

"My chains are gone. I've been set free. My God, my Savior has ransomed me." That's rich. In that song, we just gave testimony. That's our story and that's part of what worship is, isn't it? Some of it is singing to God for the greatness of God, some of it is singing to one another about the greatness of God, and some of it is posturing ourselves before people who don't know Jesus Christ. They may be in the room or they may be listening via internet and they get to hear that song that is sung by those of us in here that we've been redeemed and we've been set free. That is your story. And so, you just exalted the Lord. So just think about that for a moment and praise the Lord for that. And pray that God would open your hearts and just make Himself known to you and draw you very close to Him this morning. We don't want to miss Him at all today. We don't want to miss Him at all. And so pray and seek Him right now. Let's go, "Father, we thank You. We bless Your name, that You are jealous for Your name and that You have brought us here today for us to press into You, for us to cry out to You for fresh mercy, for us to acknowledge our incredible need for You. We all confess, Lord, that some are redeemed here, some are yet to be redeemed. We have all been stuck and tagged in this depravity that keeps us from even wanting to know You. And yet You have been merciful, You have enabled many to have the chains just fall off of us that kept us stuck in depravity and stuck as an enemy of You. And yet, chains have been released by Your effectual work in us and You have set us free by faith and trust in Jesus Christ. And now we are ransomed, new, redeemed. You have drawn us to Yourself by Your kindness and Your mercy. You have covered us with Your grace. Now You have seated us in the heavenly places and we're joined heirs with Jesus Christ. Lord, bless Your name. Draw us close today. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, believe and thank You that You have held onto us by Your blood. So make You way known to us today. In Jesus' name. Amen."

Not that you care about this, but I just want to give you a quick little introduction about who I am and why I'm here today. I'll just make that brief and then just move right on in to the talk that God has put on my heart, and that is to pray, to be a people of prayer. My name is Steve Hardin. I am brand new on staff. It's really cool, the way that we bring staff on. We bring them on and nobody knows about it, and that's really cool. God just says to Matt or whoever among the elders to "bring that guy on," and he's here. So, a month, two months, six months, a year later, you're going, "Wow! We pay that guy?" And I am one of those guys. In 1993, my wife and I at the time had two girls. Now we have three kids. We have our girls, who of course at the time were younger. Now, I have a seventeen year old daughter, Hannah, and my wife Julie of 24 years, going on 25 of cool, wonderful, love years. And it hasn't all been perfect because I'm not perfect. She's close to perfection, but I'm just a dog. And we've been blessed and graced and God has been good to us. In 24 years we've been given these three precious children. There's Hannah, who's now seventeen, who just two weeks ago was accepted into Texas A&M University. (Crowd whoops) I just never thought I'd have that as part of my life. Yeah, she's going down there to that little school down there and we're just graced by that. I also have a 9th grade daughter, Gracie. Do you remember what it's like to be in the 9th grade? Men, do you know what it's like to have a 9th grade daughter? If your young, married and have little ones here, be ready. That's a fun year, man. I love her. She's a lot of fun. She's just crazy for Jesus. I just love my daughters. The Lord's teaching me a lot, still teaching me a lot about how to raise children and daughters. I grew up with all guys in our house. I was born and raised in old Dallas. And the only female in our house was the queen, my mama. And so we just didn't know really about women until I got married, and I'm still trying to figure the beautiful women out. And then we just kicked back for a little while, and eight years ago God allowed us to have another little one and I have gotten my boy, the little warrior, the little love, the little crazy man. His job is to spare his sisters from evil people, namely guys. Any guy that comes over will get shot with a BB gun or hit with a sword. That's what we've trained him. And when he doesn't war against evil people, he wars against his sisters. So it's a lot of fun at our place. Hill

is his name.

But in 1993, before he was born, when my girls were little, Julie and I were over in Rockwall, serving at Lake Point Church. I was the student pastor there, and God said, "Move to Abilene." Now I had attended and graduated from Hardin-Simmons University, that fun little school out in Abilene. I couldn't get into Baylor and I wasn't smart enough to go to A&M, so God opened up the door in my ignorance and He just said, "Go to Hardin-Simmons." And so they were about the only school that accepted me, the idiot that I am. And that's where I went. And so from that time, I had a great heart for that school and for that town. There's three universities there: Abilene Christian University, McMurray and then Hardin-Simmons. And then there are just a whole bunch of colleges around the area. So God said go and in 1993 we left. We didn't necessarily have a place to live, and we didn't have a church to meet in. We just prayed. We just went, "Lord, we know You've put it on our hearts to go and You'll open up that door." I knew I had a heart to speak into college kids' lives, that next generation of students, to be used of the Lord in some menial way to call guys and young ladies out for His glory and His namesake. And so the Lord said go, and we went. He gave us a place to live, owned by Ms. Peavy, who is with the Lord now. She owned 240 acres pit om Abilene, and she let us live in a little-bitty rent house next to here for free. My job was to mow that acreage, two acres of it that is. We did that and then we started a Bible study called Grace Ministry in Abilene. And I went to a church, knocked on the door in the fall of 1993 and met the pastor there. Now he didn't know me and I didn't know him. And I just said, "Dude, God just brought me out here. We're going to start a Bible study out here, and I'm asking you to give us your facility to us for that. You don't have to give us the whole thing, just would you just open up the doors, give me the keys to use your auditorium on Thursday nights for college kids?" That church had a day where God really moved in it, but it had declined and was a church that had an auditorium that could seat 1300 people, and they were meeting in another room in the church running 70-80. And he said, "Wow, that's a cool vision. I don't know you, but I'll tell you what. I'll take it to our people." So he took it to his people on a Wednesday night and he said, "Would you pray about opening up our place and giving our place to this kid, to this guy named Steve Hardin from Dallas. He said he graduated from here, but I don't really know that. And he wants to start a Bible study here for college kids." And before he could finish, a godly, old, buzzhead professor of music at Hardin-Simmons stood up and said, "I know that kid. And i can't even fathom that God would use him to do that here. I mean, that kid barely made it through any class that I know of. But if God wants to do that, God be glorified in it. Let's give him the service. Let's give him the auditorium on Thursday night. In fact, if he doesn't have an office, let's give him and office for free." And so this pastor called me back on Thursday and said, "You are not going to believe this, but our church has voted to say come on in." And so in January of '94, we just launched with a prayer meeting with about 80 college kids.

In the fall of that year, part of my ministry there was not only to teach on Thursday nights, but my heart was to disciple guys, just pour my life into some young little radicals, like Scott Coy who is now a founding elder at Watermark did for me in the 70's through Young Life and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He just poured into me for two years and called me out and admonished me and fostered a godly relationship with me. And that was my calling to do that in Abilene. In fact, some of those guys, the first set and round of guys were guys like Leighton Flowers who runs the the Baptist General Convention Youth Evangelism department, just a godly kid. And then Brady Traywick. I just love Brady. He's a church planting pastor off of Hill Country Bible in Austin. He's just a lover of Jesus Christ. And then a kid named Chris Kennedy, a radical who got saved from a lot of crud like all of us, he came to Abilene raw and rough and God just did a work with him. And now he's the pastor of this little place called First Baptist Prosper Texas.

And then there was a kid who was a tall, good looking, loud, wild, smart guy from a southeast town in Texas named Matt Chandler. And Matt just popped on the scene and was so crazy, man. You think he's something now, you should have seen him raw and right out of the chute then. He was brand new converted to Christ, came to Abilene not knowing what God was going to do with him other than that there was a calling on his life. And he came to me one Thursday night after Grace Bible study and said, "Man, I want to do what you do." "Really? You want to do what I do?" "Yeah, I want to be on a

platform and I want to be used of the Lord." "Really? Well let me tell you, that's just a little penny ante part of what I do. If you want to do what I do, I'll tell you what. Come every Thursday at noon and you sit down and you keep your mouth shut for a year and you let the word of God just be poured into your life in discipleship and you just sit there and learn about the doctrines of grace, you learn about how God has worked in election and predestination, you learn about how God works in our lives to admonish us and grow us and to use us and to humble us and to crush us, you learn about the sovereignty of God, you keep your mouth shut and then you come back on Fridays and help me as a janitor at this place. Because it's not all standing in front of people; it's about cleaning up wrappers that college kids like you leave on the floor on Thursday nights. And that's what I do, I clean this place up on Friday. So you show up and ante up, and we might see that God might use you one day."

And wow, it was really wild this summer, when I felt was the end of our tenure of First Baptist Dallas, I moved back to Dallas in '99 and I went on staff at First Baptist Church. And this last year, I served as the teaching pastor there and began to really feel this pressing of the Lord to move me out and to move me away from that place and that area that I love and that I've given our life to. And yet the Lord was pressing. I didn't know if He was going to call us to church plant or to go some place across seas. I just had no idea. But in July, I just started praying. I put it before the Lord and said, "Lord, You just do what You want." And God started crushing me. Has anyone else been crushed out there? I mean, He just started taking me down. He said, "You don't worry about anything. You just get down, get down and seek Me." And man, I was low, because I knew that God was about to pull me out and I had no idea what He was going to do with my family, what that next calling was going to be. I just asked Him, "Lord, please don't let me go to a place if it's starting or if it's going to a place to be new wine. Lord, my only prayer is that You just don't send me to a place where I have to go and war an old mindset and dead religion again. I just don't want to do that again. But if that's Your call, I know You'll give me grace. But I just ask not to."

And that was my prayer on July 12th. I wrote it in my journal. And that night out of nowhere, I get this call on my cellphone. I hadn't talked to anybody, I hadn't shared my heart conviction with anybody, and that afternoon Matt Chandler left a voice mail for me and he said, "I want to tell you that I love you and I've been thinking about you. And God put you on my heart today." And he said, "I really want to talk to you when you get a chance." Man, I tell you what. You would have thought I just heard from the Lord and that the Lord through that young man just encouraged my heart when I was low. And I waited, I didn't call him back, I waited for a while. He had gone to Asia, he got back and called me again. He sat down and said, "Steve, I to invite you to come and pray about being on our team. I need another older guy on staff." I was like, "You punk." And you need to know, my heart is here. I've been watching this for the last 5-6 years through him. I've been watching what God has been doing, I've been praying for him. So what is happening here is so much of my heart beat. And when he said, "Would you pray about it," I just took some time. I went to the mountains of Colorado to pray and I just sought the Lord. I eventually came back and met with him and said, "Man, I just feel like God's calling me up there. And I don't know what I'll do. I really don't have much to offer. This thing's rolling and moving and everybody is so on fire for the Lord up there. You don't need me in that place. And yet, I just sense that God wants to do something in my life through you. And through you, Matt, I think there's some things for me to learn." And he says, "Yeah, there are as a matter of fact. I want you to listen closely to me, Steve. I want you to come and serve. I want you to come and I want you to shut up for a year and I want you to clean the church. And I want you to do what I tell you to do. And here's a little word from halfway wise guy to you to say be careful. The guys you disciple and pour into will one day be your boss."

And so it is a real privilege to be able to come and serve alongside him. I feel like and know that the Lord has called me to come and gird him up, to lift him up, to love him, to encourage those other staff that are here and then to call you and me to remind one another that we exist namely and only and ultimately for the glory of God. And the way that we're going to continue to do this work that will be a transforming, God glorifying kind of work is going to be in the room and in

the attitude in our face before God in prayer. And so I don't find it an accident, in fact I find it very providential that when God used Matt to say come and he said "The first thing I want you to do is lead a prayer meeting, Venture, on Wednesday nights," that His call, His invitation for me was to start off the platform of prayer. My pastoring role here is to be the pastor of spiritual formation. That oversees the care part of the church, that oversees the groups part of the church, those area pastors, that oversees the connection part of the ministry and then to come along side Matt and to love him, to gird him up and to love you and to be used of the Lord in some little way, to continue to remind us what we already know and to bug you and to mess with you and to push you and to push me by the grace of God to prayer. So Wednesday night, I just pick up where I left there, in calling us to prayer.

Luke 11 is where we're going to dive in today, and we don't have much time so let's go there. Jesus Christ was a man of prayer. Do you get that? Please don't forget that. He was a man of much prayer. In fact, on the day that He was baptized, we found that the dove of the Lord descended upon Him while He was in prayer. Jesus Christ spent 40 days at the beginning of His ministry in the wilderness in prayer. Before He chose anybody to follow Him, particularly those 12, He spent all night in prayer. It is not a frivolous little thing to call those who are the leaders of the church. We are to do it bathed in prayer. Do you get that? Jesus Christ, as He took Peter, James and John and He was about to show them who He was in His essence, not just the embodiment of who He was but who He was in his essence, before He went to the mount of transfiguration to step out of His carcass and to show them the glory of God in the flesh, He prayed. Before He asked Peter, "Peter, who do you say that I am?," He spent time in prayer. Before He incurred the wrath of God on your behalf and on my behalf, He was in the garden and He was on His face before the Lord. He wasn't preaching, He wasn't singing, He wasn't hanging out in community. He was was in prayer, Jesus Christ. And if you've studied and examined and watched Jesus Christ's life, you would see that the way that He exercised His judgment and His discernment and His compassion, the way that He exercised life, the way that He did His friends and that He dealt with those of deep heart ache and demonized people and dead religion the way that He did, was through the attitude of prayer. The means by which Christ operated was in prayer. And so it would do us very well to hear Christ's heartbeat, this issue of prayer. The disciples were hungry, Jesus said, "You really want to follow Me? You want to know Me? You want to come after Me? You want to know what My life is like in You? Then be men and women of prayer. You want to know how to connect with the Father? You want to know what it's like to have the Spirit fill you and consume you? Then be men an women of prayer." In other words, He was telling His disciples, "Follow Me, behold Me, watch Me, imitate Me."

Before I read the text, I've got to tell you. My son and I, we play basketball all the time out front in our driveway. We have a basketball court out there and so we would go to "tourney play" all the time, he and I. At one time, he was University of Texas and I was the University of Georgetown, and we were playing a championship game one on one. It got down to five seconds left in the game and I'm up. And it's awesome. I'm just beating my son down. I'm up just a little bit and he grabs the ball, takes it over here and I start counting "five...four...three...two..." and he's dribbling, "...one." Boom! He nails what we call a 3 pointer. It's probably five feet away, but he nails a three. He wins the game. Texas beats Georgetown for the championship of Dallas. I would always tease him and say when we play and say, "Son, I'm on fire" when I would actually make a shot. Well on this day, at the end of that game, he runs into the house, and I'm thinking, "Where's he going? He just won a game. Rub it in a little bit." He comes back out with Gatorade and throws it over to me and I catch it and he says, "Dad, pour it on my arm. I'm on fire." A seven year old kid. He had been beholding his daddy, watching his dad. Jesus Christ said, "Okay, you want to follow Me? You've got to be willing to go all the way with Me to death, because that's where I'm going. Behold Me. And the way that we're going to do this thing together and the way that I'm going to enable you to make a difference and the way that I'm going to enable you to just make My name known an great..." Because it goes against the grain of this old depraved flesh and it goes against the culture of this city which is all about image and us and me, it's all about projection it is such a me centered culture. Jesus Christ said the only way you're going to be able to be enabled to pull off this life is prayer.

He makes it real clear in Luke 11. "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And he said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name.'" The first thing that you ask the Lord, that you beseech about is that you would say to Him, "Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread,..." We recognize that every day is a gift from the Lord. Even our meals is Your gift. "...and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." That's a huge thing. "And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" That's huge.

Can I just make a couple of statements real clear? We have committed this month as a month of venturing in to the presence of God on Wednesday nights. It is a month of prayer. It is about seeking the face and the heart of God. We're declaring to one another and to God and to the nations and to our own consciences that we cannot do this apart from the prevailing work of the Holy Spirit in us. We can't do it. So statement number one that we are making today and this month, that I hope will just catapult us into '08, I pray would really be the heartbeat of who we are and what we are at the Village, is that it is the will of Jesus Christ that the Village Church be a people and a house of prayer. And so statement number one: We exist to do what cannot be done without the special supernatural grace of God. We do not exist to preach, but we exist to preach in the power of the Holy Spirit so that God would draw people in here and via internet and via podcasting and via CD's that go out from here of Matt and others that preach and teach. We exist to preach in the power of the Holy Spirit so that God would illuminate the hearts of men and women whose hearts are just dead to God and God would effectually draw them into His presence and grace them with truth and repentance and let them come to Christ. That's why we exist. We don't exist to worship. We exist to worship in the power of the Holy Spirit every Sunday. So that when you walk in and we begin to sing songs, the Spirit of God would begin to so illuminate our hearts so we have awakened in us this new affection for Jesus Christ and God the Father. Empowered by the Holy Spirit so we can see Christ here on Sundays and Saturdays and Wednesdays and evenings and through the day, we can literally see Him in here and savor Him and treasure Him and delight in Him for who He is and weep and cry and dance and jump and fall on our face and go, "Whoa! Christ was there." And that doesn't happen by mere music or a man or a musician or by good, cool, kicking songs. That's the role of the Holy Spirit. God does that. We don't exist to be a missional people. We exist to be a missional people empowered by the Holy Spirit so that we can take Jesus Christ to the city, to hard disbelieving hearts. I think that's what Paul had in mind in Colossians 4 when he said, "Pray for me. Continually pray. Keep praying for me so that there would be doors that open so that word of God may go out without any confusion whatsoever." He knew it had to be the work of the Spirit that worked in the hearts of men and women to draw them to Christ. And so we pray, guys. Do you understand that? Yes, it is God who causes us to want to pray, but it is our prayers that God uses as a means to bring about events, to bring about salvation, to bring about His kingdom. He chooses to use our prayer as a means to bring about and unleash His Spirit. That's what prayer is. And He makes it clear at the end of Luke 4:13, "Prevail in prayer, knock on the door, pray for the presence and the power and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We need it." God's called us to be a church and a people of prayer. Do it. You know, we can't do anything apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, right? You can't even change a diaper over here where our little ones are hanging out without asking God, "God, help me. This stinks so bad. I need Your help." My boy and I were watching "Daddy Day Care" on Friday night. I'm really deep; it's such an awesome thing to watch movies like that. And as we were watching that, the dad notices his son

over in the backyard is about to blow up right there, just blow out right there. And then his dad's looking and then he has a flashback of what it was like when his son was an infant and he took him to the men's restroom in a restaurant and he knew his son had a bad, blown up diaper right there. And as he began to open up that diaper, he just couldn't take it and he froze and he was paralyzed. And I just thought, we can't even change a diaper over there. We can't even do that without asking God, "God, I need more than Your common grace. I need supernatural grace."

Let me just tell you, a lot of what we do here, our preaching, our teaching, our music, our song, it can all be done based on God's common grace. A lot of what we do is sustained and can be accounted for by God's common grace, His general providence over our lives. We can eat because of His providence, His common grace. We can enjoy a good time-out with God's common grace. We can preach by God's common grace. We can worship by God's common grace. We don't need to just exercise God's common grace here. What we need is the continued outflowing and movement of the Holy Spirit. We need the Spirit to move guys and ladies. And do you know how the Spirit moves? He moves because we prevail in prayer. Have you ever seen yourself when you've just prevailed in prayer and there's a season where you don't sense that God is listening or that He's indifferent or that He's not there? You're prevailing is good. It's good for your sanctification. If you're right there right now and you don't sense to hear the Lord now, then prevail. God is gracious in your prevailing, in your waiting.

We'll kill Matt Chandler if we believe that he's the answer. Do you hear me on that? He's not asked me to tell you that; the Lord did. If we exalt any man or any person... And you've got incredibly gifted people here that God has brought, you are incredibly gifted people. The Lord's working through you, He's doing a work through you. It is awesome. But let me tell you something, man. God does not share that place with a man or with a people. The best thing that we can do for Matt, and this is my call for you, is that you would pray and prevail in prayer on behalf of him. How in the world do you think this church was postured five and a half years ago? First Baptist Highland Village, it had a lot to risk by calling a young man who had never pastored before, who was wild and in love with Jesus Christ and had an anointing unlike anybody I had ever met. How was this place postured to receive him? And this place was on the way down. I've heard the story. I met with one of the elders, Dell Steele. In three hours he told me the history. I mean before most of you arrived, this place was in a place where people were checking out. They were going to other places. Ten years ago, there were people that were down low on the ground here. They were prevailing in prayer, they were knocking on the door, they were taking Jesus' word serious and they were waiting and pleading for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they were beseeching the Lord. And their prayer was, "Oh God, use this place for this city, for Your glory. Do it, Lord." And there didn't seem to be an answer to that prayer for a season, but they continued to pray, they continued to cry out to the Lord. For ten years they prevailed in prayer, low, deep on their face before God. Mornings they besought the Lord. And God heard their cry. And God brought that young man and he walked in here, this place was ready and primed because people had prayed. He was certainly ready and primed. And then God began to bring other people that share like mind, like heart, like love for Jesus Christ, full of grace and wisdom. And *viola*, here you have it. We exist to do things that cannot be done without the supernatural grace of God.

And here's the second thing. We exist so that God would display the greatness of God. "Hallowed be Your name," the first thing that Jesus said pray for. Do you know what hallowed means? Sanctified. He's asking, He's saying, "Disciples, followers of Christ, here's what you're to ask. The first thing out of your mouth before the Lord, ask that the Lord would set apart His name in your heart and in your soul so that He would be made great, so that He would be made famous, so that your heart would be jealous for Him and not self praise and not self worth. So that He would be praised, so that He would be made great. Hallowed, sanctified, my heart, be Your name."

So I pray that you would pray with me. Here are some things in closing that I want us to pray about. These are things God has put on our heart for 2008. Would you pray, beseech the Lord with me about these? Number one, pray for prayer. Do

you know what I mean by that? Pray that we would be a Christ glorifying, God exalting house of prayer here. Pray that God would turn this place into a place of prayer, more than we've ever seen before. Pray that we'd be hungry for prayer, that we'd be hungry for God in prayer. Prayer is not the end; the means is prayer. God is the end. We want more of Him, don't we? Even if you don't think you do, you need more of Him. We need more of Him. So pray for prayer.

Number two, pray for your leadership that God has placed over you. It is a very difficult task, it is a hard work as Paul said to Timothy, it is a difficult work and yet it is our work and it is our calling as shepherds of the church and those that come along side us to help serve you. It is a very difficult thing. It is an impossible task apart from the grace of God to help you perform living by the truth, building community, living out Christian spirituality, doing missional living and being servants and foot washers of one another. That is impossible apart from the grace of God. It is impossible to present every one of you perfect in Christ on that day. As shepherds, we have a huge accountability before God. We don't take that lightly; I certainly don't. And so pray for your leadership. I know this may be an unusual day for you. You may have thought, "Steve, we were looking for something else." Well let me tell you something, baby. This is what you're getting. You're getting the call to pray. You're going to tithe. I pray that you would tithe this day, this Sunday we're giving is unto the Lord to prepare our hearts for the rest of the year to pray for our leadership. They need you to pray that they'd be full of the Holy Spirit. Pray that we would be full of power. Pray that we would be full of wisdom and grace.

My prayer is for Matt Chandler to go until the day that Christ calls him home, strong, full of power, full of grace, full of wisdom, never failing, never waning, constantly full of the power of the Holy Spirit. There's so much more work that I believe God has in store for him and for the body of Christ through him. So pray. Pray for Josh Patterson. I mean it when I say I've never met a sharper young man than Josh Patterson. Pray for him that God would guard his heart. Pray for their families, their wives. Pray for all of our leadership. Michael Blecker, who stands and leads us to the throne room through song, pray for him and his family. And all of the others, you know them by name, pray for them. Our ladies on staff, our folks that are single on staff, pray that they would continue to have undivided attention for the Lord. Pray for all of your people that give leadership. Pray.

Number three, pray for one another. That's what we do, we pray for one another. Pray for one another that we would utterly be God beseeching people this year. Pray that all of us would be filled with the Holy Spirit. Pray. Pray that we would all strive to know the height and the depth and the width of the love of Christ. Pray that the love of Christ would abound in this fellowship this year like we've never seen it abound. Do you know how that's going to happen, the means by which that's going to happen? I know, obedience to the word. I know that. But do you know how that's going to be fueled? In prayer. So pray. Pray for one another.

And then also pray for weekend ministries, for these services. Just pray that every week there would just be such an expectation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God. Pray that people come in and God just draws them to Christ on that day. Pray that people are converted to Christ. Pray. Pray that there would be healings here. Pray that there would continue to be relationships restored. Pray that God would continue to grace us with reconciliation. Pray that God would continue to deliver from deep, dark stuff. Pray. That's how we're going to have to pray this year. People are going to need that, who are brought here by the Holy Spirit. Pray. And then pray for 2008 that God would give us more converts to Jesus Christ than we've ever seen before. Pray for kids. Pray for the little ones. Pray for the babies. Pray for teenagers. Pray for students all over this area. Pray that this place would be filled with kids that are brought in here to know Jesus Christ. Pray that God would continue to bring in a bunch of messed up people given to a lot of crud in their life just like me. Pray that God would bring them in and speak to them and heal them and minister to them and we'd give them grace. Pray.

And then last, pray that God would give us the funds through you and through me, \$6-8 million. We've bought the

Albertson's over there, but we now need to finish it out. It's got lettuce and meat still hanging out in there. We've got to clean it up in there and it just costs a little bit to do that. And so pray. It's no big deal. It's huge to us, it's impossible for us, but God can do it. So God's going to be glorified in it. We don't do it so we can have this building and go, "Oh wow. Look at this cool little building." That's idolatry. We don't give a rip about a building. What we do care about is providing more space so that more people can come and experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

So let's pray. "Lord, we thank You. Bless Your name for being among us today. Thank You for choosing us, for calling us out today. And I pray, Lord, that You would continue to breathe in us this desire, even when we don't have it, to seek You. We need You, Lord, this year. There are marriages that need You. My marriage needs You, my children need You, I need You desperately. Lord, these families need You, these students and this community need You, these little babies need You. Oh God, I pray for the little ones here, that they would be able to come to know You at a young age, every one of them. I pray that we wouldn't miss one of them, that every one of them would name the name of Christ young and that they would live for your glory young and that they would not live as I have lived in my own life, neglecting You and forgetting You and living just feeding on depravity and flesh. And yet Lord, I thank You for Your grace. But Lord, I pray that these little ones could live a life where they bypass all of that junk and they live for You all the days of their lives. Make them all little Samuels, Lord, and Sammie girls that love Jesus. And where there's disunity, bring harmony. And where we're caught up in secondary issues that are unimportant, let us be really committed to the main things, the true doctrines that we ought to stand for and unmask the error where those are concerned. Let us be people of the word and be gracious as we teach it and live it. So even save some today, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen."