

Morning, everyone.

Can I hold on a second? Boat, I'm just gonna say this. Bode said you don't have to do anything. It's all set to go. So you saw my hands.

I didn't do anything, did I? Really? I've not done anything off for the last two weeks. So these hands. These hands have had a lot of rest.

I've loved the last two weeks having off. Did anyone else feel guilty because they didn't have any responsibilities last Sunday besides me? Oh, we called it. We called it. We had the coffee made.

Rod was here. We had some people working hard to make it happen. But then I saw a little bit of snow. I thought that's all it takes for me. Jesus.

You know, there was a little more. A little more thought that went into it, but. But yeah. I hope you all had a very restful last couple weeks. Welcome to 2025.

To get things started, I'm going to invite a young lady. Her and her husband have been attending our congregation now for a couple of years. Alex and Sarah Maher. I'm going to invite Sarah to come up here and join me on stage. Alex and Alex was baptized here last year, I believe.

They've got two little ones. Waylon is their youngest. Yes, Waylon. I think he's named after the Jennings of Waylon. He.

He is. Okay, There we go. There we go. Which tells you a lot about Alex and Sarah. And then little Danny.

You've seen Danny go from. Well, he was a. He was six weeks old. Oh, yeah. Six weeks old when he first started.

Now he walked in on his own volition this morning, which is an crazy thing to see with kids. So I've invited Sarah to come up and talk just a little bit about a ministry that is near and dear to her heart. So, Sarah, tell us a little bit about this ministry that this campus has been instrumental in starting here in Lawrence County. Yeah. So thank you so much for having me this morning.

Tim invited me up to talk about mom to Mom Bedford. So I spoke about it last semester, and so I just kind of wanted to share a little bit about what we're doing, what we're getting ready to do this semester, and kind of how people can help if they're interested. Perfect. So, yeah, so our mom to Mom Bedford group is modeled off of mom to Mom Bloomington, which used to be roof crashers way back in the day. And so it's really just a group of women that we invite them to come on

Friday mornings, bring their children, get them out of the house, get around Other women, we have coffee, we have breakfast.

A topical speaker every week, free children's programming. And so I did not come up with this line, but Beth Long in Bloomington always says it, that when Sunday mornings seem scary, Friday mornings are safe. And so we are truly an outreach ministry. We are open to all women in Lawrence county, not just women here at Sherwood Oaks Bedford. And our goal is to share the love of Jesus and give those moms just a little bit of a break, but in a truly safe place that they feel comfortable.

So tell us a little about how the. How the year's gone. Yeah, so it was first phenomenal. So we have an online Facebook group that we started to go along with our in person meetings. That group has over 200 women in it right now.

And so in that group, we're able to share about things happening in person at mom to Mom. But we can also share, like, you know, hey, who has a recommendation for a pediatrician? Or, you know, where can I go for this? It's just a great resource for the community to have, especially for those people relocating to Bedford. And in person, we had 36 women register.

But here's the cool thing. Women inviting other women. So even though we only had 36 people registered, we had moms attending that were just coming with a friend. And that is totally fine. Maybe they didn't register online ahead of time.

We loved having them. Fantastic. Yeah, fantastic. So how can going forward in the new coming year, what can we continue to do? Support and encourage this ministry to.

To moms in our. In our community. Yeah. So we are looking for a couple key pieces. Our moms have been fabulous.

They help out. They bring food twice a semester, and then they also help in children's programming once a semester. But our biggest piece right now, we had three wonderful young ladies who helped with children's programming last semester. And just due to new jobs and student teaching, they're not actually going to be able to help us. And we really want these moms to have that time.

We don't want to ask them to serve more than once a semester. So if you have a Friday morning free, I'm not even asking. It doesn't have to be every Friday this semester. It doesn't even have to be a whole month of Fridays, even just one Friday morning. We will serve you food.

You can join and have coffee with us. It has been fabulous. You don't

have to bring anything. We provide a Bible story, a coloring page, and then you get to pour into these children. And if you are a parent, you know how important it is to get that little bit of time each week for a break.

And so I'm looking for people to help with that. It doesn't have to be a woman if you know my. I've done it. Yes, I was going to say. Yeah, Yeah, I was.

I, I mean, I, I, I rocked it. Yes, Tim, if Tim can handle it, you guys can absolutely do it. I promise you can do it. Yeah, no, I recruited Alex to do it a couple of times too. No, he was better than me.

Oh, he'll love hearing that. So, but yeah, so if you are free on a Friday morning, I would love, you know, just come talk to me. We can pick a date. You could even say, hey, maybe I don't have a date in mind, but maybe put my name down, here's my cell phone number, call me if you need me type thing. And Carly actually made some really nice postcards for us.

So it has all the dates on there so people can take those with them. But that's my biggest ask is children's, children's programming and mentor moms. So tell us about mentor moms. Yeah. So mentor moms are fabulous.

They are moms who are maybe not in the season of life that I am currently in. So not a young mom, think a more seasoned mom or even a grandma. You have free hands. That is the biggest thing. So maybe you can hold a baby while, while a mom eats breakfast.

A hot meal is always one of my favorite things to get. So maybe you could get someone a cup of coffee. Maybe you can answer a question, help lead a discussion, imparting that wisdom that only those women who have lived life have. And that is so important. And they bring such a unique aspect to our tables and our conversations on Friday morning.

Excellent. So, yeah, so we would love help with mentor moms and children's programming and just any questions that people have. I love talking about mom to mom. Will you be hanging out a little bit after service today that you can, you can answer questions? Yeah.

So I will be back in the corner at the women's corner. I have sign up sheets. I can answer questions. I can hand out little postcards. Also I have lots of extra postcards.

If there's a woman in your life who you think might be interested, grab a postcard and give it to her or take some with you if you think you're going to be at a park or the library. We would love to get these out in the community. So I am happy to hand out two to three if

you think you're going to run into somebody who, who might be interested. So thank you Sarah, so much. I really appreciate what you are doing to help make this church the best church for our community.

Can I pray for you? Absolutely. Please do. Heavenly Father, I thank you for Sarah. I thank you for Alex and her little, little family, that they are part of our congregation.

We're blessed for having them here. I appreciate her heart so much for other women like her, young moms who are maybe new to the community, new to parenting. You trying to figure this stuff out, maybe even new to faith or not even walking a life of faith just yet, but curious. And you're drawing them. So I appreciate so much of her willingness to step up and say yes to an invitation that you offered her.

I pray the same for our congregation. That we would never shy away from the opportunity to be the best church that you've called us to be in this community and for this community. So help us to do that in a way that honors you and builds life and helps our community grow and flourish. And I pray this in Jesus name, amen. Everyone, Sarah Maher, right over there in the corner, I've got a little friend with me this morning.

Can you all see this beautiful specimen of horticulture here? Yeah, I don't know when it was that I really became a plant guy. And you may look at this and go, well, you're not quite there yet. This is not mine. I won't tell you whose it is, but it's someone in our congregation who said, please don't mention that this is my plant.

I may, because I don't have kids of my own for such a long time. I sort of. You know how I feel like God designed man and Adam with this desire to grow and cultivate, whether it's kids or whether it's plants or maybe pets. But we're sort of designed with this built in thing that we're gonna. We wanna help things grow and get better.

So I don't know why that maybe I chose plants. They're easy, require some water every once in a while. My house is full of plants. Probably too many actually. And maybe that's why mom cornered me over the holidays and pulled this plant out.

And she goes, do you want this plant? And I'm telling you it didn't look much better than that right there. And I looked at it and I don't know, it had a few sort of healthy looking green leaves on it, but it was mostly just yellow. And they're falling and they're wilting and There were quite a few crispy brown leaves. It was alive, but I mean, just, just barely.

It was surviving in the strictest sense of the word. And it sort of broke my heart because I don't believe any plant deserves to be put under torture like that. Plants should thrive, shouldn't they? They

should thrive, not just survive. And how could I turn down that opportunity?

You know, this is Adam's call to cultivate and care for things. But I steeled myself against the guilt and I toss it. I do not need anything else to try to take care of. I am barely surviving myself. Anyone feel that way?

Barely surviving myself. 2024 was a year where my little family, we survived. I would say we survived two teenagers that need to be fed and clothed and get to school and fed and made sure they were safe and loved and felt safe and loved. And then I needed to feed them again. You know what I'm talking about here.

And 2024 was the year where I learned to do all of that. Mostly. Mostly. And I learned most of that by asking you guys lots of questions. Is this normal?

Is this not normal? Should I chill? Should I stress about this? Maybe I should panic a little bit. Should I panic?

No. No. I felt like a toddler learning to walk, teetering all over the place, making a good call here and then completely blowing it over there on that end. But look at us. We survived.

But in 2025, I want us to thrive. I want our lives to be flourishing. Spiritually, academically, relationally, physically flourishing. I want us to be financially flourishing. Anyone else say amen to that?

I want a life that doesn't just survive the day to day grind, but can flourish in whatever season I'm in. That's what I want. I want it for me. I want it for this congregation. In fact, at the end of the service today, we're going to do a little quick survey, or I'm going to invite you to do a little quick survey that will help us be better at assessing how we can help each other thrive, not just survive, because I bet you all want to thrive as well.

But what does it take to thrive? Is it who's in office? Is it how much money we've got in the bank? I don't think so. I think the scripture points us to a truth that is going to give us the secret to thriving in the new year.

So we're going to turn to the scriptures this morning. Surprise, surprise, surprise. I'm going to have you turn to Psalm chapter one. That's where we're going to kick off and then I'm going to pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, which instructs us, enlightens us, points us to you, and even unveils you.

As we read the Scriptures, we discover who you are. So, Lord, today as we open your word, we pray that you would reveal to us things we have

not seen, things that we need to be reminded of, things that challenge us, things that quicken us in our spirit, that in turn provide the platform for which we can. We can not just survive, but thrive. This year. I pray this in Jesus name.

Amen. So if you got Psalm 1 open, you can hold it there. I think we've got it on the screen as well. For those of you who don't have your Bible apps, your Bibles with you this morning, but I'm going to have a stand together and we're going to read Psalm 1 as a group. So let's put it up here.

And it begins this way. Read it with me. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And in his law he meditates day and night.

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. You can be seated now.

The Psalms don't give us the author to this psalm or this song. I think it's David, because I think David knew what it was to live the flourishing life. Bible says he was a man after God's own heart. And in this psalm, we see that played out. It says the person, the man or the woman who is flourishing, is delighting in doing what God wants.

Now, how do they know what God wants? That's always a big question, isn't it? How do you know what the will of God is? Well, look here. They know it by reading the word of God.

They discover it in his word, the law of the Lord. And David says, this person meditates on that law day and night. Meditating on the law of the Lord is how the roots go deep. I am currently in the Process of repotting, not repotting, but I'm trying to get some pothos cuttings to take root. Now, this is not a.

This is not a difficult thing to do. This is not. This is. This doesn't require a lot of training to get these things to take root. All it requires is you take the clippings and you put them in some water and you leave them there and you just let them sit in that water and you put water in it because they'll.

They'll drink that water up. But you got to keep the water in there. Just leave it there. It's not hard, but it's not quick either. You have to be patient because it takes several weeks for those roots to begin to appear, even months for those roots to begin to appear, and

several more after that before those roots are ready to go into the soil.

Growing good spiritual roots is the same way. It's not just opening up your Bible on Sundays and reading there and thinking you're going to develop some really good, strong spiritual roots. It's spending time daily in God's Word. It's letting those roots go and just hang out. That means spending time daily in it, absorbing it, meditating on it, thinking on it, allowing what you read in the morning to trail you all through the day, just to soak and marinate in what God has said in His Word.

God promises that the time we spend in His Word is not time that goes to waste. The time invested in God's Word returns to us in dividends when we need insight, when we need direction instead of depending on our own wisdom, the kind of wisdom that leads us to surviving instead of thriving. When we invest in God's Word, that kind of wisdom that we glean there helps us thrive. The psalmist says our leaves are green and healthy and our lives are prosperous is the word he uses, meaning they're fulfilling, they're fruitful. We'll come back to that word.

They're flourishing. Those who don't understand are like this poor little plant right here. I mean, they just. Those leaves just crumble up dry. Blow on it and it'll disappear.

Look at this. Oh, bless its heart. Do you feel for it? Does anyone want to take this home and try to do something with it? You're welcome to, but at the slightest disturbance, a plant that's not been treated well, that is not thriving, is going to.

Is going to blow away. Well, that's what the psalmist says. They're like the chaff which the wind drives away. 2024 was quite a year. And I can guarantee you that 2025 is going to be quite a year.

There will be wonderful things that will happen. You'll get that raise. You'll find the perfect partner. Some of you, most of you have already got the perfect partner. You just need to open your eyes and recognize it.

This is the year we're going to pass all our classes.

But there will be less wonderful things that will happen, too. Your job will get frustrating, that job that God gave you. We'll not be perfect. We will lose people we love. We know what that's like in this congregation.

And we will fail at very important things. You know, that's just how life is. If we're not grounded in God's Word, those things can sap the life out of us. We'll be left dry and crumbly and not sure why we're not experiencing the joy of the Lord.

But if we make delighting in His Word a priority, if we're delighting in living out what God says, then whatever happens, our roots will grow deep. The psalmist says, our leaf shall not wither. We will flourish, and our lives shall be marked by fruitfulness. There's that word again. Fruitfulness is a big deal to God, a real big deal.

He wants our lives to be fruitful, like the crew down at Apple Acres. Jesus tells us in John 15 that one of the works of the Father is as a pruner. He keeps an orchard. The picture he gives us is of a vineyard. And the job the Father does.

He's got his pruning shears, he's got his saw, and he goes around and he makes sure that those trees are in perfect condition to bear lots of fruit. So he cuts away the dead branches and he prunes the living branches. In a couple weeks, we're going to talk about pruning, because there's so much good stuff here. But he does both of those things. He cuts away the dead and prunes the good branches so that they will bear even more fruit.

Here's how Jesus says it in John 15:8. This is to my Father's glory. Jesus says that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples. To flourish, to bear fruit. As a branch, we have to stay connected to the trunk with its roots sunk deep in the soil.

And this is where we get to this picture that Jesus uses of the vineyard, which would have been very familiar to the people he was talking to at the beginning. He looks at the vineyard and the grapevine's growing, and he makes this point. He says, A grapevine that's clipped, that's sawn from the vine, will no longer be suitable for bearing fruit. It has no chance of bearing fruit, no matter how healthy it was four minutes ago. Now its fruit bearing days are over.

So Jesus says, stay connected. Here's what he goes on to say in verse 4 of John 15. Remain in me as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain connected to the vine.

Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. Now, what does remaining in Jesus mean? Sometimes Jesus says things, you're like, I think I get it, but what does that actually look like? So I pondered that a little bit. For me, I think the easiest way to think about this is when Jesus commands us.

The Bible commands us to pray without ceasing. Now what does that look like? Does that mean that if we're Catholic, we've got our beads going all the time, or if we're not Catholic, we're at the altar all the time or on our knees? No, that's not what that means. I think it means for me is that I am constantly recognizing that there is no part of my life that functions well without Jesus.

No part of my life functions well without Jesus. So I'm always bringing my stuff into Jesus. Let's be honest, I'm speaking in a hypothetical right now because I don't always bring all my stuff to Jesus. But this is what it means, I think, to remain in him, to bring all our stuff into Jesus, not bring Jesus into our stuff. That's what we do.

Oftentimes instead of praying without ceasing, we pray when something's gone wrong. We pray when we're feeling a little bit desperate and we invite Jesus into our stuff. And Jesus says, that's not really the picture. I want you to bring your stuff into me, not me into your stuff. When we're doing this, when we're bringing our stuff into Jesus, we see real quickly what fits and what doesn't fit.

This is also part of the pruning process. The stuff that doesn't fit, doesn't go in. If it fits, it goes in and Jesus is Lord over it. If it doesn't, we let go of it. That's what I think remaining in him looks like, reminding ourselves on a daily basis that we can do nothing apart from him.

So to sort of lean into this even more, in the very next verse, Jesus basically repeats himself as if to say, I know you've drifted off a little bit, but come back. Let me say this again. In verse 5, he says this. I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. Let's say that together. Apart from me, you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you're like a branch that's thrown away onto the pile and it withers. We know if you've done yard work, you know how this works.

Such branches are picked up, they're thrown in the fire and they're burned. Not within city limits, please. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish. Oh, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. Now, there's a lot in there.

Did you pack? Did you unpack? All that flourishing Bearing much fruit is only possible if we remain in Christ. Check. Apart from him, we could do nothing.

Check. Apart from him, we are nothing. Check. Apart from him, we're good for nothing. Check who.

That's pretty Sad news for 2025. But look at this promise. If we remain in him, then we have this wild, wild commitment from Jesus. If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, you can ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Now, we don't take one verse and build an entire theology out of it, but at the very least, Jesus says this. If we remain in him, and if we

refuse to let discouragement, confusion, chaos, uncertainty sway us from our commitment to follow Jesus, then our lives will have the trust and the confidence and the favor of God. And God says, I trust you to ask for good things. We can ask him for what we really want, and we have the confidence that he will answer in the affirmative. That sounds like a radical statement.

I don't think it's as radical as it seems. Because first of all, we know this. Our Father loves us. Right? My two boys asked me for a lot of stuff.

A lot of stuff.

If I can do it, I'm going to try to do it. Now, there's some things they ask for. I'm like, not today, maybe tomorrow, maybe when you're 18.

But I'm listening to you. And now that I know you want it, I'm going to see what I can do to help make that happen. This is because we love our kids. We want to do this for our kids, don't we? Our Father loves us, and he wants to do good things for our lives.

The closer we live in him, the closer we live in His Word, the more distinctly I think those longings and desires really become Known to us as well. What do you want, Tim? Jesus says. I said, I got a list so long it'd make Santa Claus blush. What I want.

No, what do you really want, Tim? Well, I'm gonna be honest with you. I would love a deeper sense of contentment. Does anyone besides me struggle with contentment?

I'm always very aware of what I don't have. Anyone else aware of what you don't have? I want to live with a deeper sense of contentment and joy in what God has provided for me. I would like to lead my little family with more confidence. I often feel like a reed tossed in the wind trying to figure out how to do this thing.

I really appreciate some of you who have shared some of the issues you have with some anxiety, because I, too, would love to be done with anxious thoughts once and for all. That's the kind of life I would like to live in 2025. And Jesus says, listen, if you remain in me and let my words remain in you, then you shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water that brings forth fruit in its due season. Your leaf is not going to wither, and whatever you do will prosper. And it's not just me who prospers.

You see, when we are going deep in God's word and staying connected to Jesus, then the environment around us will also be impacted. In just a few moments, I'm gonna have Jeff come and lead us in a time of communion. When he does that, you're gonna have two little elements in

your hand. You're gonna have the cup and you're gonna have the bread. The juice is made from grapes, and that piece of bread is made from a grain of some grains of wheat.

On their own, the single grape and the little grain of wheat would not have much to offer for us today. But when combined with other grapes and combined with other grains of wheat, what happens? They get combined, and they are now useful for the nourishment and edification of this entire congregation this morning. For us, when we stay connected to Jesus through his body, we become an element that is beneficial and edifying for the entire community. Like Sarah, who says, I want to help do something in partnership with this church to reach the moms in Lawrence County.

When we allow our roots to go deep in God's word, when we stay connected to Jesus, it's not just our lives that will thrive and flourish. We'll also nourish the people and the places that God has positioned us in. And we'll be the church, the best church for our community. Jeff, I'm going to have you come up. I'm going to pray.

We'll share together and then we'll close out with a few announcements and an invitation to help us flourish better. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the promise that if we remain in you and you remain in us, we will flourish in this life.

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