

Heavenly Father, I just want to praise and thank you for the scores that you've given us. We thank you for this church that you can be part of. We thank you for the words that can be shared today. As always, open our eyes, open our ears, open our hearts. Let this time of fellowship and prayer and praise be pleasing to you. In the name of Christ we pray. So the scripture that I am reading today is the Romans 12. One of the reasons I like the Romans 12 so much is it's very practical, not only how we should live, but also seeing the evidence of the spirit in our lives. If you were to look at these things, just a mere list of things to do, you'd be hard pressed. Now we're also focusing on what would we do without our brother Charles? The theme for today, as we've mentioned, is Thanksgiving and joy. And that's part of a really special offering next week in helping others help each other. So I'm going to read these words. I would like you to listen carefully. So often when people are talking, we feel like we're being talked at and we don't hear. We don't process and kind of check out. So I would appreciate it if you tried this. Just listen carefully. See what the Lord is trying to teach you. And I like to use the New American Standard. Romans 12. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, which may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. For through the grace given to me, I see that everyone among you do not think more highly of themselves than he ought to think. But to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allowed each member of faith. For just as we have many parts in one body, all the body's parts do not have the same function. So we, who are many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. However, since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each device is to use them properly. If prophecy in proportion to one's faith. In service in the act of serving, or the one who teaches in the act of teaching, or the one who exhorts in the work of exhortation, the one who gives with generosity, the one who is in leadership with intelligence, the one who shows mercy with cheerfulness. Love must be free from hypocrisy. Be tested with evil, claim to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love, giving preference to one another in honor, not lagging behind in diligence, servant in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse, rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind towards one another. Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the Lord. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never relate evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all people. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people. Never take your over-venge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God. For as written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, said the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, be him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink. For in his sudden doing, he will keep burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. So the word I wanted to focus on today was joy, or rejoice in this case here. We have so much all the time and we don't think about it. But I think for a lot of people they confuse happiness and joy. And so, happiness is kind of a terrible condition, right? You're happy when you have a nice dinner, get a new car, find that piece of apple pie in the freezer. Well it doesn't pay any. So, but the joy is something else. The Greek word is kyro. It's the same root word as for grace. Joy is a gift from God. It comes from somewhere else, it does not depend on circumstances, though we get to participate in them. When I think of joy, I think of the angels in heaven rejoicing when the soul is saved. When somebody in the church gets buried, it's a source of joy. When I think about those designed to be baptized as it should be, that's the proper thing to do. That is a source of joy. So my challenge for all of us is that we don't focus on the negative, but we focus on the positive and we seek that joy because we should be living in a state of joy. The Spirit gives it to us. And so how do you write this? Seek out joy. Seek what the Lord wants for us. Seek what the Spirit gives us, because that's what's real. We've seen the Southwest, Southeast here, what's going on. There's a lot of sorrow, a lot of suffering, and yet for those who are filled with this character, there's still hope and joy that comes with the Lord. I'm going

to be reading 1 Chronicles 16. And in this chapter, David is praising God and thanking Him. The archery covenant has been brought back to Jerusalem. So that's a context. Think of that as we read this Psalm. Give praise to the Lord, proclaim His name, make known among the nations what He has done, sing to Him, sing praise to Him, tell of all of His wonderful acts, glory in His holy name, of the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice, look to the Lord and His strength, seek His face always. Remember the wonders He has done, His miracles and the judgments He pronounced, you His servants, the descendants of Israel, His chosen ones, the children of Jacob. He is the Lord our God. His judgments are in all the earth. He remembers His covenant forever, the promise He made for a thousand generations, the covenant He made with Abraham, the oath He swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant. To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit. When they were but few in number, few indeed, the strangers in it, they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another. He allowed no one to oppress them. For their sake He rebuked kings. Do not touch My anointed ones, do My prophets no harm. Sing to the Lord all the earth, proclaim His salvation day after day, declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples, for great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. He is to be feared above all gods, for all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and joy are in His dwelling place. Ascribe to the Lord all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name. Bring an offering and come before Him, worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness, tremble before Him all the earth. The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let them say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!" Let the sea resound and all that is in it, let the fields be jubilant and evident in none, let the trees of the forest sing, let them sing for joy before the Lord, for He comes to judge the earth. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, His love endures forever. Cry out, "Save us, God our Savior, gather us and deliver us from the nations, that we may give thanks to Your holy name and glory in Your praise." Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Then all the people said, "Amen." Praise the Lord. A few aspects of this psalm that I wanted to point out as we think about the theme of gratitude and joy. As I mentioned, this psalm is in response to the Ark of the Covenant being brought back to Jerusalem. Sorry, I stepped up. And when we think of this, they're praising God because He is now dwelling among His people again. That visual representation of the Ark of the Covenant is now back in Jerusalem. And in the context now of this side of the cross, we are now God's holy dwelling place, as His holy spirit dwells within us. So we have a similar response to praise Him, to praise Him that He is here, He's among us, He's living with us, guiding us, as we read in the book of Romans, you know, guiding our behavior, how we think, how we feel, how we react to people. And we have a lot to be grateful for and to praise God for. And we notice in the psalm, the psalm, psalm, whatever you want to call it, that there are different aspects that David is praising God for. He is praising His holy name, just who He is, His name. So we can just, we can thank God and praise Him simply for who He is, how He has made Himself known to us as a personal God. As, you know, the psalm mentioned here, the different idols, they can't even compare because God made the heavens, God made everything. And we know Him personally. Similarly, the psalm praises God for His wonderful acts. We read all about the different ways that God provided for His people, and how He made the heavens and the earth. So His wonderful acts, the way He behaves, the way He sustains us. We also hear about the enduring covenant, the enduring covenant that is for thousands of generations, that He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which is still, He is in a covenant with us today through Jesus Christ. So we praise Him for that, that He commits to His people in a personal relationship that lasts forever. And then towards the end of the song, which is my favorite part, is singing about the beauty of creation, how God made the earth, He sustains the earth, and how, you know, the fields are jubilant, the sea resounds, all these different aspects of creation that praise Him along with us. And I think that's just so beautiful. I think this time of year, just with the changing leaves, I don't know, it's just like, wow, God knows each and every tree, each and every plant, and He is sustaining life, and it's beautiful. So we praise Him for that. And lastly, but definitely

not least, is His enduring love. We read, you know, "Get thanks to the Lord, for He is good, His love endures forever." He loves His creation, He loves us, and that endures forever. That's just a brief reflection on this song that I, as I was reading and preparing, I just, it really struck me in different ways to think about all the different ways that God interacts with His creation and all the ways that we can express gratitude. It's not simply just, "Thank you, Lord, for what You do for me." It's everything. It's how He sustains life, how He endures forever, and how He personally knows His people and dwells with us. Good morning. I'm Harry Rheaning from James 1. This is part of the section of the scripture that Pastor Brian has been presenting to the men's ministry when we meet on Wednesday nights. And just really, it's me and I thought I'd like to bring to you James, the servant of God of the Lord Jesus Christ, through the 12 trials scattered among the nations, greetings, and say, "Reach, join me, brothers and sisters, whenever you face a trial of any kind, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance, that perseverance finishes work so that you may be mature and complete and not lacking in anything. If any of you have wisdom, you should ask God generously to all that thou would find you fall, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to get anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all activity. Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position, but the rich should take pride in their humiliation, since they will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises, scorching heat, and the weather's a-planting, his blossoms fall, and his beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away, even while they go about their business. Blessed is the one who perseveres on your trial, because having stood to test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by anyone, nor does he tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after the desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chooses to give us birth through the Word of Truth, that we might be kind of the first truth that will all be created. Dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everybody should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become aware, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all immoral self and evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the Word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourself. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror, and after looking at himself, stares away, and immediately forgets what it looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect long, gives freedom and continues in it, not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do. Those who consider themselves religious, and yet do not keep a tight brain on their tongue, deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion in God our Father accepts, as pure in Father, is this, to look after orphaned widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being deluded by the world. With what has happened in the South, you know, we need to be conscious of what goes around. I was talking to Melissa and her son, Trale, and we were afraid the other day, and that's why God's not here today, because he knows they're helping. And that, I think, is the type of thing that God calls us to. To be reaching out to each other, to strengthen each other through the Word, through prayer, and being light. Most of you know that I'm a hugger, so I think that the reason that I do that is because, number one, it gives me good joy, and I feel good about it. But it shows that we are family. It shows that we are to be with each other, to serve each other, and help each other. And, again, what's happening in the South, like, you can look over the seas and see what's going on in Ukraine and Israel. The time is coming when we're going to have to really rely on each other more than we do now, and I just hope that, to read this morning, that I don't want to help me out. Good morning. Bear with me as I try to get this figured out. So, as everybody's aware by now, joy and thanksgiving was the thought for today, or the word that we wanted to go out. So, naturally, I had chosen 2

Corinthians to speak on, because Paul addresses very clearly in this letter both the ministry of thanksgiving and the joy that it brings. I'm sure we all know Paul was a very unique teacher. The way he writes his letter should probably open up to any of this stuff, not even know what it is, and know that it's Paul that wrote it. He has a unique way of, he will commend your faith, commend you, what you're doing, and then he'll beat you down, pick you back up, boast quite a bit. But there's also something else that he always does that I think he'll pick up on in this letter as we read. So, let's see what Paul has to say about this ministry of thanksgiving. Starting with 2 Corinthians 8. "Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. For I can attest they gave not only what they could afford, but far more, and they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing the gift of the believers in Jerusalem. They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do." Now that alone is beautiful. The church in Macedonia, through their struggles, being tested, they still find joy in Christ. Being poor, but still giving so generously to the other believers in Jerusalem. I could stop there, but it would be for a very short service, if ever I have some other points to make, so I will continue. So we merge tight to encourage your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to finish this ministry of giving. Since you excel in so many ways, your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us, I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving. I am not commanding you to do this, but I am testing how gentle your love is by comparing it to the eagerness of the other churches. You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich. Here is my advice. It would be good for you to finish what you started a year ago. Last year you were the first who wanted to give, and you were the first to begin doing it. Now you should finish what you started. Let the eagerness you should in the beginning be matched now by your giving. Give in proportion to what you have. Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. And he says, "Eagerly, but eagerly, thankfully, joyfully, whenever your heart is in the right place." And give according to what you have, not what you don't have. Of course, I don't mean your giving should make life easy for others and for your heart and for yourselves. I only mean that there should be some equality. Right now you have plenty of it to help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty of it to share with you when you need it. In this way, things will be equal. As the scriptures said, "Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough." That's pretty straightforward. Paul's asking Corinth to show genuine generosity towards the believers in Jerusalem. He's probably igniting some passions, maybe good and bad, for asking for this ministry of giving. Which brings me to the next part. And this would be, Josh, this would be your boom moment. Moving on to 2 Corinthians 9, 6. Remember this, "A farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop, but the one who plants generously will receive a generous crop." Right there, just stop, we'll get the ushers, we'll pass the plates, and then get everything going now. Obviously, obviously I'm being facetious with that, but the unfortunate truth is that happens in churches and ministries everywhere. People make a lot of money. If anybody's attended the prayer meetings or read the summaries, you know that I am drawn to those little snippets where you might take one or two pieces, or one or two lines of scripture, and people want to take and twist that to suit their own human desires, or fulfill their own human desires. When we read that, red flags should instantly go up, because I can assure you with just a little bit of study and looking into it, you'll find that it doesn't fulfill human desires, but it actually glorifies our Lord whenever you read the full truth. So just as we spoke a poll's boasting, he does go on and on in his letters about all the things that he's done, all the services he does at the trials, he's been through in prison and everything, but one thing he also always does is he will tie it back to the joy it brings him in serving the Lord, the joy that he receives through all these trials, whenever he does take and preach the truth. And I think you'll find that here as we read on. Let's see how Paul ends his request for generous giving, and I think he will pick up on that. "You must each decide in your heart how much to give, and

don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure, for God loves a person who gives cheerfully, and God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left there to share with others. As the Scriptures say, they share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever, for God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you." In you, very important word, not for you, but in you. "Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous, and when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will come from the result of this ministry. The needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God for generosity to them, and all believers will prove that you are obedient to the good news of Christ. And they will pray for you with deep affection, because the overflowing grace God has given you. Thank God for this gift, too wonderful for words." That is just perfect right there at the end, the way he ties it all back. Honoring and glorifying the Lord through thanksgiving and other believers so that they might partake in this gift that we've received. It's not glorifying Paul or the ministry or ourselves. The pastor had said perfectly last week that our relationship with Christ is not transactional. I love that, that's perfect. And nowhere in Paul's letters did he request specifically money. Now we can draw that conclusion ourselves. Yes, we tied. Get what you're happy to get, get what you can afford. If you have a garden, an abundance of food, use the NARFX, donate the food banks, clothing, donate clothing. If you have time, serve, join a ministry, the Young Pupables Men's and Women's Ministries, Kids for Our King. And if you have none of these to give, pray. We can sing his praises for what you do have. You can give thanks that we can ask for any of these things in his name because he owes us nothing. He's already covered our debts, it's been paid in full, he holds the receipts. We should live as indentured servants for him and the only payment that he requests is our broken and contrite hearts, repentant hearts, and the interest is our actions. One thing we should all have is the Holy Spirit. So share it. Spread the truth, spread joy through thanksgiving for his grace, this gift too wonderful for words.