



Sunday, June 5, 2023

Speaker: Pastor Glenn Duncan

Scripture: Acts 11:19-26

Sermon Title: Encouragement—Sharing God stories

Testimonies & Sermon

Mike Broersma

So my testimony is that God is with us through thick and thin.

The idea of sharing our stories is that we witness the world around us by our faith, by our walk, by how we handle the things that have come across us.

I'll do this really briefly, but about a year ago, I am employed by the church and the church was a little tight financially. We were wondering about ways that we could help financially. So I really couldn't take much of a pay cut or reduction but my wife and I thought, "Well, we could sell our house." Remember, last June, it was still a good market, and we could buy something much smaller. The intent was to buy a cheaper house and sell our house what it was worth and become debt free. And that was our way of helping in a way that we had felt God calling us to do.

So we did. We bought a house before we sold and we weren't able to sell. Then the market last summer went kind of weird. I don't know. A lot of people were taken by surprise, but we couldn't sell the house and next thing you know, we're further and further in debt. We ended up being nine times further in debt than we were and our monthly expenses have doubled and all these things. We're wondering, "Well, that didn't work out. Lord, what in the world is this about?"

I happen to work with Steve Koi and Momentum Campus Ministries at Queen's University as part of my outreach role, and we're working at Trent University as well. And the idea of student housing and starting up a missional house here in Peterborough which we don't have here yet. So we decided to move in that direction and convert our house into a campus ministry home.

We felt God really directing us in that. And the story is that even though the struggles against that, the banks didn't quite see that it's such a great idea. They see it as a rooming house and a bunch of other things. And we're plugging it forward and my income is what it is and trying to convince people that it's the right thing to do. We kept getting roadblock after roadblock, but then another door would open up and another door would open up.

I'm working with a Christian broker now. We have some people in our lives giving Christian advice, and we see an end. We have girls living in the house already. And let me just say, it's such a blessing to see them growing already in their faith.

My wife and I realized a little while ago - we looked at our family and realized, "You know, our children are both believers, strong believers. They have married spouses who are strong believers, and it's not lost on us. I know that people of my age, my friends, that doesn't happen all the time. And I know the struggle of not having children who are following the Lord. We are so blessed. And I look at my parents and my siblings. We're all believers. I think what a blessing that is. We are rich beyond our means in that way.

So what matter the cost, we're following God's will. My wife, Judi, and I are praying about this. These young girls who are going to university, we're providing a Christian atmosphere, a Christian home for them to live. And they're strengthening their faith. And I don't know, you know, universities can be a really dangerous place sometimes for worldviews, etc. It would be amazing if, you know, 10-15 years from now, those girls' parents are saying, "What a blessing that our children are believers." And if we have any part of that, that's a joy. We feel God has called into that.

So we're sticking. We're sticking with it through thick and thin. And I just wanted to say to God's glory, that he has brought us through. He has walked with us through this journey. We look back in the footprints, God was carrying us through all those difficult times. He put people in our lives who have helped us financially and helping us to see a way to make this happen. And the ministry doors are opening up. So it's an amazing story and to God be praised for that. We have some more stories.

Jim Vandenberg

So I'm Jim Vandenberg. I'm your new elder just elected in. So thank you very much. [Clapping.] My wife read and I've been coming here for, I think, six years or so. I've been reluctant to be on counsel before now for personal reasons. But I think things have changed dramatically for me. One of the things that's changed is something I'm going to share with you today.

My story is to bear witness to the power of prayer and I'll give you a bit of details. But anyway, I was talking to Andy earlier today. A few years ago, Andy got in a serious snowmobile accident. He broke five of his ribs. Punctured his lung. He was in deep trouble at that time and I thought, "Well, maybe I can do better than that." [Laughing.]

I had an accident in February where I basically destroyed all the ribs on the left side of my body. I was driving along a trail. There was a bunch of oncoming traffic. It was tight because it just snowed. One of the machines darted out of position and our skis clipped as we passed each other and my machine catapulted me off. And I went flying through the air and down a hill and then landed on my left side. It was a huge blunt force trauma and I was in trouble.

It took a while to get to the hospital because I'm in the middle of Quebec. At first I couldn't breathe. I was losing the feeling on half of my body and I was wondering, "What's wrong with me?" I thought I would still be going to go to dinner that night. Then the next morning, we realized through the night I couldn't get any relief from the pain. I was in very deep, deep trouble, like in distress. No matter what they put in my body, it wasn't helping me at all. So they had no choice but to put me on an epidural. So this is serious when you're in blunt force trauma.

So what I found out was that I had shattered all my ribs on my left side. I had three ribs go into my lungs. I had a huge hole in my lungs. There was serious internal bleeding. On the second night I was there, the doctor came up to me and said, "Are you going to agree to a DNR? We have one of two choices. A DNR or resuscitative thoracotomy," which is an invasive, cutting open of your body to massage your organs. I thought, "Whoa, I didn't think I was that bad." So they're talking about the fact that I have hours to live. And I thought, "This isn't good."

The next morning when my wife came in, she realized that it wasn't just a simple accident. So the first thing she did was call Anita Mahy. Anita has been very, very helpful to us over the last few years. She's a prayer warrior. So Rita didn't think of calling friends or family. She called a prayer warrior. That's the first thing she thought of. And then two days later, I'm sitting in the ICU bed still. I'm just sitting there staring straight ahead. I had no way of moving or anything. The doctor came up to me - they were constantly giving me CT scans and X rays and things like that - he approached me and he looked at me with this confused look on his face. He said, "The hole in your lungs is sealed. The bleeding has stopped." And he said, "This is completely unexplained. We don't know why this happened." [Clapping.]

Yeah, just like that. And so that was answered prayer. There's no doubt about it. And everyone I've mentioned it to has affirmed that is just clearly answered prayer. So anyway, when I got home, I wasn't completely healed. I was just saved. And I was allowed to spend time sitting in an armchair. I sat there for two months. The first month in excruciating pain, staring into space. That's all I could do.

I received a lot of cards and a lot of well wishes from people. I just want to share some verses that were on the table in front of me while I was sitting there. The first came from Anita and David Mahy. 2 Samuel 22:29-34 and it says, "29 You, Lord, are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light.

30 With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.

31 "As for God, his way is perfect: The Lord's word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him. 32 For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God? 33 It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure. 34 He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he causes me to stand on the heights." So these were encouraging words for me for moving forward and gaining strength. And then I received another card from Corry and Kaes Vanderkooy. 1 Peter 5:10-11, "10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."

A few weeks ago, Pastor John preached on the importance of prayer and that we need to pray constantly. And that's something hard to understand until you've been in a situation like I have. The reassuring verse of that sermon was Romans 8:26. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

I spent a lot of time in pain and I felt the Spirit's groans. It's beyond words. You know, you don't know what to pray for. You just need the Spirit to be with you. I felt that and I thought that verse was very important. So in closing, I just want to say that one thing we found about Living Hope is that Living Hope has a number of prayer warriors. It's very important to know who they are and to lean on them because they are gifted people. I know that everyone was praying.

Everyone prays, but there's something special about the gifts of a prayer warrior. They know how to pray. And we can learn a lot from them. I just think that's a very strong gift of Living Hope. I think we should encourage it.

And so I'd just like to ask you to continue praying for me because I just had another CT scan. I still have six ribs that haven't healed and I have to go for more tests because I have some pulmonary cysts because my lungs were so damaged that not everything is 100%. But anyway, continued prayer would be appreciated. And I just thank you for your prayers. I'm thankful that I can stand here before you again. I trust that and I hope that God will bless me and my position as elder. So thank you very much.

Andy Fong

Good morning. I'm grateful for many things. I have taken some time to think about quite a few things and I've had an interesting journey. I'm grateful for my wife Debbie who has stood by my side many times since I ended up in many emergency rooms and at one point I thought God had a plan. Maybe it was to tour the emergency rooms of Ontario. [Laughing.] No, no. Anyways, I've had some heart issues but praise God the medical system has gotten me through them and I'm still here. But I think Mike wanted me to come up and talk about my journey.

I was actually at a shop in Peterborough. It turns out a good friend of mine is a guitar luthier and he builds guitars, and he was doing some work for me and I showed up at the shop and I was greeted. I sat down and Dave Fox, who is the guitar luthier said, "Andy, I was thinking about you this morning. I know you're coming by and I wanted to pray for your cough." I have a chronic cough and by the way, if you hear me coughing in the church, I'm not sick. I have a lung condition called bronchiectasis, but anyways, Dave said, "Hello, I was thinking about praying for your cough," and I said, "Well, I have to sit. I seem to be in distress."

And this has probably happened more than a half dozen times where my wife Deb and I are somewhere and usually about two or three in the morning I would be awakened by severe pain. It would start as moderate severe pain but it would actually escalate so it always ended up with me saying, "I think I have to go to the hospital."

And because of my history or anytime I go into the ER, they look at my file and they say, "You're in," within five minutes. It makes me feel guilty because there's people suffering for six, seven hours sitting there thinking they're being ignored, but I get taken in.

They never can figure out what's going on. But this pain started this one morning and I even said to my friend Dave, "I think I might need to go now because if I don't, I won't be able to drive. I'll end up on the floor basically." And he said, "Andy, can I lay hands and pray over you?" And I said, "Yes. Thank you." He put his hand on my back and prayed and within 15 seconds this pain was gone. [Clapping.]

It was incredibly definitive for me because all of a sudden I said, "You know something? I've had times where I suffered and it's my place to suffer it, whatever is going on." But this particular time, it lifted within 15 seconds. Because I've gone through many trials in my time, I thought about John 5:2, the Bethesda waters where Jesus decides to heal the crippled man, who was always hoping to get into the cue and get into the waters to be healed. But Jesus noticed and said, "Would you like to be healed?" And Jesus healed and he said get up and walk. It just made me realize that some people do suffer. I've suffered sometimes in my life, but I'm just grateful that I'm here. And I'm grateful for the house of God. And I'm grateful to have you as my extended church family. So that's my story. Thank you.

Bola Abodunrin

Praise the Lord. Where I come from, when you say, "Praise the Lord" you say, "Hallelujah." Praise the Lord. [The congregation says:] Hallelujah.

Thank you. My name is Bola Abodunrin and I have come to talk about the goodness of God. The Bible says the Lord is my refuge and my strength, my very present help in times of trouble. That's what I'm here to talk about.

I came to Canada in January 2022. I'm married and I have three kids. I came alone as an international student. I left my husband and my children. I've been an orphan for like 20 something years, so I don't have any friends. I don't have families here. But God was with me.

When I came to Peterborough for two weeks, there was no church around. I lived somewhere on Chemong Road. I just came back from work one day and there was this flier I saw. And I saw an app called Nextdoor. People were writing so many things on the app. What I wrote was, "I am looking for a Bible believing church." About five people reached out to me on the app and four of them talked about Living Hope. [Clapping.]

And I just want to thank God for the help of Bob and Hilary. "Living Hope is a good church," he said. "If you would like, I will come to pick you up." And for eight months, this wonderful family came to pick me up in the morning and takes me back in the evening. That is one.

Secondly, when my children and husband was granted a visa, I needed a house. There was a day I came to church and felt very heavy. I don't know if you understand what I mean by being very heavy. I remember Hilary asking me, "Bola, what is wrong?" I just started crying. They took me in there (the prayer room) because I needed a house. A house is very expensive. I needed strength. You know, sometimes we just feel very heavy. And they prayed with me. I started to search for a house. I could not afford a house but I was looking for a house.

Everyone I was reaching out to was saying they couldn't give me a house. I can't afford it. I was doing a job for minimum wage. So you can imagine, no one wanted to give me a house for five people - myself, my husband and three children. But God gives favor. I was just walking on the streets and I saw an apartment for rent. That is very rare. I went in and I spoke to the person. She agreed to give me the house.

Then I needed money. Then God showed up again. Through Hilary and Bob, they reached out to the deacon in the church. They came to see me... this black, lonely girl... at my place of work. They asked me what I had. It was the way Jesus asked those people, "What do you have?" And I told them what I had. They told me what they could do. And trust me, God came through for me.

I said that was not enough. I was sleeping one day and I had a dream that someone gave me a car. It was just like a dream. Then someone in this church, after my kids and my husband came, a woman came up to me. She said she thought, "I was in Church, then I was just seeing you." That was God. And without asking - I didn't even know they had an extra car - they gave it to us.

I said that was not enough. There was a day I came to church. My husband didn't have a job yet so I had to work on a minimum wage. Don't forget, pay and house rent and three children. Those children are not working with batteries. They actually eat food. [Laughing.] I came to church and a woman walked up to my husband and said, "Your kids are wonderful." And he said, "Thank you." And the woman said, "Can I bless you?" And the woman sent us money that could get at least groceries for a month.

I don't know about you. But God is faithful. No matter where you are. No matter how far away you are. Even when you think that, "I'm a sinner. God does not love me anymore." No. That's not the way it works. My life is a testimony. I don't have all that I want. But I am content. I am happy. I am grateful. Could you please help me put your hands together for Jesus? [Clapping.] God has been good to me. Thank you.

Pastor Glenn Duncan

Are any of you encouraged by what you heard? [Clapping.] Me too. When people share the good things that God has been doing within their hearts and in their lives, when we see that God loves us and shows us that He's present, we're encouraged to be able to trust God for His faithfulness. We're also people who get to offer encouragement to others. Thank you for each of you and sharing the ways that God has touched you recently.

He sees us, He knows exactly what's going on in our lives and He loves us. If we don't see Him doing that, it's not because He isn't. It's because we're not seeing things the way they really are. So let's pray together.

Our Father, how we thank You for the fact that You are our true Father, our Abba, our Dad. You give everything You are and have so that we can belong to You. And that giving is so personal and practical and is that throughout our lifetime for all of eternity to come. We thank You for Your Word which is also alive. By Your Spirit, we ask You to open it to us. Give us hearts to be encouraged by Your faithfulness. Give us hearts to become encouragers. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Our scripture reading today is taken from the book of Acts 11:19-26.

19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. **20** Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. **21** The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

22 News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. **23** When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. **24** He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, **26** and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This passage that we're reading, Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us what precipitated it was the persecution of believers. Stephen, who was a deacon, was martyred for his faith in Jesus. A persecution broke out on the believers as a result of that and they scattered all over the place. Wherever they went, they started to talk about Jesus. We read about this persecution in Acts 7.

In Acts 8, we realize that Philip went to Samaria - Samaria was a mixture of Jew and Gentile - and preached the gospel and people responded. The early disciples thought that when people became followers of Jesus, because He is the Messiah, that people would become followers themselves and adopt everything that was involved in the religion of Judaism. So they always preached to the Jewish people. And if Gentiles heard the message and asked Jesus to be their Lord and Savior, their Messiah, it was expected that they would be Jewish in practice as well. But the wonder and the joy of having God in our lives can't be contained. If we love Him, if we know Him, it starts to bubble out of us. We become people who tell what Jesus has done and we have to let others know.

So some of these rambunctious believers went to other places and skipped telling it to the Jews first and simply started telling what was going on and people started to become believers. Word got back to Jerusalem. There are people who are now following Jesus, but they're not Jewish and they don't intend to be either. They're following Jesus. So they picked a person, a believer. His name was Barnabas. He went to see what was going on in this town of Antioch, which is about 300 miles to the north, near the Mediterranean from Jerusalem.

We first read about Barnabas in Acts 4. His name actually was Joseph. But the believers gave him a nickname, and the nickname is Barnabas, and that name means "son of encouragement." The first time we met him, he had some property that he sold and then gave to the church so that all of the new believers would have what they needed. He shared his possessions. And that's all we hear about him until Acts 9. In chapter nine, the persecution of Stephen breaks out against the believers and one of the people who's persecuting the church is a man named Saul from Tarsus.

Saul gets sent by the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin from Jerusalem, and he gets sent to Damascus to ferret out people who were followers of Jesus and to arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment, maybe even death. And as Saul is on the road heading there, suddenly Jesus meets him in person. This Jesus whom he is persecuting reveals himself to Paul (Saul) as the Messiah and Saul becomes a believer. We read that he started to share his faith with people in Damascus and persecution broke out against him. They wanted to kill him for being this false teacher about this Messiah. Saul escapes. He comes to Jerusalem and he wants to meet with the Christians. The leaders there think it's a trap. They won't talk to him. But this fellow Barnabas does talk to him.

Barnabas goes and hears Saul's story. He hears about his conversion and him accepting Jesus as the Messiah. And he hears about how Saul has been sharing his faith with people everywhere. And that the Jewish religious leaders want to kill Saul as well. So Barnabas becomes kind of an intercessor. He brings Saul to the religious leaders - to Peter, James and John - and he says, "Nope, this is the real thing. You need to accept him." So they do.

Then we get into Acts 11. The gospel started to spread everywhere. So they send Barnabas to the city of Antioch to go and investigate. We read a passage about Barnabas, that he was a good man, that he was full of the Holy Spirit, and that he was full of faith. He was glad when he saw the way God was at work in people's lives even though they weren't becoming Jewish. He could see the Holy Spirit wisdom and sight. And with faith, the lives of people. And he encouraged them to become all they could be.

Then after having done that, he spends time with them. He tells them to go on with the Lord, to live for Him with all their hearts. He's rejoicing. Then he gets this idea from the Holy Spirit. Go to Tarsus and find Saul. There's about 11-12 years that's passed since Saul first becomes a follower of Jesus. Barnabas goes and finds him and brings him back to Antioch so that he can join him in teaching the good news and helping people to come into a living relationship with God. He can see in Saul giftedness that God has put there because he's a man of faith himself and because he's filled with the Holy Spirit, He can see what God has put in Saul to become something amazing. So Saul teaches with him. Barnabas, with his gift of encouragement, being an encourager, welcomes Saul to come and take his place and to join in the teaching of these new believers.

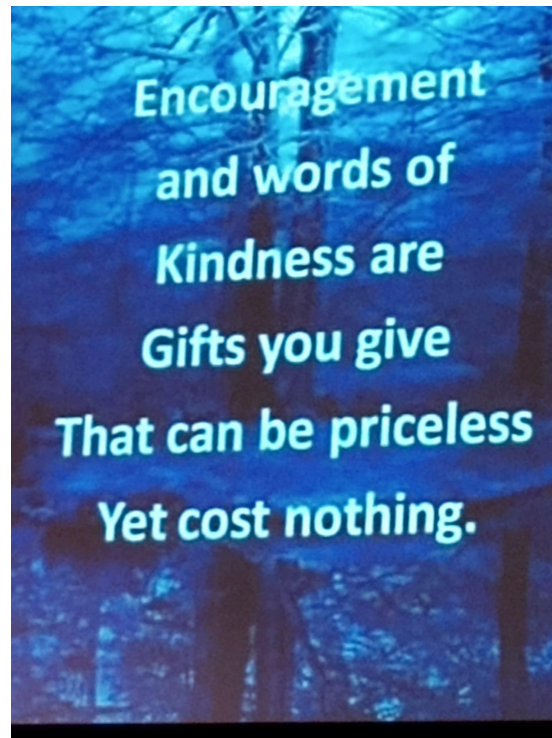
But there's something amazing about Barnabas. As you go on and read in the following chapters from Antioch in chapter 13, Barnabas and Saul are commissioned by the church in Antioch to go and share the good news for a whole region to the west and the north of where they are to go on a missionary journey. Very quickly in the missionary journey, we start off reading about Barnabas and Saul. Then Saul is given a new name. Just like Barnabas got a name, Paul (Saul) received one as well.

And when we start to read this new name (Paul), the order of how it's reported changes. Instead of it being Barnabas and Saul, now it's Paul and Barnabas. Paul becomes the leader and Barnabas is glad to let him do it. Because he's not concerned about what he gets out of this. He's not concerned about hanging on to leadership and control and being the boss. Especially when somebody with him is especially gifted to be able to be that leader. He holds it with open hands.

They go on that first missionary journey and they bring along with them a cousin of Barnabas. His name is John Mark. He's there to help them out, doing some of the detailed things behind the scenes. As they go to share their faith with other people, there's persecution that takes place and it is hard. John Mark decides it's too hard and he leaves them. They come back from their missionary journey. They report the good things that God has done.

Then we get into chapter 16. It's time to go out again. When it's time to go on a second missionary journey, Barnabas says, "I've got an idea. Let's invite John Mark to come join us again." Paul says, "No way. He didn't stick with us when things got hard. I'm not gonna go with that guy." There's such a disagreement with them that Paul chooses Silas to become his partner. And Barnabas goes and finds John Mark and they go in different directions.

Does anybody know who John Mark became? He's the writer of the gospel of Mark. In later letters that Paul writes, he asks John Mark to come and help and he says, "Because I need him. He's helpful to me." In other letters, he mentions him in the list of those who stand out in different communities because they're followers of Jesus and are willing to pay a price. Barnabas could see that about John Mark. And John Mark is touching our lives to this very day because of his walk with God. But Barnabas could see that in him.



Some people have, I think, a spiritual gift of encouragement. But every person has the potential for encouraging others. Words are powerful. Words make a difference in the life of people both for good and for bad. When people say negative things because of this broken world, it seems that negative words go deep into us and we carry them around.

My wife Sheila taught school for many years. I can remember her telling me on parent teacher nights, if she had 25 students in her class and had 25 sets of parents or guardians that came and 24 of them told her what a great job she was doing -which she was - but only one of them said, "I don't like the way you're teaching my child. I think you're doing a terrible job," 24 words of encouragement didn't carry the same weight as that one who would attack.

There's a spiritual clinger to words. If we speak out of anger and bitterness, we live in a world that makes an art of criticizing, of being able to insult, and there's power to it. There is a spiritual dynamic that's going on as we do that. We're venting and people are hearing and there's something in between that's taking those words and distorting them so that they start to stick to us.

But the same is also true of encouragement that's done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Where we say words where, "You know something? I caught you doing something really well. I saw you helping that person. I saw you using gifts that you have. You're creative, you're musical, you're helpful, you're hospitable. I saw you doing that. Thank you so much. It's touching the lives of people and you doing that gives me life even as I'm watching it from the side and it gives them life to know that there's something good that's going on in their lives. Then they start to become invited to become something.

When I was a student in school, the word "student" really didn't apply to me. I was there under duress, not because I wanted to be, and I certainly had teachers who discouraged and teachers who encouraged, but I had one teacher who one day sat down and talked with me and he said, "Glenn, I see that you know how to think." "I do?" I responded. "Yes." And he gave me examples of why. That word of encouragement has stuck with me all through my life. It has carried me because that's words that are given in the power of the Spirit. And this man was a follower of Jesus.

That's what happens within the lives of people when you speak it out. Encouragement and words of kindness are gifts you give that can be priceless, yet cost nothing.

What would happen at Living Hope if we ask the Holy Spirit to help us all the time, to be looking to catch each other in things where we serve? To be looking to see, "Oh, I see this about you." To speak life to one another? What would happen if we started to actually look to see how we can invite others to become all that they can be? And we ask the Holy Spirit to help us when we do it? There's power in words. Because our God Jesus is the Living Word. He's put His life in us so that we can be free and enjoy Him. He's put His life in us so that we can encourage others to become all that they can be. To speak words of life at the right time at the right place. And all the other times as well.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank You that You are the Living Word. We thank You that You invite us to live. We thank You for the example of these precious people already who have told of Your goodness. We thank You, Lord, for those who have led us in worship this morning. Who are using giftedness and are willing to put themselves in the right places to encourage and honor You because You receive encouragement. And to encourage and honor us. Thank You, Father, for those who are willing to put their names forward for leadership within our church. We ask for Your blessing on each one and for those who have been appointed for Your anointing on them. Thank You for encouraging us because You're our Father. And You're with us at this very moment. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*