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**New Year 2023**

**Ephesians 5:15**

**Prayer:** *Again we are grateful and thankful for all the gifts that you bring to us, we are grateful and thankful for answered prayer. We just continue to pray this morning for again the gift of the presence of your Holy Spirit. We pray as we open up your book as we again this very first day of this brand new year that we again have the presence of your spirit as we open this book. And Lord, I again pray the prayer I pray all the time that you would again make it of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well for the past few years I've used the occasion of the upcoming new year to examine a scripture that's as good a new year resolution as you're going to find. I basically looked at the same scripture ever since the year 2015 and every year I found different understandings of it based on the circumstances that the previous year had presented. And so this year once again I just want to give you a compilation of some of the things that I've touched on in those other messages sort of a best of on how we approach this year.

So I want to first take a look at the scripture. It's *Ephesians 5:15* which says: *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* Now there's three different commands in this scripture. First is watch how you walk; second, make the very best use of your time; and thirdly, understand that the days are evil. We're kind of looking at a new year's resolution and so the first thing we want to work on in 2023 is a resolution to walk wisely.

You know when the actor Kirk Cameron's new children's book on family and faith and biblical wisdom, when that gets turned down for story hour by fifty different public libraries, all who have hosted drag queen story hours, you know you need wisdom. When many of our young people reach college age and just kind of walk away from their faith, you know we need wisdom. And when the only absolute truth that our culture now accepts is the statement that there is no such thing as absolute truth, you know you need wisdom.

So first we ask the question that we've asked many, many times before and that is what is wisdom? Well, wisdom like joy, like patience, it doesn't yield to a simple English definition; and like joy and like with patience, we need to look to the scripture to find out just what wisdom really is. See, most folks confuse wisdom with intelligence, but they're not one in the same. The

biblical wisdom is not just the accumulation of knowledge about things biblical even though the Bible is our source of biblical wisdom. I mean, you may have heard me say that there's a very simple two-word definition of what biblical wisdom really is, but even that needs some further explanation. I've often described wisdom simply as -- quote -- "skillful living."

J. I. Packer describes it this way, he says: "Wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it. Wisdom is, in fact the practical side of moral goodness. As such it is found in its fullness only in God." Well that practical side of moral goodness is the power that God offers to us through wisdom. Now practically speaking I would give a definition of wisdom as it's the power to perceive the word, the world, and the kingdom of God with a supernatural ability, and that ability is the ability to connect the dots to each one of those spheres in a way that points directly to and from the mind of God. That's how we define wisdom.

So part one of our task involves making our resolution to live wisely a normal part of our every day lives. Again, *look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.* So walking wisely is the place that starts first with the word of God. Well, let me tell you how God showed me that in my own life.

Way back in 1971 I had just graduated from college, I was about to marry the most beautiful, intelligent and kind woman I'd ever met and I thought I was literally on top of the world. *James 1:5* says: *If any of you lacks wisdom,* well at that moment in time I clearly did, but it was of no concern whatsoever to me. See, I had no need of God's wisdom because I was one of the smartest people I had ever met and I thought I was brilliant. I mean, I had no idea I was a living, breathing definition of what a fool is. We think a fool is somebody who's a knucklehead, you know, he's a nitwit, he can't find his way out of a paper bag, but God's word describes a fool very differently. *Psalms 14* says: *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* Those words and that idea defined me. I didn't just say that in my heart, I said it to anyone who would listen. I was extremely impressed with me and my opinions, and I decided that if there was a God he had to be like exactly how I had envisioned him; and when he wasn't, I just concluded that he didn't exist.

Well nevermind that my god was no God at all, it was an idol I had constructed in my own mind, which is something just about every unbeliever does, I mean, my god loved everyone, my god didn't judge anyone, my god didn't even believe in hell. I was as guilty as the next person of saying "my god" and just you fill in whatever blank you'd like. I never had any inkling of knowing that the first part of wisdom is knowing or at least suspecting what *James 1:5* is

saying when it says: *If any of you lacks wisdom and that is you just might not have that. That never occurred to me.*

Scripture addresses that as well. *Proverbs 12 says: The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice. Proverbs 28 says: Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.* I mean the very first thing that God did when he opened my eyes was to introduce a genuine fool like me to the wisdom of his word, and it was a wisdom unlike any other I'd ever been exposed to before, and that's understandable. And you see, God's wisdom is antithetical to human wisdom, it's oftentimes its direct opposite, and that's why God says: *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

So through the miracle of God's saving grace, the foolishness of the idea that God himself would become a man, that he would live a perfect life and that he would offer that life up on a cross and that by faith I can claim his righteousness as my own and stand before God now worthy of heaven, well that idea that had seemed so ridiculous to me before, that now made perfect sense. God's way stood man's way on his head. And God says: *"For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."*

I mean it seemed like every single time I opened my Bible God was exposing me to insights and ways of thinking that I'd never even thought of before. Dots were being connected that were never connected before, and they were all coming from the printed word in the pages of a book I'd had nothing but scorn for. I mean I'd spent the first 23 years of my life learning as much of the world's wisdom as I could and I found out over and over again that it was no match for God's wisdom. I learned that that too was part of the wisdom that God had for me in his word and there in his word he said this, he said: *Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness."*

Well I've since spent 49 years studying the wisdom that God has given us in his word and all that I've learned in all of that time could fit in a thimble with room to spare compared to the vastness of the wisdom that's there. It's God's wisdom coalesced into a printed word but that doesn't mean that it's available to anyone. You see, the word of God is a closed book to anyone who doesn't have the wisdom of God to open it. And you don't get that wisdom from training or genetics or from discipline, you get it simply by asking for it. This wisdom is not like chemistry or physics or literature or even theology. Some of the most brilliant

theological minds there are in places like Yale or Harvard and Princeton, they're hopelessly blind, deaf, and dumb when it comes to understanding the simple truths of the gospel. And understand, all three of these institutions were at one time centuries ago bastions of truth and genuine wisdom because they sought that wisdom to give glory to God. They humbly asked for it.

In 1636 this is what Harvard's charter said. It said: "Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life, John 17:3, and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, let every one seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seek it of him."

Can you imagine the howls of outrage that would take place if they repeated that as some kind of present day maxim? I mean in 1636 Harvard knew where wisdom came from and subsequently it is evidentially forgotten. Those places are now theological wastelands for the most part because God has withdrawn his wisdom and left them to pick over the carcass of man's wisdom.

You see, God gives his wisdom freely to anyone who sincerely asks for it and he hides it from anyone arrogant enough to think that

they can own it. Jesus himself said in *Matthew 11*: *"I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes."*

You know, if anyone lacks the wisdom of God, all you have to do is ask for it. That's the scripture in James that I repeat virtually every single day as a prayer. It's taken from *James 1:5*: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.* You know, *if any of you lacks wisdom*, is James' way of stating the first part of a conditional clause that's stating the obvious. I mean James is assuming that we all lack wisdom. And the fact is whether it's the word or the world or the kingdom, all of us lack the wisdom that God is offering to us. And the requirement to receive it seems all too easy, I mean, all you do is ask.

Well actually there's a second requirement in the very next verse and it's that requirement that requires me to believe that I truly have the wisdom that I'm asking for. *James 1:5-7* says: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.*



So there's actually not one requirement but two: you have to ask and number one, you have to believe that he's going to give it to you. It never ceases to amaze me that folks don't do this every single day. You want the best use of 30 seconds? This is it. There's not a day that goes by that I don't ask God for wisdom repeatedly, and he gives it to me repeatedly, and you know why? Because I ask for it. I mean I'm confident that I've received wisdom from God not because of me but because I believe God when he says what he says. I mean I knew that I lacked it and I know that I need it, I know if I ask God he would give and so I'm confident that I have it. I mean we're trying to look carefully as to how we walk, we're trying to walk wisely, and the wisest way to do that is by accessing the wisdom that God has given us in the Bible. And we lack wisdom in the most critical thing and that is in understanding God's word. You see, the scripture is the language that God uses to communicate that wisdom to us and the more you read scripture, the more you memorize, the more you take in, the more wisdom you're going to find you possess.

And here's how. You see God tells us repeatedly that his ways are not our ways and that he doesn't think like us, and the Bible gives us insight as to how God thinks and oftentimes it's not at all the way we think. It's always better, it's always deeper, it's always wiser. And here's how we find that wisdom personally. I've said

it many times, God's word is a master program and each verse of each book is like a file that you download into your spiritual hard drive. It is the source of knowledge that God's Holy Spirit draws on to give you that wisdom. You can't learn a foreign language until you start studying its vocabulary, and the Bible is the vocabulary that God uses to speak to us. So the more limited your understanding of the Bible, the more limited your vocabulary in learning how God speaks. The more scripture you're familiar with, the easier it is for the Holy Spirit to connect the dots between scriptures to give you insight as to what it means to live not as unwise but as wise. And this is the perfect time to begin or renew a daily content with scripture.

I mean for years I've used one of those through the Bible in one year. I use the MacArthur Study Bible. I just started this morning once again, probably been doing it, I bet you, for 30 years. And sometimes you find yourself reading material you can't imagine what possible use could this be, regulations about skin conditions in Leviticus or genealogies of patriarchs. But God says: *All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* Well practically speaking I can tell you God can and does use all parts of his words to communicate truth globally

and personally.

See, when I'm looking for God's wisdom for a particular issue, I often hear God speaking to me and I hear him speaking not audibly, I hear him speaking scripturally. That is as I'm praying through an issue, many times a particular scripture or scriptures that bear on that exact issue will just come floating into my mind. You see, that's God's Holy Spirit communicating to me through his word. And it's pretty obvious the more scripture I have command of, the easier it is for God to communicate. I mean it's not magic but it is supernatural. See, it takes effort and discipline to study the Bible but its reward is God's own wisdom, and the more scripture you have in your heart and mind, the better to individually perceive God's wisdom.

I mean here's how it works. Let's say someone's said or done something that's really upsetting and I'm tempted to blast them in response and I'm sitting down, I'm going to write them a nasty letter and suddenly a scripture comes into my mind and it's James who says: *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.* Well chances are that didn't happen by mistake, that didn't happen by chance, that God is speaking to me through his word, he's saying, slow down, Tom, slow

down, be careful to listen to all that's being said and do not respond in anger.

See, you got to understand that perceiving the wisdom of God, that requires wisdom itself. You know, folks try to use scripture to do all kinds of things, they try to use scripture to pick horses for horse racing or stocks in the stock market, all kinds of genuinely bad ideas because folks like to think of scripture as magic when in reality it's God's will communicating itself to man. But you have to have a vocabulary in order to communicate the exercise of wisdom.

I mean think of something simple like cooking, like recipes. If I said "braise the diced onions until they become completely caramelized," most of you who are into cooking will understand exactly what I'm talking about. But people like myself who barely know how to boil water, I mean, we hear those words, we have no idea what they mean. Well, that's similar to our knowledge of scripture. You see, the more familiar you are with God's word, the more familiar you are with his concepts, the more God communicates to you through his word. You know, braising, dicing and caramelizing make perfect sense to cooks just like justify, sanctify and glorify make perfect sense to believers, or not. That's why God says: *Be diligent to present yourself approved to*

*God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

So God calls us to *look carefully at how we walk, not as unwise but wise*, then he further defines that wisdom by saying part two of our resolution. He says: *making the best use of the time, because the days are evil*. Okay. So how do we do that? Well, you know time itself is the only commodity that virtually every one of us receives in exactly equal amounts. At the end of every day literally we've all been given the exact same 24 hours. God charges us to make the best use of those hours and he's not silent about how we are to do that.

You see, scripture describes three different places that we can be in with regard to time. We can be in the past, we can be in the present, or we can be in the future; but two of those are just reference points or stopping points that are okay to visit as long as we don't make plans to stay there. Those places are the past and the future. You know, God says we can learn from the past, we can prepare for the future but he expects us to live in the present. And we need to look into those three different places in time to see what God's idea of making the best use of time is all about because God has much to say about living in the past, the present and the future.

First God has something to say about the future because it's the place where believers place their hope. Biblical hope is not wishful thinking; instead it's a confident expectation not that I know what the future is going to hold but that I know who holds the future. And I know that's a cliché but it's a cliché that's based in absolute truth. The secret to being able to joyfully anticipate the future is rooted in understanding that God is firmly and absolutely in charge of it. And there's unlimited power in having the understanding that even some of the worst circumstances in the world can't stop you and that comes from trusting Jesus.

Listen to what he said about trusting in him for the past, the present, and the future. He says: *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven,*

*will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

I mean Jesus is just, he's asking us to look at the obvious signs of God's sovereign care even for the humbler parts of his creation, and he asks if we're willing to believe that God cares for us more than he does for birds and for flowers. So we can look to the future with joy and hope not because it's a nice thing to do but because it's the key that God gives us to survive.

The other key that God gives us with regard to time can allow us to accept repeatedly a future that might look like an invitation to despair. God does this by visiting that other place in time that God calls us to visit in moments like that, and that is the past. I mean literally dozens of times in scripture God commands us to visit the past. He calls on us to -- quote -- "remember." In *1 Chronicles 16* it says: *Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually! Remember the wondrous works that he has*

*done, his miracles and the judgments he uttered.*

I mean practically speaking, listen to how David used the past to remember what God had done to use that to strengthen his hope in the future. He says this in *Psalm 40*. It says: *A Psalm of David. I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.* I mean, here's David, he's looking back at this miry bog that he was in and he describes a time of patient waiting and then being lifted out and set on a rock, so much so that he has a new song of praise for his God.

Think about the miry bogs that you've been in. I mean, I can think of a half dozen or so miry bogs that I've been in in my life and some of them required much more patience than I thought I could muster, but in each case God faithfully lifted me out and set my feet on a rock. Many times I've spoken about God's miraculous provision that got me through some absolutely impossible situations; but in each time he has, I've remembered or I should say most of the times or some of the times I've remembered, and when things get dicey all over again, it's that remembrance of what God had done in my particular past that enables me to trust that he



would get me through it again.

I mean I coined the term "the celestial bank account" that describes what happens when you sense God's presence getting you through some type of difficult circumstance. And each time he does, he gives you something to remember. He's making a deposit in that celestial account, something that he wants you to draw on when things look bleak. It doesn't have to be some kind of spectacular miracle, I mean, more often than not it's simply God letting you know that he has his fingerprints on every single event in your life and that you're not alone. And each time he does that you have one more example of his faithfulness to look back on.

And again, one of the best examples of that, I remember Mike and Cindy Gingerich when they were here, these were folks at one point were missionaries in the Philippines. And once Mike was asked if he had any stories to tell about God's lifting him, and he shared with us that he had been struggling with whether or not he should move his family to the Philippines going into full time mission work. He and his family were at the time in the midwest, they were in the middle of winter, they were unable to get out of the house with all the snow and the ice. Mike realized they were missing something that was critical and vital to their family: toilet paper. The family was completely out of it. And the weather was

too nasty to go out and buy some. So Mike said that simple need, that simple need put him in the middle of a very deep funk. He thought to himself how can I trust that God's going to take care of me and my family in the Philippines when here I am, stuck in the midwest with a simple need that he can't even address. Well, he said as he was thinking that, he happened to be watching out the window and the mailman pulled up to his mailbox and he went out, trudged in the snow, walked to the mailbox and there in the mailbox was a package that consisted of one roll of what? Toilet paper. It was a free sample. Now you can certainly make the claim that what an amazing coincidence. Well, Mike said he knew better. I mean to Mike it said everything he needed to know about God's desire to meet his family's needs. And that happened years and years ago but Mike even teared up at that point as he was explaining the simple little miracle that God had done in his life. That's why it's incredibly important to build that celestial bank account by doing what God says to do and that is to remember, to remember things that God has done in the past. Practically speaking it's something as simple as having a prayer journal or a place where you just jot down ways that God has answered prayers in your life. It can be extremely helpful when things are looking bleak.

I have my own stories about my septic tank or the car that God

provided or other issues. They're a powerful means of pulling me out of my miry clay and setting my feet on solid rock, again when things seemed to be going south. So it's important to memorialize even the tiniest things like a roll of toilet paper because God invites us to revisit the past in order to give us hope for the future and confidence for the present.

Part two of our resolution says: *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* So how do we make the best use of time? Well, how about scheduling time specifically for prayer or reading or growing your relationship with Christ? How about shaving an hour off watching TV or surfing the net in order to hear what God is trying to say to you? Is that worth it? And you have to understand something, this is not for God's sake, this is for you. I mean we don't carve out time for God so that he's going to like us a little bit more for doing so. You have to understand, God can't give you any more than he already has, because the love that he first expressed to you was the maximum that God could express.

*John 13 says: When Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.* And the end for Jesus was the cross. So you can't think about this as some way to

earn God's love because you already own it if you're a child of God. Like I said, this isn't for his sake, it's for ours. Our greatest joy and deepest pleasure is knowing Christ. We just don't fully realize it yet.

As you look back over this past year, ask yourself how pleased you are with the way that you've used the time that God has given you. Have I drawn closer to Christ this year? Have I firmly grasped the idea that I'm part of a kingdom at war and that anything and everything I do is ultimately for the glory of God. Have I grown in my knowledge of Christ and kingdom and my determination to make them my number one priority? Well if you can say "yes" to any or all of the above, you've had a spectacular year. Now if you can't say "yes" there's always hope because right in front of us today is a brand new year.

Paul well knows how to make the best use of time and he also knows what it's like to have a past full of regrets, and he also knows how to exactly approach a future that's set up before him. And so if we're to be like Paul, we want to set our sights on the year ahead, not on the year behind regardless of how well or poorly we did. This is what Paul said, he said: *But one thing I do: Forgetting -- forgetting -- what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for*

*which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Well 2022 is now behind us and so our challenge is to strain forward to what is in front of us in the year 2023. So what is it we are going to strain toward in that year? Paul says: *I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.* He talks of it as this prize. Well the prize is the ever-increasing ability to grow in Christ.

So how do I make 2023 the year that I really grow in Christ? Well, before I tell you, let me just say what I've said before about what I consider to be my primary job as your pastor. I think it's my primary job is to help you fall deeper and deeper in love with Jesus Christ because that changes everything. If you've ever truly been in love you know that you would do anything, anything to please your mate. It's not a heartache or an effort to pour yourself out for those whom you deeply love, and the more you know Christ I guarantee you the more you will love him. Imagine loving Christ not just in theory but actually as much as you love your first love. That's the power that the love of Christ brings. It's the love of Christ that empowers, it's the love of Christ that energizes us, it's the love of Christ that makes any sacrifice for God and kingdom seem well worth the price we have to pay. But you know for many of us the love of Christ is still kind of a mystery.

I mean it's a mystery because we don't really know the Christ that we worship, we just know that he died for us on the cross and for that we love him. But that's not nearly enough.

I've talked before about the difference that Tim Keller pointed out between loving Christ because he's useful and loving Christ because he's lovely. I mean most of us come to Christ, to put it starkly, to put it honestly is because we find him useful. I mean we recognize that we are sinners and we're caught up in the evil of the day, by the grace of God we come to understand that Christ has come to give us new life, to bear our sin, so we love Christ for his ultimate utility: He saved us from our sin. And it's okay to start there but it's not okay to stay there. And the one thing I can say about Christ is the more you learn about Christ, the deeper your love for him is going to grow. The more your heart delights in Christ, the more delighted you will be in life itself. I mean the neat part of all this is the more you delight in Christ, the more Christ-like you become. The more the fruit of the spirit, the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, all of that of Christ becomes part of who you are, the more imminently attractive then you become. I mean, God has so worked in our hearts to the extent we delight in Christ, God says, I'll give you those delights. He says: *Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

So how do we do that expediently? Well, when it comes to making the best use of our time, how do we practically go about the task of growing our love for Christ? Well, God actually has a suggestion for us; guess where? In his word. This is *Hebrews 10:23*. He says: *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

You see, if you're looking to use your time in the best possible way in this coming year, I suggest you pour your heart and your time into growing your knowledge of Christ through scripture and putting your knowledge to work in what was so precious to Christ that he literally died for it, and that is his church. I mean the church is not a building, it's not a denomination, it's not even a marketing brand, it's a gathering of called out individuals who meet for four reasons, the four reasons that the original church met. They're lined out perfectly in *Acts 42*. It says: *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

So those four things: Doctrine, fellowship, communion and prayer.

That's what the church is supposed to be about. Those are the means by which we grow our love for Christ. You see, you can't love a Christ you don't know, and the way that Christ wants you to grow in the knowledge and love for him is through the apostle's teaching which is biblically based preaching, through fellowship which is each of us sharpening each other as iron sharpens iron, through communion which is each of us confessing and acknowledging our sin and the need to make Christ an intimate part of who we are and finally through prayer. I mean, we're constantly trying to emphasize the notion church is community and you can't have community with people you don't know beyond a three- or four-word greeting every Sunday morning. Prayer is how we connect with God and with each other.

And finally it goes without saying the third part of the scripture: *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* I mean this is a wicked world and it's wickedness is no longer subtle. You don't need the drag queens to tell you that. You need discernment and wisdom to walk carefully and well within that world, and for that we need the collective wisdom that we as a body share through the power of God's Holy Spirit, but that doesn't happen unless you make the effort to first spend your time stirring one another up to love and good works.



Our Wednesday night prayer meeting, our corporate prayer meeting, it's available to anyone, you can have it right in the comfort of your own home through Zoom or you can be meet here at the church if you want to be there in person. We just re-started a monthly meeting to pray for prodigals, those who have walked away from the faith. You can text, you can email, you can call, you can encourage each other. Now more than ever we need to push back against the darkness.

And praise God some of that push back we're even seeing. I just learned Friday that two of those libraries who welcomed the drag queens and refused to allow Kirk Cameron to speak, they had reversed themselves due to legal threats and allowed him to come and speak and that in both instances the results were overwhelming, I mean, 2500 people, the biggest crowd that has ever showed up in the history of this library came to one of the libraries and over a thousand came to the other one. So be encouraged. Meanwhile we have a brand new year in front of us. I mean the times are indeed evil but God is sovereign even over evil times. So *look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, and understand just how and why these days are evil.* Let's pray.

*Father, I thank you for your word, I thank you for the wisdom that*

*you freely give to any who asks. And I pray that you would just continue to speak to us about how we can use that wisdom to grow our love for you, to grow our courage to living in a place where evil is rampant. I pray that you would give us the ability, Lord, to not just grow our love but to be able to show our love to those around us who desperately need that love, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*