

The 2025 Challenge

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to Romans chapter 12. Romans chapter 12. Thank you, Brian. What a blessing.

It may sound like a sci-fi movie for some of us, but in three days, we're going to bust into 2025. Wow. So let's do it right.

Let's not waste the opportunity. Because in one way, January 1st is just another day on the calendar. However, in another way, it is a very special day because it's an opportunity to start afresh.

So I want to give you a challenge today. I assure you that I challenge myself as well in more ways than I'll mention this morning.

Before me, the Apostle Paul challenged us. And it's the basis of much of what I have to say. In Romans chapter 12, beginning in verse 1, it says, I want us to look at this passage for just a few moments.

[1 : 13] It says, I want us to look at this passage for just a few moments, and then I want to try to apply it to us.

Any of what I'm going to say about what should happen to us at the beginning of a new year will only come by the mercy of God.

Grace is often described as not getting what you deserve, and mercy is getting what you do not deserve. And none of us deserves to have the opportunity in Christ.

But because Christ went to the cross, all of us have the opportunity to come to Christ. Christ made the sacrifice that ends all of death sacrifices.

The whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament was just looking prophetically to the need of a Savior to come who would be the ultimate sacrifice.

[2 : 28] Christ does not need us to die for him. He wants us to live for him, and that's why the Apostle Paul says that we're to be living sacrifices. We are to present ourselves to him holy.

Holy means that we are to be set apart, set apart for his purposes. Now, how can we be set apart for his purposes if we can't find anything in our life that points to how we actually serve the Lord? If that's the case, it ought to be an eye-opener. Now, I'll be honest with you. I'm kind of strange and different because I don't call this hour that we have together on Sunday morning a service.

I don't like that because in reality, I believe that it can somewhat confuse us along the way. We're not serving the Lord by sitting or standing here.

We serve him out there. We serve him in other capacities through this church. We're here to worship him, and that's why I call this a worship hour and not a service hour because if we don't already have one, we need to find a way to serve the Lord in a gospel-oriented way.

[3 : 52] And just standing and singing his praises is not really service. Just seeking his face in prayer is not really service. That's worship. It's putting him in the proper place.

When this passage speaks of an acceptable one to God, it also speaks of one being presentable. So let's make ourselves presentable.

I have always lived away from family all my life. My dad was in the Air Force, and we traveled, and my grandparents were always away. We lived close to one of my grandparents at one time and 800 miles from the other.

Dad retired. We moved to South Carolina. I still had one 800 miles away. When my grandparents passed, we married and moved around.

We lived close to one set of parents and 500 miles from another, and then we moved here, and we were 500 miles from them, and then we moved back there, and then we were 500.

[4 : 53] All this stuff always had distance. And then I left a daughter in Mississippi, so I'm 500 miles from her. And so I've always been away from family and always spent a lot of times vacationing, visiting family.

It's just part of it. It's what you do. And when I was a kid, right before you got to where you were going on these long journeys, you had to get presentable. And we didn't pull over the side of the road to do it.

We were reckless in those days. We had a station wagon just laid in the back. And if something happened, well, it's in the Lord's hands. Whatever, forget a seat belt. Who cares, you know? My brothers would have thrown me in the way, and I would have been the airbag, I promise you. But anyway, and my mother, to make us presentable, would give us spit baths. And so I'm not talking about getting a spit bath this morning. I'm talking about being presentable before the Lord. So how are we presentable before the Lord? Well, we live for Him. We live for Him when people's looking. We live for Him when people are not looking. We do what pleases Him.

[5 : 56] We say what pleases Him. We think about what pleases Him. We ponder on what pleases Him. That's how we worship Him in an ongoing way, and that's how we prepare for corporate worship together as a family.

We set our lives apart for His purposes, and we live to please Him. And then Paul takes the next step in verse 2 and says that we are not to act like the world.

Folks, the world's going nuts. And I'll tell you why. They need Jesus. People need the Lord. They don't know who they are.

They don't even know what they are, quite honestly. And they don't know what they believe. And it's very common for even self-professed Christians to claim part of God's Word, especially in the polarizing atmosphere that we're in the world today.

I want you to listen to what I'm about to say. They claim, self-professed Christians claim part of God's Word, but they distance themselves from other parts of God's Word.

[7 : 06] They claim the parts they like. And when they don't like what it says, they dismiss that as not as important as the other or even not important or even bias.

And if we spend our time taking in that nonsense, which is what it is, we will conform to the pattern of this world. We'll just look like the world.

We won't look set apart for the Lord's purposes because we won't be set apart for the Lord's purposes. Like a cow to the slaughter, we'll just follow the tail in front of us as we march toward our demise.

And so I just want to say as the New Year is upon us, let's be better than that. I mean, let's do better than that. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to transform our minds and allow the temptations that we face to merely be tests, that helping us to sharpen our skills and living for the Lord.

In school, I always hated getting ready for tests. I hated it. It'll ruin an afternoon trying to get ready for a test. I mean, it will. But in that preparation, I learned at least some of the material.

[8 : 17] I got it, you know, at least enough to remember it to get it on a sheet of paper and then I could forget it again. That was what happened to me too often. Don't let the difficult times in life, the tempting times that often lead to compromise, go wasted.

Learn from them. Prepare for them. And when those opportunities come to say no, say no to what's wrong.

Say yes to what's in Christ and be stronger at it. Listen, every time you tell the devil no to a temptation, I don't mean directly talk to him, I just mean walk away from the temptation and don't do it.

But every time you do that, you get stronger for the next one. Now, he comes back, I spent a whole quarter talking about how he'll resist the devil and he'll flee from you, but he'll come back.

But instead of him getting a stronghold or a foothold on you, you can get stable grounding yourself and walk out of that.

[9 : 26] Now, some of us need to hear this morning that a new year is a great time for us to be reminded that we can walk out of the messes that we put ourselves in.

We can walk out of the habits that we've developed in our lives. It's time to stop it. It's time to resist it and let him flee from us and move forward from this day forward.

And so on that basis, I want to challenge you with seven challenges. I know that scares you to death. Just hold on. You're all right. New Year's not for three days. We got time.

I want to challenge you for 2025 with seven challenges. For some people, they need to heed all seven. Others of us, maybe only one.

But all of us can do something in the 2025 challenge. First one is this. Commit totally. Totally. And what I mean by that is surrender your life to Christ.

[10:40] The greatest fear I have in ministry is that there are some that hear me again and again and again, week after week, and never commit their life to the Lord Jesus.

They've never truly surrendered to the Lord. They've never asked the Lord to forgive them of their sins. They've never asked the Lord to wash them clean. In reality, even though they may be a member of a church and may hold position in a church, they've never surrendered their life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

They've never become a Christian. And I want to be clear. You can come to church every Sunday and you can die and go to hell. Your attendance here is appreciated.

But it is not an eternal security by any means. The only hope you have is in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the new life that he has given to us when we surrender our lives to him.

And now's the time. There's no need for you to continue to put off making a decision to follow the Lord Jesus.

[11:47] I want you to nail that down. There is a common fallacy that if we align ourselves with a church and if we align ourselves with the beliefs of a church and we sign in to some kind of confession or we complete some class that somehow we're covered.

And I've had people tell me again and again that they've done such as that in churches but no one has ever asked them personally if they've ever surrendered their life to Christ. And so I'm telling you if you're here this morning and you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ go no further.

Don't leave this room. As soon as we close if you're watching online call me. Let's get it down.

Don't wait until 2025. Walk into 2025 a born again believer in Christ assured of your walk with Him. Commit totally. Second thing is step forward. And this speaks of a larger pool of people no pun intended.

[13:06] The first step to Jesus' public ministry was that He went to John the Baptist and got baptized. That was His first step. Baptism is a Christian act that is a physical representation of what God does in us spiritually when He saves us.

He cleanses us and the old is gone and the new has come. So why did Jesus do that? Why was He baptized?

Jesus never sinned. Jesus didn't need salvation. He was not born in sin like the rest of us. Why did He need to publicly acknowledge that?

Why? He was baptized by John the Baptist and submitted Himself to that to identify with us because Jesus relates to sinners. He also did it as an example for us.

And then He closes out His ministry by telling us in the Great Commission His final words to baptize folks that come to Him in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. In other words, baptism is the bookends of Christ's ministry.

[14:19] And He does it as an example for us in the beginning and He commissions us to do it in the end. And if you're a child of God and you've never been baptized as a believer, well, something happened to me as a kid or something happened to me earlier and then I gave my life to Christ.

What that means is your baptism is out of order, okay? And it's void. You got wet but you didn't have Christian baptism if you were not a believer. And so, if you've given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ and you've never been baptized as a believer, then do that.

let's get that done because I promise you it can serve as a hindrance to you when you miss the first step of obedience in a relationship with the Lord Jesus.

So I encourage you if you've never done that, let's work on that. Let's get that done soon. Third challenge is this.

Join in. Join in. If you're not a member of Pickens First Baptist Church, I encourage you to follow the Lord's lead. I don't want you to do anything except follow the Lord's lead but when God leads you here, don't delay because delayed obedience is disobedience.

[15:42] If you feel like God is leading you to do that and we haven't talked about it, let's talk. I'd love to know more of where you are in your journey and the good news is I'm available. I'm available this week, I promise.

Call or text me. My number is on the front of the bulletin. Let me know. I can't think of a better way to begin a year than by committing to follow God in a new church home.

And if that's what God's leading you to do, then let's get it done. Fourth thing is this. Way deeper. Way deeper.

If you're a member of Pickens First Baptist Church and you're not a part of a small group, you need to be. January 1 or more specifically January 5th is a great time to start. And we'll be happy to guide you and help you find what class works for you.

On Sunday mornings we have life groups. That's recently a name change that some of us have a hard time getting through. I understand that. But these are Bible study driven classes that encourage you to share life together.

[16:55] And that's why they're called such. The priorities of these classes are fellowship, prayer, Bible study, ministry, and outreach. We no longer call them Sunday school because they don't just happen on Sunday.

We fellowship beyond Sunday. We pray for each other beyond Sunday. We minister and do outreach all week long. And we ought to live life together as the Church of Acts did.

Life groups. On Sundays and Wednesday evenings and Tuesday mornings we have D groups or discipleship groups. These groups study a particular subject for a particular time.

And we try to meet felt needs through the Word of God through these groups. It's a good thing. But I will tell you life groups on Sunday morning are a key part of knowing what Pickens First Baptist Church is all about and making us better at it.

It'll benefit each one of you all of us as well. And so I encourage you as you begin 2025 if you've not found that place then find it.

[18:07] Jeff will be in the foyer right afterwards. He'll be happy to give you some information that'll guide you to classes that are available. And you can try us out. Stick your head in one.

If that don't meet your flavor try another. Okay? Find your place. You'll be much more better. You'll get a greater sense of what Pickens First Baptist is really all about when you join your lives with others.

fifth challenge. Fifth challenge is this. Dose daily. Take your daily dose. Every one of us needs a daily time with the Lord.

You can call it a quiet time. You can call it a devotion. You can call it whatever you want to. But we need time to seek God's face in prayer. To read God's word and ask God to show us how it applies to our lives.

We all need a plan to do that. I promise you it'd be better for you to know what you're going to do tomorrow morning when you study God's word instead of just cracking it open and hoping you fall to a spot.

[19:22] Easy to miss it without a plan. And the ones we promote around here will take you through the Bible in a year. It's a blessing to do that.

I encourage you to do that but I want you to hear me. Please don't get bogged down and discouraged about the first of February when you get in Leviticus and can't handle it.

Okay? Let me tell you what the devil's scheme is. All right? He'll get you mixed up in something like that and you'll be studying what you do when you get boils for your sins and all that stuff and you'll forego the rest of the year.

And some of you I ain't gonna point you out just cause I don't know who you are but some of you stopped about February when you hit Leviticus 4 and said I can't take much more of this and never got back in God's word daily for the rest of the year.

Don't you see the victory that the evil one got? Don't do that. Don't do that. Let's wade through this thing together. You know?

[20:31] I got a four part series on Leviticus that I preached before that says don't stop now you know because there is applicable truth there too but it can be challenging at times.

And so to encourage that we I don't want you to get bogged down I don't want you to get discouraged. if it's not best for you to try to cover the whole Bible in a year then don't cover the whole Bible in a year.

I just want you to hear from God every day from his word. And the ones we promote around here will get you through the Bible in a year and reading the Bible through will give you a much better more thorough understanding of the whole counsel of God's word.

There is strength there. However be clear it's really not about consuming more than you can digest so you can boast about it. We're not going to give out medals at the end of the year okay. Or to feel good about how many times you read the Bible through. I was in a church one time when they they said you know we normally list everybody who reads the Bible through in the bulletin on the last Sunday of the year or the first Sunday of the year.

[21 : 50] And I said well we're not going to do that. And if that's why you read the Bible through you read it through for the wrong reason you ought to have applied some of it. I may not have said all that but I felt it. I felt it.

If you don't apply what you read in your life you can know it like the back of your hand. And you can still die without Christ. That impression was left on me when I was about ten years old.

I was riding my bicycle in the neighborhood and some little punk was staying with a relative that was invading our neighborhood and he built a ramp over a ditch and we were jumping it and I was doing better than him.

I want to clarify that. And somehow I think we started talking about church or the Bible or something. I hope it was my evangelistic outreach but I don't remember.

And he said well I've read the Bible through twice. He's about ten years old. And I said well it really ain't about reading it all the way through. It's about applying it to your life. Or something like that.

Whatever a ten year old would say like that.

[22 : 54] Because I didn't see any fruit in that old boy's life playing with him in that yard that day to show that he had read any of it. And I didn't believe him anyway. So the best thing for us to do is to commit to pray and read and apply God's word and have a plan to do it.

Even if you have to alter it along the way. And if you want such a plan, man we got a bunch of them. And I apologize about so many options quite honestly because I don't want it to get confusing and I'll be happy to guide you through that.

I always share what I'm doing with my people and I've done two very good ones for almost 20 years.

stuck to them. I'm trying a new one this year. Probably the strongest option that we offer at the church for a lot of reasons is the one the ladies are doing and they're celebrating it this Saturday called the Bible Recap.

And the strength of the Bible Recap is it takes you through scripture chronologically. And the strength of it is that it has a great podcast where a lady will guide you through what you read that day or what you supposed to read that day.

[24 : 20] And there's also a commentary that only gives a one page summary of the four or five chapters a day that you've read. And so and she does a good job with it from what I've read of it.

There are a lot of ladies doing that in this church. Last year at this time we had about 160 ladies sign up to do that. So so there's a lot of people involved in that and joining in with somebody and doing that is always helpful.

It goes a long way toward walking with the Lord in a winsome way. And I fully support it and I thank God for it and I don't do it for two reasons. I'll tell you.

One is the podcast is very feminine. It's for ladies. And I listened to it a few times and I just I just I enjoyed it. What she said was good but but it's just it's designed for women listeners.

OK. If you don't know the difference we can talk about that afterwards. But anyway. The other reason is this is me. I don't want to wait to the last quarter of the year to read New Testament.

[25 : 32] I need some New Testament throughout the throughout the year. I need it every day. OK. I need New Testament every day. So I alternate among plans that give me Old Testament and New Testament every day.

And there are now three that I that I look to. One of them is our PFBC Bible bookmark.

They are available on the offering box. There's an offering box at this right here. There's one out there. There's two of them in the foyer as well. And what this what these you get a new one every quarter if you pick it up.

It's available every quarter. And and it'll take you through the Old Testament once. It'll take you to the New Testament twice. And he does a good job with putting New Testament passages that are relevant to the Old Testament passages that you read.

I read a book by Wayne Cordero who's charismatic pastor in Hawaii. Bad place to minister. And Wayne wrote a book called The Divine Mentor. I don't agree with Wayne on everything that he

believes but the book was excellent in motivating you to read God's word.

[26 : 38] And I've taken snippets from that book for years to encourage people to read God's word. And it did a number on me. I was with several pastors in Tennessee mountains for a treat and it was good.

And The Divine Mentor by Wayne Cordero. And he had a Bible reading plan in there. He sold these bookmarks. And we just got them customized and made for our church. And so I came in with that. I've seen Sunday school classes designed around this because he also in there tells you how to apply it to your life and how to work through it every day and all that kind of stuff. So it's a great study.

And they're available in those areas. And then the one I just I'm finishing up is the Machaney or Machane Robert Machane Bible reading plan.

It's probably the old classic. Machane died at 29 years old in 1843. But in that short time that he lived he wrote numerous books and he came up with this plan.

[27 : 48] And there's copies of this. It gives you daily and it kind of explains his philosophy with that on this front page. And those are available if you go out this door to my right and to your left.

They're on that table between those two doors. And Machane is probably the most used Bible reading plan to read the Bible through that's out there.

It's probably the most popular because it's been around the longest. And so anyway he does a good job with that. This year I'm doing something different because I wanted to read first I wanted and I was going to design it myself if I needed to I wanted to read the Old Testament chronologically and I wanted to read the New Testament chronologically and I wanted some old and new both each day.

Okay. So I was going to do that and then as I got to reading about that and thinking through that I realized that if you read the New Testament chronologically you're going to read the same thing for several days in a row because the Gospels sometimes cover the same passage.

You know the synoptics I mean the harmony of the Gospels is that some stories are in there four times and so you're going to read the same thing over and over again. So there's a plan called the Five Day Bible Reading Program.

[29 : 09] Okay. That's out here if you go out the door to my left or to yeah to my left and to your right if you go out that well not to your right but anyway that's not that's not that's not true for everybody in the room is it but anyway if you go out the door to my left it's on that table okay and it's got this little design of a Bible it's got that little design up top okay and what I like about this is it takes you through the Old Testament chronologically and it gives you New Testament passage every day and you read a different gospel every quarter so the New Testament is not chronological but it gives you it spreads the gospels out throughout the year and I like Jesus throughout the year and so so I'm trying that now let me tell you what's controversial about this is it's a five day reading plan okay and I believe y'all spend time in God's word seven days a week I do and I don't think this ought to count as your time with the Lord okay I think you should have done it before you got here or do it before you go to bed or whenever you do it okay so

I kind of thought well should I promote that you know am I going to give my day off you know how do we handle that well let me tell you how life works sometimes days off comes whether you like it or not the other day I was putting right along I had a busy morning started early and I got about 11 o'clock and realized wait a minute I ain't read God's word today I need to sit out a minute I was taking care of good things for good people early on but I I hadn't taken that time to do that and so I sat down to do that but the reality is sometimes things come up along the way and I'll tell you what my plan is my plan is to read this these passages in five days and then to read something else on Saturday and Sunday that's my plan there'll be days when I might skip the New Testament passage and save it for Saturday for instance or did you know that there's a proverb for every day there's a chapter of

Proverbs for every day of the month there's 31 chapters of Proverbs there's no more than 31 days in a month so you always have a Proverb a chapter of Proverbs for the day as well you have five Psalms for the day and I can tell you how to work that out but it ain't gonna make much sense up here but you can have you can read five Psalms a day and so you've always got that okay and so five day reading plan is something I'm trying okay and I made you some copies if you want to try that along with me regardless the 2025 challenge is to have a plan to pray and read the word of God and apply it every day it is a life changer and we all need it and it's worth the effort the next

challenge is give generously and please don't misunderstand my plea when I say this because I stand here today very thankful for your generosity during 2024 as year ends we stand strong now having said that you still have an opportunity to give in person until noon on Tuesday and online until midnight that day you can give this year and our

Lottie Moon goal is moving right along but it's still outstanding so there's opportunity to give for the glory of God we need to meet all that however when I say give generously I'm not talking about for church purposes I'm talking about to the Lord through the church on a personal level trust your tithe to the Lord trust it to the Lord and I realize for some that is a giant step and a huge challenge for 2025 and I get that and if it is for you I encourage you to take that challenge when you stop trying to run your own finances and you obediently follow God's plan there will be times when you will not be able to do the math trust me on this you'll not be able to do the math and understand how God has blessed you the way he has but he chooses to do that God works in obedience he does and the tithe can be one of the toughest for some but I encourage you to give generously one last challenge serve faithfully there's an old adage in the church life that says 80% of the work in the church is done by 20% of the people and 80% of the people do little to nothing

I added that last part but anyway when you serve the church in the church for the right reasons you serve the Lord and as God has blessed our church with growth the need for volunteers to take their turn has grown quite honestly we have a place for you to serve and if you'll take that guest card even if you're not a guest and you're a member if you'll take that thing and you'll hit that QR code it'll send you to a form and there's room there for you to say whatever you want to say as long as it's nice and in that if you've got a question you place that question and we'll see that if you know who you need to speak to about that our numbers are on the front of this bulletin for a purpose you can reach us share with us what God's laying upon your heart how he's leading you do what

[35 : 01] God's leading you to do but let's not settle folks none of us let's not settle for where we are let's not settle as a church with where we are let's not settle as individuals where we are let's faithfully serve the Lord faithfully serve the Lord that is the 2025 challenge to commit totally to give your life to Christ if you've never accepted the Lord Jesus Christ I encourage you the moment we stand to sing in just a moment you come down this aisle and you take my hand and you say pastor I need to be saved I need to nail this down let's get that taken care of if you've done that step forward step forward and let that become public through baptism if you haven't already take that step as God leads you join in if you're a guest with us and God's leading you this church again I'll say I don't think it's a better time to join a church than the first of the new year just a just a good start for everybody

I'd love to talk to you about that this week and I'm available I am and then way deeper don't be satisfied with where you are way deeper be a part of a life group join a discipleship group be a part of those things way deeper and then get a daily dose of God's word faithfully give generously serve faithfully have you ever heard of the trust fall I participated in one when I was in a psychology class in high school psychology was in a portable because the school was growing and so we were in a portable and we had a narrow stairwell on the back of it with a handrail and an awning over the door there wasn't a whole lot of room there and our teacher was a coach so because he was a coach he had us climb on top of that handrail that shaky handrail and trust a bunch of punks to catch us okay as we held on to the awning and leaned on the shaky handrail sounds like a liability to me but however they probably won't let you do that now but anyway but each student was to fall back in to the cohorts that probably had been cussing them earlier that day and to catch them okay and you know what everybody that did it was caught we all survived the thing if you answer the 2025 challenge you're gonna have to have some trust but not in a bunch of renegades you're gonna have to trust the

Lord because the Lord will meet you where you are I promise you if you step out of your comfort zone for the Lord he will be right there with you and for you and it is my hope and it is my prayer that we'll honor Christ with all of our lives in 2025 let's start before it even gets here let's get a head start let's do it now with every head bowed and every eye closed I ask you this morning primarily have you ever given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus and if you hadn't I encourage you to come I'd love to guide you in that if you have have you ever publicly acknowledged that through baptism if you haven't I encourage you to come God's leading you to be a part of this church and you know that's what he'd have you do I encourage you to come if there's parts of your life that you need to recommit to the Lord you can do that where you'll stand in just a moment or you can do it with a

pastor praying for you

I don't know what God's telling you to do I know what he told me to say and I tried to say it I encourage just be obedient not just in the next few moments but for 2025 and you won't do that perfectly but by the grace of God he'll make us better and stronger and more holy for his purposes it is my prayer that all of us will go into 2025 challenged accepting the challenge to live for the Lord Jesus to just be obedient to follow him Lord Jesus I love you thank you Lord for your word thank you Lord for the challenge of it I pray that you help us to respond in obedience in Jesus precious name Amen