

## **Resolved: Vision 2025**

### **Psalm 20**

Delivered by Dr. Daniel Kitinoja at Calvary Baptist Church, Tilton, IL

**Sunday, January 5, 2025**

It is, of course, the New Year, so Happy New Year to everyone! Some of you may have made resolutions, and I know there are jokes out there about resolutions. However, a resolution is truly a good thing when you think about it. For example, when someone says, “This year, I’m going to eat better and exercise more because I want to be healthier,” they are expressing a desire for positive change. They think, “I’ll be happier if I’m a little bit healthier,” and so they resolve—they are determined—to do this. They set out on this course.

Another example is when someone says, “This year, I want to get my finances in order. I think I’d feel less anxious if I had a better understanding of how my money is being spent.” They may look at how often they’re eating out each month—or even each day—and decide to take better control of their finances. Their goal might be to reduce anxiety and possibly give more to worthy causes they believe in. They set out, resolved to make this change.

When you really think about it, a resolution has two basic components: vision and determination. Vision has been described as a mental picture of a preferred future—being healthier physically, being financially stable, improving relationships, or growing in Christ. For instance, someone might say, “This is the year I’m going to get back to following Jesus. I’m going to start reading my Bible again,” or something similar. Along with vision, there is determination: a belief that life will be better and look better if these things are done. This belief fuels resolve.

The word "resolved" means firmly determined to do something. This morning, I feel led by the Lord to share the vision for Calvary Baptist Church for the year 2025. This was also encouraged by a brother in Christ from our church, who suggested I share this vision with the congregation. So, this morning, we’re doing that, beginning with Psalm 20.

Psalm 20 is an interesting psalm. It’s almost like David is preparing to go out into battle, leading the charge to advance God’s agenda. The people are gathered with him in the sanctuary, worshiping God. In this psalm, we see the heartbeat of God, the king, and the people. I find this to be a good starting point for discussing vision. Let’s read:

"May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble;  
May the name of the God of Jacob defend you;  
May He send you help from the sanctuary,  
And strengthen you out of Zion;  
May He remember all your offerings,  
And accept your burnt sacrifice. Selah  
May He grant you according to your heart’s desire,  
And fulfill all your purpose.  
We will rejoice in your salvation,  
And in the name of our God we will set up our banners!  
May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed;  
He will answer him from His holy heaven  
With the saving strength of His right hand.  
Some trust in chariots, and some in horses;  
But we will remember the name of the Lord our God.  
They have bowed down and fallen;  
But we have risen and stand upright.  
Save, Lord!  
May the King answer us when we call." (Psalm 20:1-9)

Let's pray.

**Prayer:**

Father in Heaven, we thank You for this new year. We thank You for the beautiful snow, and we pray for safety while traveling in it. We praise You for this church, for its history, and for its future. I pray that You give us the resolve to faithfully advance Your agenda for this church and for all churches. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Reflecting on this psalm, a couple of things stand out. First, this is a Messianic psalm—it's about the king. When thinking about vision, I acknowledge that I am not a king or **the King**. A pastor is more like a shepherd—a brother in Christ. Yet, in the Bible and in Baptist churches, the pastor is often looked upon as a leader, someone who sets an agenda, a vision, or direction. That is what we're discussing this morning.

When I set out to present a vision for the church, I realized it wasn't about what **I** wanted to say but about what God would have me share. After prayer and seeking God's guidance, I carved out time in my schedule and went to Forest Glen. I brought coffee, my Bible, a pen, and some paper. As I opened my Bible, I landed on Psalm 20. It felt random at the time, but as soon as I read it, I knew it wasn't an accident. This was the psalm God had for us, and so we're going to take a closer look at it together.

The first thing I want to highlight is in verses 1 and 2, where it says, "*May He send you help from the sanctuary.*" This is the people speaking, and before I delve into where I see us going as a church, I want to take a moment to express my gratitude to you as a congregation.

One of the realities in the life of a pastor is that, for various reasons, pastors sometimes function as "Lone Rangers." Sometimes it's due to their own tendencies, and other times it's simply because they have no choice—they end up doing everything themselves. But that has not been my experience here at Calvary during these four and a half years. I have had the privilege of serving alongside brothers and sisters who partner with me in the work we're doing for God's kingdom. I am not a shepherd out there trying to drag the congregation along. Instead, we've locked arms, partnered together, and advanced the King's agenda—serving the Lord, worshiping the Lord, and serving His people.

So, I want to say **thank you**. If you've ever prayed for me or for anyone else in this church, thank you. If you've ever served in any capacity, whether in an ongoing role or occasionally,

thank you. If you've ever given financially to support the ministry of this church, thank you. Your partnership in the gospel means so much.

This reminds me of the opening chapter of Philippians. Paul writes to his friends who had supported him while he was in prison for the gospel. In those days, prisoners relied on others to provide food and basic needs, and the Philippians had sent him a gift along with a messenger to encourage him. Paul writes to thank them for their partnership in the ministry. In a similar way, I have felt that same sense of partnership here. We share the same heartbeat for Jesus Christ, and I am grateful.

Now, moving on to verses 4 and 5, we see themes of petitions, heart's desires, and purpose. Let's read those verses again:

*"May He grant you according to your heart's desire, and fulfill all your purpose. We will rejoice in Your salvation, and in the name of our God, we will set up our banners! May the Lord fulfill all your petitions."*

The word "*petitions*" here means prayers—may God answer your prayers. In these verses, I see two connected ideas. Let's start with verse 5, where the people are essentially saying, "When God blesses, we will celebrate." And that's an important point.

I want to share a personal story. The first time I heard a pastor preach about vision, I mostly understood his heart because he was my pastor. However, some in the audience may have taken away a message he didn't intend. He had a skit where he acted out the passing of a baton, and some interpreted it as a call to hand off responsibilities to the younger generation and step aside. Whether or not that's what he meant, I want to clarify that **this is not my mindset**.

If I had that mindset, I doubt anyone could celebrate if God blessed my ministry. My heart is not about *passing the baton* but about *locking arms* to advance the King's agenda together. Whether you're 8, 80, or 108, if God has given you life and breath, I want us to partner together. So let's settle that up front—this is not about stepping aside but about moving forward together.

Now, let's return to verse 4, where it talks about heart's desires, petitions, and purpose. This is the part of the psalm that truly grabbed my attention when I read it that morning. Within minutes of opening my Bible, I knew this was the passage God had for me.

My heart's desire and purpose haven't changed. In fact, they've been consistent throughout my ministry—whether I've been a youth pastor, a seminary student, or a senior pastor. My goal has always been to be as effective and faithful as possible in advancing the Great Commission.

Some might say the primary goal is to glorify God, and I wholeheartedly agree. But we glorify God through the advancement of the Great Commission. So, what is the Great Commission?

In Matthew 28, it unfolds like this: Jesus was born, lived a sinless life, died on the cross to pay for our sins, and rose from the dead. His disciples, who had not expected Him to die—let alone rise again—had a transformative reunion with Him on a hilltop. They worshiped Him, and then Jesus declared, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*" This is the

foundation of our purpose as Christians and as a church—to advance His mission with the authority He has given us.

Then He says in verses 18 to 20, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."* That's evangelism and discipleship. *"Teaching them to observe" (that is, obey) "everything I've commanded you. And lo, I'll be with you always, to the end of the age."* So, we have discipleship and presence—evangelism, discipleship, and presence. That is the mission of the church.

My heart's desire, my purpose, the thing for which I am resolved, is that in 2025 we would continue to enhance our local missions outreach. As a church, we've labored to enhance our worship and discipleship, and one area that we've worked on—but must continue to focus on—is local outreach.

Let's talk about that. First off, when you talk about maturing disciples, you're talking about the Great Commission, which means making and maturing disciples. How do disciples mature? It's really rather simple:

### **1. Gather for Worship**

Something happens when we worship. We become like what we worship. If we are football fans and we praise the Chicago Bears—number one, I'm sorry for your losses (which are many, like a Browns fan)—but you might become a sports fanatic. I like sports, but if we worship the Son of God, we might become more like Him because we recognize His imminent worth and value. We start to aspire to be like Him, set our sights on that, and it transforms us.

### **2. Discipleship**

Discipleship is growth. We get together in Sunday school and other small groups, like a men's Bible study, and chew on the Word of God together. We encourage and challenge each other. Sometimes, I don't have perfect insight into my own spiritual development, and when brothers sit next to me and say, "You might be missing something here," or when I realize it myself as they talk, it transforms me. Discipleship also includes spending time in the Word of God on our own—reading Scripture, making observations about what it says, thinking about its applications: *How does this change the way I think? How does this change the way I view God? How does it change the way I'm supposed to act?* Then, we pray for God's help to carry it out.

### **3. Serve God and Others**

We find opportunities to serve God and others, both inside and outside the church. Can I tell you what happens in well-established churches like ours? We are what I like to call a "legacy church." Some would say that means we're old, but I say it means we have a long-standing tradition of serving God and others in this community. However, legacy churches can become internally focused. We don't want to do that exclusively.

When I hear that someone has sent a letter, made a phone call, or taken someone to a doctor's visit, I say, *"Praise God for their partnership in the gospel."* Growing includes serving one another because that glorifies Christ. But now, in 2025, we need to think about going outside the walls of the church. My resolve is to continue enhancing our local missions outreach.

Two years ago, I resolved to pursue something for outreach. I didn't quite hit the goal, but we made progress. My goal was to get to where we were doing, on average, one outreach-focused activity each month. At the time, our outreach was basically The Switch and, perhaps, the softball team—which does connect with some unchurched people. But those were our two main outreach efforts. I said, *“Let's pursue getting to one outreach activity a month.”*

We did things like the outreach at County Market with the hot dogs and Bible distribution. We did other events like the Valentine's Banquet and the chili cook-off, and we started to grow. In the first year, we reached nine outreach events. When you go from one or two to nine, that's pretty awesome, right? In the second year, 2024, I started coming up short.

But then, late in the summer, God did something. Alex came to me and said, *“I have this idea about having a worship service out at Tilton Park. We need to get outside the walls of the church.”* That's great because if the church is salt and light, it's not preserving anything if we stay inside the saltshaker. So, let's get out of the saltshaker!

Let's have a worship service out in public, and people did slow down to listen. There were teenagers in the park. It was a little cold that day; the weather didn't cooperate. Admittedly, Calvary Baptist Church got outside the walls of the church. There were not a ton of people in the park, but some girls came up. We gave them hot dogs and chips and the whole thing, and they wanted to pay for it. They thought nothing in life is free, and we said, "Well, maybe not, but we're giving this to you because we care."

Then, a little bit later, Alex came to me and had another idea. He said, “At our old church, we used to do this thing where we'd make these Thanksgiving baskets and deliver them to people outside of the church who were not connected to the church. Can we do that?” I said, “Yeah.” Unbeknownst to Alex, this was my vision that he was helping complete because I hadn't been able to execute it.

The church said yes. We promoted it, and we asked, “Can you donate?” The church—you guys—donated. You gave to that. The baskets were collected and created and delivered. I can share with you one story. This is why I could go on for an hour, but I'm just going to share one. One man broke down in tears when the basket arrived because he did not know how he was going to put on Thanksgiving for his family. I think that's glorifying Christ.

So those things happened. Then we had one more activity, and I didn't know how it was going to turn out. My friend Mike Roal, who was the director of Love INC (it's now reformed as Hope Renewed), had a thing because they partnered with Slumberland, and Slumberland donated bedding and mattresses. We went out and delivered mattresses. We were able to minister to people, and that was it. We got almost to 12.

Once again, my goal is to continue to pursue that elusive goal of 12. But what's happening when that happens is our church is making sure to not only focus on itself. When we went prayer walking, another thing happened to me. When I think about outreach, we started to do the prayer walking. I was aware of the issue of not soliciting in Tilton because of that whole ice storm fiasco a few years ago. So we said, “Let's do this. We're going to get these cards that say, ‘We

prayed for you,’ and here’s our address—Calvary Baptist Church.” We went out and literally prayed for every house in the neighborhood back here.

We had some encounters with people. Our intention was to go, and if people talked to us, great. But because of the soliciting issue, we thought, “Well, we’re not soliciting, so let’s play it safe.” We had some encounters, and I’ll share a few of them. Those encounters told me that just on the other side of King Street, it’s a little different than—it’s different than us.

One house had a welcome mat that said, “Go away.” That’s funny. Another lady—sweet—she was sweet. I don’t know if she’s old enough to be a hippie, but she kind of seemed like one. She wanted to talk about spiritual stuff. When she found out who we were and what we were doing, she was happy to talk spiritual. She opened the door, and out rolled marijuana smoke. Hey, that’s our neighbors.

Another man—I think he was younger than me. I’m getting to the point where my perspective on age is kind of getting warped at 47, right? But I’m pretty sure he was younger than me. We were walking, and I came up to him and told him who I was and what we were doing, praying for our neighbors. I asked, “Can I pray for you for anything?” He goes, “Yeah, do you have a time machine?” He wasn’t joking. He had a heavy heart. Something had gone wrong in his life. I didn’t pry. I didn’t think it was my place to pry, but something had gone wrong. He wasn’t happy with where things were for him. I suspect he lost something or someone, maybe. So I said, “Well, I don’t have a time machine, but I do know Jesus, and we’ll pray.”

All of those people—every single one of them—was different, but they all have one thing in common: they need the hope of knowing Jesus Christ. What I realized is that going out to our neighbors and also doing service projects on the other side of the cemetery—that too was a different world. Have you been back there? We did a little service project with the youth, and it didn’t take long to realize King Street is one way, but it seems like the rest of the town is a little different.

So then we have to think through: how do we most effectively communicate the gospel, the glory, and the love of Christ to the people in Tilton, Illinois, and Danville in 2025? Our population in our community is shrinking. You probably know that—you’ve seen it. I had a little study done, and there’s a 12% vacancy rate; 12% of the houses in the area are vacant. A lot of the good jobs have left. So we have to wrestle through and think through: who are we serving, where are they coming from, and what’s their mindset?

Going out into the community and even getting yelled at for soliciting—when we weren’t soliciting—tells you a bit about where we’re at. So we started to think through how to reach out. Number one: online. We changed our website. And you might think, “What’s the big deal?” A lot of times, churches create a website for the church people who already know what time church starts and where the church is located. So, we revamped the website, and most of you probably didn’t even notice. But all of a sudden, the service times, locations, and pictures of guys like Chad—who is friendlier-looking than me—were on the website prominently.

Why Chad and not me? Well, I wear a suit, but I don't want anybody thinking they have to wear a suit to come to church. I'm going to pick on Bob—you look great, brother; I like the tie. But listen, my heart's desire is to be a church for everybody, and I don't want people to feel like they have to dress up to come to church. That's why my face isn't prominent. Chad is great, he's friendly, and he was wearing jeans that day. Some of you might think, "What's the big deal?" Well, it does matter.

Can I share a story with you? This happened here since I've been at Calvary. A young lady visited our church a few times, and I got to talking to her. She told me she'd been here before, years ago, and that she went shopping before she came to church because she didn't have "church clothes." A part of me thinks, "Well, that's sweet," but another part of me says, "Golly, I'd hate for people to think they have to go shopping to come worship Jesus with us." I'm not talking about people wearing sweatpants or ripped-up jeans, but maybe we should just let people be themselves. That's kind of my thinking.

We started to change a little bit of the in-person experience. The music style has changed—I'm sure you've noticed that a bit. The dress has changed too. Ultimately, these changes are because my vision for the church is not about us becoming something exclusive. I want us to be a church where everyone feels welcome. So, we kind of went in that direction.

Let's think about teaching. I'll share a personal thing God has laid on my heart about how I function in the preaching task. I'm aware that I'm kind of the "nerd guy." It is what it is. But after studying Tilton and our area a little more, I realized that being the "nerd guy" could actually be a hindrance to effective ministry. So my goal in 2025 is to find ways to communicate the truth much more simply. Pray for me in that, because it's an area of focus for me at Calvary Baptist Church.

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## **Where We've Been and Where We're Going**

We are a church in the early stages of revitalization. Our church started out 125 years ago—126 years now, I guess—in 1899. We were a church plant. I didn't know this, but some of you may not either: First Baptist Church had a role in planting this church. In the early days of a church plant, you know what you have to focus on almost exclusively? Local missions. Church plants know that if they don't focus on local missions, they die.

In the early stages of Calvary Baptist Church, we struggled and went back to First Baptist Church, saying, "We can't pull it off. Would you take us back under your wing?" And so they did, and we relaunched a little while later. In 125 years, Calvary Baptist Church has seen more than one period of "glory days" followed by seasons of decline.

I was shocked—Bill Neighbors probably won't be shocked to hear this—but I came across a little flyer from 1966. I think Pastor Bennett was the pastor. In the flyer, it said how much money Calvary Baptist Church took in each year: a million dollars. In 1966! I suggest that's a heyday.

I understand that, before Pastor Joe came, it was a very dark, difficult time here. Some even talked about—I don't know how widespread this was, but I've heard it from more than one person—whether or not Calvary could continue existing. We are not in that place now, nor are we even having conversations like that. Of course, we've experienced unbelievable times, and we are in a season of renewal.

But along with renewal occasionally comes uncomfortable changes in ministry practice. I have it on good authority that even Pastor Bennett had to make some changes that not everyone appreciated. And it's not because some approaches are morally wrong and others are right, but because some are more effective in one era than another.

Did you ever notice when you read the New Testament? They don't have sound systems in the book of Acts. They were probably happier that way. They didn't have published Bibles back then either. So, some things have changed. And when we think about this, there are changes, and along with the changes, there are experiments. Let's talk about that.

Musically, I had a pastor a few years back share with me—and the deacon body—how their church revitalized. Some of those things they did wouldn't work for Calvary. For instance, they said, “We take all the songs that are on the local Christian radio station, and that's what we want to play.” I immediately knew that wasn't us. I'm not against the local radio station, but we are a church. Baptists have a great hymn tradition, and there is a lot of rich theology in our hymns. We weren't interested in jettisoning that, nor am I interested in singing shallow songs. But could we possibly tweak the presentation of hymns so they don't sound like they're from and for a different generation?

I'm going to share a story. Some of you have picked up on the fact that I'm not a southern gospel guy—I'm kind of more of a heavy metal man. Years ago, in what seems like a former life, I was a youth pastor at First Baptist Church of Hermitage. My secondary role was activities, which sounds fun, but what it actually meant was that I took seniors on outings. One of the things I got to do was take them to a Booth Brothers concert. Some of y'all are saying, “Praise God! Are we taking a busload to the Booth Brothers?” No, we're not. We could, I guess.

At the intermission, I got to meet one of the guys from the Booth Brothers. We were talking, and somehow it came up—probably just because I'm painfully honest sometimes—that I said, “Well, I'm kind of more of a heavy metal guy.” He said, “Heavy metal? Why are you at a Booth Brothers concert?” Then I told him about my job description. He asked me a question: “Well, what do you think of the show so far?” I said, “I like it more than I expected. I had low expectations, and I've actually enjoyed this more than I thought. I don't regret coming.”

He said, “Well, I'm glad to hear that.” Then he went on to tell me an important story. He said, “We are trying to find different ways to appeal to younger audiences because, in 25 years or so, southern gospel will be dead. The people who grew up on it are dying. Wouldn't it be sad? I don't even know all the southern gospel songs except the ones my dad listened to. What if southern gospel just disappeared because nobody sang it anymore?”



I don't want that to happen to our hymns, and I know you don't either. So, we've got a drum set and electric guitars. With experiments, there are hiccups along the way. One of the things Alex found out—and he told me about it—was that we were playing it too loud. He said, “I found this video, and they talked about decibel levels.” It was quieter this morning because we're experimenting.

What we are trying to do—there may be other churches doing this, but I don't personally know of any—is revamping some of the old songs. It's an experiment, a time of trial and testing. And shoot, when they sang *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, that was hard to sing. The newer songs, like *Amazing Grace*—it's crazy to call *Amazing Grace* a newer song—are easier to sing. Somebody told me the reason *Amazing Grace* was so popular was because it's easy to sing. Not every hymn is.

So, there's that process. We've got the acrylic drum thing—I don't know what you call that little cage around it—to help muffle the sound. No, we didn't buy it. A sister church let us borrow it.

Can I tell you another way Calvary has changed a bit? Historically, fundamental Baptists don't interact with other churches very well. We don't play well with others. Y'all know it's the truth. A sister church from the Assemblies of God let us borrow this. That's part of my heartbeat. We are going to continue to hold firm to the doctrinal positions that we hold, but I don't view every other church that doesn't call itself a fundamental Baptist church as a false church—at least not at first glance. Some of them are; let's just be honest. But that's not my starting place. My starting place is this: if they're worshipping Jesus Christ and believe the Bible, we've got a good starting point.

We have some common ground, all right? Along with changes will also come new faces. I want to share something with you—I've heard this more than once. We've had new faces coming into our church, although today is not a good representation or example (the fake news scared us all a bit with the snow this morning). I've heard from more than one person, new to our church, who said how welcoming our church has been. Some of those folks don't look like the traditional Calvary folks. So thank you again for your partnership in the gospel.

One of my goals for 2025—we're going to land the plane very soon because the children's church person (I sleep next door to her) will expect us to wrap up. A lot of you, after Pastor Rob stepped down to take on his role at Waynetown, and now that I'm the youth pastor again, have been asking, “Are we going to hire another pastor? Are we going to hire a youth pastor? What are we going to do?” I've gotten texts about that, phone calls, and in-person conversations.

I want to share with you my heart. It's probably too early to get very, very serious about this. There are conversations that need to happen with the deacons and the finance team, and some other steps need to be taken. But I want to share what's on my heart for 2025 regarding hiring another pastor.

One of my goals—hopefully for 2025 but maybe later—is to hire an associate pastor of local missions and assimilation. Let me try that again: an associate pastor of local missions and

assimilation. What's the difference? Number one, when churches typically hire a pastor, they often think, "We need someone to help us take care of what's going on in here."

Can I tell you something? Calvary Baptist Church takes really good care of each other. I think we'd be better served by hiring someone whose primary focus is reaching outside the walls of our church. It may not look exactly like what Pastor Curt did, but he was doing that kind of work. His primary role would be getting out into the community, building bridges, and organizing outreach events.

What would his role be to the body? His role would be discipling us by equipping, inviting, and challenging us to partner with him in the outreach work. See, when we think about being a disciple, we talk about "gather, grow, go." Understand this: being a part of the mission to reach outside our church is a part of being a disciple.

We would look for someone with the spiritual gift of an evangelist, someone willing, interested, and excited to spend almost all their time outside the walls of the church reaching lost people. But here's the thing: when you think about an evangelist, one of the things that has to happen when someone comes to faith in Jesus is they need to get connected to a local church. His job would be to help new converts or people re-engaging with the life of the church get assimilated into the body of Christ.

Local missions and assimilation—that's where I believe the Lord is leading us. That's the direction I think He has set for us. To be frank, this wasn't something I discovered back in October when I was walking at Forest Glen. I've known this was needed for quite some time.

In the meantime, while we're not quite ready to make such a hire, we don't have to wait until then to start pursuing a God-honoring vision of more effective outreach. So what do we do?

**Number one:** Pray. Pray that God would give us a bold faith in Him. Verse 7 says, "*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will trust in the name of our God.*" The idea is simple: some trust in their military might. We might say, "Some trust in their bank account, their skill sets, their abilities, their good looks, or their connections." But we will trust in our God. We will trust in the power of the gospel to save people, to transform people. We will trust in the name of the Lord our God. Pray for bold faith in God and for a heart like Paul's for our community.

Ephesians 3—which we may look at tonight (I'm still up in the air about Sunday night service)—shows Paul as a Jewish man. The Jews didn't usually associate with Gentiles, but God called him to reach people who were not like him. Those were some uncomfortable times for him. In fact, that even got him thrown in the slammer for preaching the gospel. Calvary Baptist Church has been placed here by God's sovereign wisdom to reach the people of Tilton and Vermillion County as they are, at this time, in Tilton's history. And so, we need to have a heart like Paul, willing to do what is necessary to reach them.

**Third, pray that God would send laborers to help us.** Some of those laborers are already part of our church—pray that God would raise them up, motivate them, and stir them to step forward into service. Jesus had this amazing teaching in Matthew 9:35–38. He saw the people coming

and said, “*Behold, the fields are white for the harvest. Pray then that the Lord would send laborers.*” Some of those laborers are already part of the church, so pray that they’d step forward.

One of my heart’s desires is to continually mentor others—other members and other people who are called into ministry. I’ve been a youth pastor for about 20 years, and my doctorate is in youth ministry. But at this stage, I’d rather invest in someone who feels called to be a youth pastor. I’m praying that God brings someone like that along, someone I can invest in and give opportunities to serve in that way.

I’ve always wanted retired pastors and missionaries to come find a home at the churches I’ve served in. Well, God’s chosen not to do that yet, but it’s a prayer of mine.

**And then, give.** One of the things pastors get criticized for sometimes is asking too much about giving. I think you could literally criticize me for not talking about giving enough. I’ve been here four and a half years and maybe talked about giving one other time. So, let’s talk about that really quickly.

If you’ve never given before, I want to ask you to really pray about whether God would have you give. And if you’re getting mad at me for talking about giving, I’d say, hold off on giving until your heart’s okay with it. See, the Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver. So, if you’re not ready to give for whatever reason, hold off until your heart is ready. But I do challenge you to pray about it and to look at scripture to see what it says about giving.

If you have given before, I want to say thank you. If you’ve given, whether online or in person, thank you for giving. But I want to ask you to pray about whether God would have you become a *consistent giver*—someone who gives regularly to the church. This isn’t for me; I’m not commission-based. It’s so we can continue to advance and enhance our outreach.

If you’re already a regular giver, there’s this benchmark set in scripture of 10%. Ask God to help you have the faith to step forward and grow. If you’re giving 1%, ask God to help you grow to 3%. If you’re giving 5%, pray that God would help you grow in that.

Can I say this? Every person I’ve ever known who set out to grow in giving, to the point of giving 10%, was scared. They wondered, “*How are we going to pay the bills if we give 10%?*” But I think if you polled the room and talked to the people who’ve been tithing for some time, they’d all tell you they were scared, but somehow, God continued to provide. Maybe you’re not there yet to give 10%. I understand. But I’m asking you to pray about whether God would have you give and grow in giving.

I have this desire to see us call a pastor to help us reach out. Financially, we’re not struggling, but we’re not quite at the place yet where we could hire someone. Growth in giving is necessary. So, that’s my request.

Thank you again for your partnership at Calvary Baptist Church. I’m excited about what 2025 has in store. I had, oh, probably four different versions of this sermon, but I think I landed on the

right one today. Pray that God would continue to bless, be present, thank Him for our past, and let's move forward with excitement into what He has in store for the future.

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