of 2004 He blessed us with the honor of setting apart Gary and Nancy Storm for international ministry, after they had served at Scioto Hills Camp and WBC in a host of ways for 25 years. In 2005 we sent Erin Wawro, who had served the previous seven years as our church secretary, to be part of a church planting team in south Brazil. A few years later He privileged us to send Jade Burley to the Dominican Republic where she served for the past five years. More recently Kevin Smith has served with Tri-M in Nepal.

In each case (and there are more) it's been our privilege to send our people into the harvest and to support them generously. Our sinful tendency is always to hoard God's blessings, to keep God's choice servants *right here*. We benefit from the use of their spiritual gifts. But so could the nations. And so, when God calls, we must respond. Indeed, it's our privilege to respond, and gladly so, and give away God's blessings.

Many of you joyfully participate in the ministry of giving. You've developed a biblical perspective on God's blessings, having learned that *God blesses us in order to reach them*. Perhaps you have yet to learn this joy. This year is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to get involved in the partnership of the gospel.

May we all see the material blessings God has given us in light of His purposes. He has blessed us, not so we can keep those blessings for ourselves, but so we can partner with Him in reaching the nations.

Should we all go to the nations? No. But we should all have the nations on our hearts in all we do. As we do ministries *here*, it's always the mission *there* in mind.

When I was a young person, the Lord placed me in a church where this was reality. I came to know Christ under the ministry of the preached Word at Grace Chapel in West Liberty, Ohio. The church was very involved in my development and eventual call to the ministry. After my freshman year in college, they learned that I was interested in serving on summer staff at Scioto Hills Camp, but couldn't afford to do so. I had worked construction the previous summer to make money so I could go to college, and needed the same amount to be able to return to Cedarville. So my church decided to pay me the same salary I earned in construction for the eight weeks I would serve at Scioto Hills. They chose to invest God's blessings so that the nations would be blessed.

The Bottom Line: Two things will always be true.

*One, we will always need God's blessings.* Thankfully, we have access to these blessings through the merit of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

*Two, we must always be willing to give God's blessings away. And not haphazardly either, but with this objective in mind. "May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you."*

So, what is the state of the church as we enter 2025? The answer is clear. The Lord blessed us in 2024. The Lord is giving us opportunities to bless the peoples in 2025. Let's now reflect on these two realities.

### **The Lord blessed us in 2024.**

He did so in many ways. I'd like to share with you some of the blessings received and the blessings given away in 2024.

Back in early 90s, WBC received a gift from a generous donor which enabled us to create a Youth Endowment Fund. The current balance is about \$140,000. This past year the YEF generated about \$6,800 interest, which we used to fund various aspects of our ministries with children and teens. Blessings received. Blessings given away.

So let's talk numbers for a few moments. When the coronavirus hit in 2020, we stopped passing the offering plates. And the result in 2020 was \$255,396 in general fund giving. In 2021 the number was \$280,986, the highest in the history of WBC.<sup>3</sup> In 2022, the general fund giving was \$241,719. In 2023 the Lord provided us with \$269,667 in general fund giving, exceeding our budgeted need by over \$45,000!

Last December we approved a budget for \$227,000 for 2024. According to our faithful treasurer, the actual general fund giving for 2024 was 278,901. That's an average of 5,363 per week. For which we say, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow!" As well as, "Thank you church family for your generous giving to the Lord first and foremost, but also for the work of the ministry at WBC.

As a result of the blessings received, we were able to give \$43,690 to missions out of our budgeted general fund giving to support our team of missionaries, including fourteen couples, two singles, as well as eight ministries like Scioto Hills, TSBC, ACBC, the GARBC, etc. We gave about \$3,900 to CRADLE (including budgeted general fund and special gifts). About one-fifth of our general fund income goes to minister elsewhere. Blessed, that the peoples might bless.

About ten years ago the Lord provided us with the building across the street, which became our community center. The purpose of the CC is to bless this community

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<sup>3</sup> For comparison purposes, here are some giving and attendance averages from previous years:

2024 - \$278,901 (weekly 5363) – attendance AM 143, PM 46, Wed PM 25, FLY 28

2023 - \$269,667 (weekly 5186) – attendance AM 146

2022 - \$241,719 (weekly 4648) – attendance AM 114

2021 - \$280,986 (weekly \$5403) – attendance AM 99 with others at home due to COVID?

2020 - 255,396 (weekly \$4911) – (attendance AM 94)

2019 – 241,352 (weekly \$4641) – (attendance AM 101, PM 51, Wed PM 49)

2018 - 231,897 (weekly \$4459) – (attendance AM 102, PM 47, Wed PM 38)

2017 - \$234,425 (weekly \$4434) – (attendance AM 109, PM 58, Wed PM 44)

2016 - \$247,509 (weekly \$4828) – (120, 55, 47)

2015 - \$239,625 (weekly 4609) – (127, 60, 59)

2014 - \$228,253 (weekly 4367) – (124, 64, 78)

2013 - 226,507 (weekly 4355) –

2012 - 206,588 (weekly 3973) – (136, 73, 86)

2011 - 199,633 (weekly 3839) – (129, 69, 89)

2010 - 197,900 (weekly 3717) – (121, 61, 70)

2007 – 189,347 (weekly ?) – (129, 61, 74)



with meeting space so that it creates opportunities to talk about why we're doing this, which is the glorious gospel of Christ. In 2024, our Community Center was used approximately 30 times by people in the community for events such as showers, birthdays, etc. Utility costs for the building were about \$4,500. Approximately \$3300 was received in donations.

It was used for funeral/memorial meals. It was used by non-profit organizations, including Quilters, Girl Scouts, OSU Extension and 4H, Over 55 etc. It was also used by church family members for special events. Blessed in order to bless.

On the first Sunday of each month this past year, we put "Let the redeemed of the Lord *say do*" into practice. About eighteen of you shared your stories of how God saved you with the church family. God blessed you with salvation, and you blessed us (and all listening online) with your story.

We gave \$500 for Brazil flood relief.

We gave around \$4,900 to support the ministry of Scioto Hills Camp and Retreat Center in 2024 (which includes budgeted general fund money as well as special designated gifts). We also gave a special gift of around \$6,500 to the "Expanding Our Impact" initiative at Scioto Hills Camp.

We invested about \$6,400 to enable our young people to spend a week under the ministry of God's Word at Scioto Hills camp this past summer. We also gave another \$1000 to SH support summer staff.

In 2024 we received a special gift of \$10,000 which will help us send more children to Scioto Hills in 2025.

We gave about \$4,400 to BCH, about \$4,500 to do ministry in Nepal, and about \$2,400 to TSBC.

Because of God's blessings, we were able to spend about \$49,000 for a new roof over the auditorium and gutters, another \$1,600 for roof work on the community center, \$1,500 for flat roof repair, about \$9,300 for HVAC work, and around \$750 for new T8 and T11 light bulbs throughout the building. We were able to pay electric bills which were about \$11,000. We spent about \$4,500 to heat this building with natural gas.

But these were not just expenses. They were important investments which make it possible for the ministry of the Word to occur in this building, so that the peoples of the world will be blessed.

It's all about the ministry of the Word. We love this Book. We love to go deep in its study, which we do by preaching it, then chewing on it in our community groups. On Sunday mornings in 2024, we began the year with a series on "The Christian Family." Then came "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" to prepare for Passion week (which coincided our special outreach initiative and woodworking project on Good Friday). Then came a series we called "Gospel Disconnect," followed by our summer series "Christ: The Object of It All." On Sunday evenings in the summer we did a mini-series, "The Christian's Response to Government." In the fall we did an expositional series in Malachi, "Great Among the Nations." Then in November and December, "The Danger of Being Religious," an exposition of Matthew 23.

On Wednesday evenings, Michael led a team of brothers who taught us 2 Corinthians. Our preachers in training continued to us through Proverbs on the second Sunday evenings. And every week a dedicated team taught our various Sunday School classes and gave us even more opportunities to enjoy the Scriptures together.

In 2024, there were Two:Two groups for men, and Titus 2 groups for women, to equip reproducing reproducers of God's Word. And of course, there were Sunday School classes, and children's and youth ministries, and summer camp and retreats at Scioto Hills, and many other ministry opportunities. There were special prayer times for men during Pastor's Prayer Partners that meets every Sunday morning at 8:30.

I am so grateful for the pastoral team the Lord has raised up, four brothers who assist me in shepherding roles at WBC in a part-time capacity. Pastor Matt began his new role as program director at Scioto Hills, but continues to serve as our Associate Pastor of Discipleship. Michael Dow is our Director of Youth Ministries, and also leads a team of men who teach the Wednesday evening adult Bible study. Douglas Goncalves serves in a position we are calling "Pastor's Assistant" and is responsible for mobilizing the church in the assimilation of visitors, facilitating joyful corporate worship on Sundays, and leading our Sunday School ministry as Sunday School superintendent. Rex Howe began his new role as Associate Pastor of Outreach (more about that later).

I'm grateful for our deacons who are the spiritual pacesetters of the church, and specifically for they pray for this body, leading our prayer times Wednesday evenings. I'm grateful for our trustees who steward our properties well, and for Wilma DeCamp who mobilizes much of what happens at WBC as our Administrative Assistant, and for Dan Edwards who cleans the church building. And for you, for every member is a minister at WBC, as Ephesians 4:12 makes clear.

In 2018 our Sunday morning attendance was 102. In 2019 the number was 101. In 2020, which is when COVID began to spread, our number was 94. In 2021 it increased to 99. In 2022, it was 114. At the end of 2023, it was 146. In 2024 our average Sunday morning attendance was 143.

Our current membership is 169. The Lord added eight new members to our family in 2024 (we lost four). This evening we'll be voting on adding six more new brothers and sisters who recently completed our new members class.

Yet these numbers don't tell the whole story. Through the labor of love invested by our technology team, every week we minister to an unknown number of people in their homes.

Our Counseling and Discipleship training continues to minister to people worldwide through our online class *Biblical Counseling in the Local Church* at TSBC. We had twenty-one students in the winter course (including people who serve in Nepal, South Africa, Brazil, Dominican Republic, and the staff from the Baptist Children's Home), and another seven in the fall semester (including our missionary, Nate Bell, who serves in South Africa. Listen to this testimony from Nate Bell:

"Pastor Brad, Wow! What a blessing this course has been! And as expected, immediately practical and beneficial for our ministry here. It probably comes as no surprise but it seems each week the Lord brought opportunities to put these truths to action - even had two strangers sovereignly referred to me to meet this week. Appreciate your prayers. I am definitely interested in certification and getting further equipped in this area. I will be working through the observation videos and grateful for Tri-State getting us access to them. I have all the necessary reading materials also."

And to repeat something else I mentioned a year ago. It's not just that we are seeing more people connect with us at WBC. It's why. Again and again, the Lord is

sending us new people who are hungry for the Lord, who want to know Him and the treasures of His Word more deeply.

It's always good to remind ourselves why we are here. So listen again to our mission statement. "We are Wheelersburg Baptist Church, a church that cares because of Christ. We are dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the responsibility He has given us: to make disciples of Christ locally and world-wide, through the proclamation of the whole counsel of God's Word, by which lost people will be evangelized, and saved people edified, until Jesus comes again."

So when we look back, yes, the Lord blessed us in 2024. Now let's look ahead.

### **The Lord is giving us opportunities to bless the peoples in 2025.**

What's coming in 2025? By God's grace, more blessing (which we always need), and more opportunities to bless the peoples of the world. Here are some examples of some ways we want to seek to bless the peoples.

**Through a special focus on outreach.** On January 1 Rex Howe joined our pastoral staff as part-time Associate Pastor of Outreach. This is strategic. As his ministry description states, his role is "to help us fulfill our mission of making disciples locally and worldwide by seeking to cultivate a culture of outreach at WBC."

Rex will be preaching a two part sermon series on a theological foundation of outreach, this evening and on Sunday evening February 9. He'll also be doing an evangelism training series on Wednesday evenings mid-February through March.

**Through increased emphasis on missions.** In December you approved a budget that includes funds for new missionary support. Douglas and Lacey Goncalves and their three children believe the Lord is calling them to serve as career missionaries with ABWE, likely in Brazil. They have asked us to be their sending church. This evening we'll be voting once again on becoming a sending church.

**Through Scioto Hills Camp.** We plan to help children go to Scioto Hills camp again this year. Parents, if you will pay the deposit, we as a church will pay the balance. Be watching for more details. We want to see many young people go to camp this year, as well as serve at camp on summer staff!

We're also excited to see what the Lord is going to do through the Expanding our Impact initiative at Scioto Hills, and how He wants to use us and our people and our resources in this venture.

**Through our partnership with CRADLE and TSBC.** We treasure these para-church ministries, as we do Scioto Hills. They are regional ministries and remind us that God is doing wonderful things in this Tri-State beyond our four walls.

**Through further ministry in Nepal.** The Lord willing, I'll be helping train church leaders in Nepal in late October with Tri-M. We've also been asked to do a biblical counseling conference for church leaders in Kathmandu. Just another example of *blessed to bless the peoples*.

**Through another Good Friday outreach.** We're once again planning a special outreach initiative which will take place the week before April 20 (Resurrection Sunday). It will involve another woodworking project. Men are needed. If interested, be watching for details. Be praying now about who you can invite to your home for a Good Friday outreach, and then for an Easter Sunday morning sunrise service.

**Through our CDT ministry.** This too has become a regional ministry and it provides a tremendous way for us to give away the blessings we enjoy. This is year

twenty-six for Counseling and Discipleship training course, which kicks off tomorrow evening with one of the largest classes (based on registrations) we've had for many years. And there's room for you if you want to learn how to skillfully minister God's Word to people who are struggling with family and personal challenges.

**Through singing the Word.** Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO. That was last year's focus. This year it will be, *Redeemed people...SING THE WORD*. It's another practical way we can remind ourselves that we are to *do* something with what the Lord has given us.

**Through more testimonies.** Last year we heard a story every month. It won't be monthly this year, but from time to time we look forward to hearing personal stories about how God has transformed lives. Raj will be in March. If you'd to participate, let me know.

**Through FLY, our youth ministry, our seniors ministry, and much more.** There is a lot of ministry happening in this church, more than I even know, which is a good thing and the way the Lord intended. I'd like to finish by highlight two specific opportunities.

**Through rest.** Rest? Yes. The Lord created us to need rest. Work six days. Then rest. Last summer you graciously approved a sabbatical break for Sherry and me, for which we are so grateful. An opportunity to rest from the normal rhythms of ministry. The sabbatical will take place this May through July and will provide a wonderful opportunity for others in the body to exercise their gifts.

**Through the ongoing, boring ministry of teaching the whole counsel of God.** Boring? Allow me to explain that word "boring." I don't mean put-you-to-sleep boring. I mean what a drill does as it bores a hole in a board by doing the same thing over and over and over again, going around and around and around. It may not seem like much is happening when you look at one turn of a drill bit, but just keep watching.

So it is with the consistent *boring* teaching of God's Word at WBC, week after week after week. Lives are transformed. This is our DNA. Expository preaching. Teaching the Scriptures carefully, deeply, for the glory of Christ, the edification of His people, and the salvation of the lost.

Next week we're planning to launch a sermon series that I preached nearly twenty years ago. Why repeat a series? Because of all the series I've ever preached, it's the one that produced the most feedback. And God used it to bring much good to this precious church. The series is called, *Killing Pride, Cultivating Humility*. May the Lord be pleased to use it for His glory and our good once again.

Blessed to bless the peoples. This is the state of the church in 2025.

**Closing Song:** #185 "*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*" (all four verses)

**Communion**