

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/8/12 Sunday evening
State of the Church Address: 2012

*“I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells.”
Psalm 26:8*

As I begin this year’s State of the Church Address, I want us to think about a verse to create a context for what follows. In Psalm 26:8 we hear David make a very personal and revealing statement, “I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells.”

Let’s break that apart. David begins, “*I love the house where you live, O LORD.*” He’s thinking about the tabernacle, for in his day that was the house of God. He says he loved that place. He loved going to Israel’s place of worship. Why? What made the tabernacle so special? David tells us. It is “*the place where your glory dwells.*” At mere appearances, it just looked like a big tent, but David knew better. What made this structure so special, so attractive, so worthy of his devotion, was the presence of *the glory of God.*

The glory of God is the manifestation or display of the very character and essence of God. Remember, God is a spirit (John 4:23-24). You can’t see Him or touch Him. But nonetheless, the invisible God exists, and He makes known the essence of who He is in the expression of His glory.

In David’s day God manifested His glory in the tabernacle. It happened in dramatic fashion on the day Moses first set it up, but in reality, His glory was there to see every day for those with spiritual eyes to see it. When a man of faith like David went to the tabernacle, he saw the glory of God. How? When he looked at the priests in action, and watched the animal sacrifices, and smelled the incense, he actually saw God’s holiness and grace being declared. Every time he went to the house of God, he was reminded that the LORD God is a revealing, reconciling, and restoring God who desires for undeserving people to know Him, and has made provision so that can happen.

“*I love that place!*” said David. It’s no wonder that in Psalm 27:4 David concluded, “One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.” David says his highest ambition in life, his primary desire, was to be in the place where God manifested His glory, to dwell there, to gaze upon His beauty there, to seek God there.

Okay, so what does this have to do with our State of the Church Address? In my estimation, plenty! Follow me now. If you wanted to see God’s glory in David’s day, you went to the tabernacle. In his son’s day and for centuries thereafter, you went to the temple. What about today? We don’t have the tabernacle or temple, so where can we see it?

We find a clue when we turn to the New Testament, to John 1:14, and read this statement. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us [lit. “tabernacled among us”]. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Amazing. John the apostle, a man who in his early years did go to the temple, says that when he saw the person of Jesus Christ, he saw *the glory of the One and only*, that is, *the glory of God.*

Don’t miss the connection. What thrilled David? The glory of God did, which he saw in the tabernacle. What thrilled John? The glory of God did, which he saw in the living tabernacle of Jesus Christ.

So if you want to see the glory of God today, just look at Jesus the Christ. Jesus embodies the glory of God. Jesus radiates the glory of God. Jesus manifests the glory of God. As Hebrews 1:3 explains, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory.”

You say, “That’s wonderful to know, that God manifests His glory in the face of Jesus. But how does that help us? Jesus returned to heaven. So if the glory of God is demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ, and if Jesus Christ is now in heaven, where can we look in order to see the glory of God?”

In short, the answer is, you can look in two places. One, at the *Word*; and two, at the *Church*. The Word makes Christ known, for Christ Himself said He is the subject of the Book (John 5:39). And the Church makes Christ known, for the Word says the Church is Christ’s Body (Eph 5:23). Thus, the Scriptures reveal His glory, and the Church reveals His glory.

Paul associates the themes of *glory* and *the church* and *Christ* in Ephesians 3:21, “To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” So God not only manifests His glory in the church, but intends to receive glory in the church, and receive it there forever and ever.

So David said he loved the house of God because it is *the place where His glory dwells*. This side of the cross, we can say the same thing about the church. To the degree that the church portrays Christ accurately, and it does so when its members live in ways consistent with the Scriptures, then the church is manifesting the glory of God. Or to put another way, in this present age, God is manifesting His glory by making Christ known *in the church*.

So we can say, “I love the house where you live, O LORD, for it is the place where your glory dwells,” and think of *the presence of Christ in His church*. Peter says we, the followers of Christ, are “being built into a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5).

There are many reasons why we should cherish the church, perhaps none greater than this one. When we are in the church, we get to see the glory of God up close and personal!

Now, if that’s the case, then we ought to be asking ourselves a question continually, and it’s this. What is God doing to put His glory on display in our midst? I’m convinced that far too often we miss the display of His glory in the church because we’re not looking for it. I must confess that I miss it. Far too often I look at the church and see people and programs and problems and budgets, and miss what God is doing through those people and programs and problems and all the rest to put His glory on display.

So in preparation for this message I took a sheet of paper and wrote this question at the top. *How did God put His glory on display at WBC in the past twelve months?* I was amazed at how the list grew. I started thinking of things I’d forgotten, or overlooked, things God has done to manifest His glory to us, that is, the manifestation of His generosity and wisdom and grace and mercy and power.

Brothers and sisters, we’re so prone to miss the display. It’s there to see, and it’s there all the time. “The heavens declare the glory of God,” says Psalm 19:1, but it’s not just the heavens. He does the same thing in the church.

You look at the night sky and you see a declaration of the glory of God, specifically of His wisdom and power and care. But you can do the same thing by looking at the church. You observe things that teach you about God when you look at the living organism He calls the Body of His Son. You see His mercy and grace and power and patience and perseverance and kindness and love and holiness and righteousness. You see all this, and more, if you just look.

So let's do some looking tonight. First, let's look back. And then, let's look ahead. We're looking for one thing tonight, *the glory of God*. How did God put His glory on display in the church last year? And how does He want to put it on display in the church this coming year? Let's reflect on those questions one at a time.

Looking Back: How did God put His glory on display at WBC in 2011?

I realize the answer to this question is sort of subjective for it depends on the observer. Your list will differ from my list for we're standing at different vantage points. So before I share my list, I'd like you to take a couple of minutes and write down the first three things that come to *your mind* when you hear the question, "How did God put His glory on display at WBC in 2011?" What stood out to you? What did you see God do in our midst that taught you something about Him? Go ahead, write down the first three things that come to mind.

Sharing Time: Share your list with your neighbor.

Now it's my privilege to share what I've seen, in no particular order.

We saw the glory of His love for sinners in how He sent gospel opportunities our way.

I think of how He brought our Chinese friend, Li Teng, to us back in March. And how through Li Teng He brought us into relationship with several other Chinese friends, who also visited our church services. And then how He manifested His sovereign timing by bringing Steve Sark to us, a missionary who just "happened" to be on furlough from China this year, who helped us with translation so we could baptize one of the these brothers, and then helped us begin an English class on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. I think of how He demonstrated His love through some of you who invited our Chinese friends to your homes for Thanksgiving and on other occasions.

We saw the glory of His generosity in how He met our financial needs.

These are challenging days for ministries. The economy is unstable, to say the least. And as in previous years, the Lord once again relocated some of our key people away from Wheelersburg to other places of service in this past twelve months (such as the Walkers and June Conley). But I must confess I was stunned when I did an end of the year comparison of income and discovered the following. In spite of the economy and people moving away, the General Fund income was higher than it's been in five years!

General Fund income (figures taken from Treasure's end of year statement)...

2011	\$199,633
2010	\$198,144
2009	\$196,506
2008	\$190,823
2007	\$189,347
2006	\$200,565
2005	\$182,015

This income enabled us to do ministries locally, support a quality team of missionaries, care for staffing need, pay utilities, and maintain the wonderful facilities the Lord has entrusted to us. And it's not just through General Fund income the Lord has demonstrated His generosity. When you consider other designated income in 2011, which was approximately \$50,000, the total income reached close to \$250,000. This includes:

Sagar Island Ministry \$12,000

Brazil Trip	\$4,000
Education Fund gift	\$3,000
Harvest Offering	\$3,948

Other provisions this year included: a new video projection system in the auditorium (thanks to Matt Wilson and Aaron Cook for installation), new landscaping (thanks to Bob Hurley, the trustees, and others for their efforts), and a new heat pump unit in the education wing.

Those are just some of the ways we saw God demonstrate the glory of His generosity in our midst in 2011. Let's take a moment even now to express our thanks to Him for these gifts and the privilege He gave us to see His glory.

We saw the glory of the mysteries of His providence.

The hymnwriter, William Cowper, wrote, "God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform." We certainly saw His mysterious moving last year, at times in ways that remind us that the end of the story is still coming.

We saw it in the unfortunate closing of Evangelical Baptist Mission. Three of our missionary families, the Storms, the Dernelans, and the Chambers, lost significant ministry funds. Yet out of the losses God demonstrated His faithfulness. He raised up our sister church, Grace Baptist in Cedarville, to provide administrative care for these missionary families. And through His people He has begun to replenish ministry funds. Sister churches took special offerings. WBC entered into the joy of giving through our first (and hopefully annual) Harvest Offering, the proceeds of which went to help resupply the ministry funds of these former EBM missionaries (\$3,948).

We also saw the glory of the mysteries of God's providence in the Fall when He took our sister, Savilla Ruggles, home to heaven after her bout with cancer. We saw His sufficiency as she demonstrated joy and child-like trust in her heavenly Father even as her body failed. We saw His sufficiency in her family as they sought to glorify Him in her memorial service. We saw His sufficiency as He worked through church family members to provide meals and other expressions of love.

There's really no way to capture the fullness of this display. We saw it in family after family, person after person. Through the deaths of family members, through job losses, through parenting challenges, through battles with physical afflictions, and more, we saw the glory of the mysteries of God's providence. God doesn't always remove the trials. Sometimes, *many* times, He takes His people right through these trials so that we all might see a display of His glory.

We tasted the glory of His goodness in the ministry of His Word.

The prophet Amos made a tragic announcement in Amos 8:11, "'The days are coming,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'when I will send a famine through the land— not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.'" We are so blessed, brothers and sisters. We are *not* experiencing that kind of famine. We have the joy week after week of tasting the goodness of the Word of God.

We taste it in our Sunday School classes. We taste it in the children and teen groups. We taste it various small group Bible studies that meet throughout the week. And we taste it from the pulpit. In terms of special events, we tasted it in July when Bob Gillespie from Answers in Genesis spoke at WBC for a special *Creation* seminar during SS, AM, and PM services. We tasted it in November when Dr. Michael Loftis was the keynote speaker for our World Missions Sunday.

But it's not just special events. We're so blessed to taste it every week. Let me remind you of some of the things we've heard and tasted from this pulpit in the past twelve months:

On Sunday mornings: We began the year with a continuation of the series, "Getting to Know Jesus Better: A Journey through the Gospel of John." We worked our way through John 5-8 during the first half of the year. In conjunction with Easter we did a four week series in Isaiah 53 during the month of April. In August we did a topical series on *Revivals in the Bible*. In the Fall months we focused on a nine part series, *Marks of a Healthy Church*, and then discussed those messages in small groups in the evening service. In December we prepared for Christmas with a series entitled, *A King Like No Other*, an exposition of Matthew 1-2.

On Sunday evenings: On Sunday evenings, for our church "family" service, we gather to give the Lord honor by reflecting on what He is doing in the people and ministries of WBC. For instance, in January Tapan & Sandhya Bandyopadhyay and Fox Hunt gave a report of their ministry trip to Sagar Island, India. Also in January, for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, the CRADLE pregnancy care center team presented their ministry to women in need in Scioto County. We had a Youth Night service in May and a Children's Christmas program in December. We enjoyed three Home Fellowships in the summer months. We were enjoyed fellowship with Pleasant Green Baptist Church in January, July, September, and November. There were six weeks of elective Growth Groups in March/April. In the Fall we did a nine week church-wide Growth Group using Mark Dever's *What Is a Healthy Church?* Missionary speakers throughout the year included Justin Gamble, who spoke to us in January about street evangelism, Bob Litteral (missionary to PNG) in February, Gary and Nancy Storm (ACCG) in May and December, Donna Messenger (Barnabas) in June, and Steve and Patty Sark (China) in July. Interspersed throughout the year we also had several topical series of messages, including: in February, *Slaves to Sin No Longer*, an exposition of Romans 6; in April, *The Most Important Thing We Do: Prayer*, from 1 Timothy 2; in June and July, *What's Going on in the World? Learning about the Future from Daniel*.

On Wednesday evenings: We began the year by finishing our inductive study of the book of Nehemiah. During the rest of the year we walked verse by verse through the book of 1 Corinthians (and are currently in chapter 12).

We saw the glory of His love for the nations.

We saw it in how He worked through the Brazil Team. In November, four of our members (Andrea and Lacey Willis, Abby Edwards, and Fox Etta Hunt) traveled to south Brazil to encourage our missionaries and serve in the church plant there.

We saw the glory of His love for the nations as He guided in the ongoing development of the Sagar Island ministry in India. Significant steps were taken organizationally to put this ministry into the care of nationals.

We saw the glory of His love for the nations as we sent Gary and Nancy Storm for ministry trips in Slovakia and Ukraine and then heard reports of how God used His Word to equip His servants who work with children there.

We saw the glory of His love for the nations as Bob Litteral shared with us about how God is working through literacy training in Kenya, Sudan, Nepal, and Papua New Guinea.

Sherry and I were privileged to see the glory of His love for the nations in June when we traveled to Caen, France and worshiped at the church planted by our missionaries, the Laceys, and heard them rejoice at the prospect of a grand-daughter church across the city.

Indeed, God loves the nations and is intent on rescuing sinners from every nation, and He privileged us to see the glory of that love and even participate in it in 2011.

We saw the glory of His faithfulness in the making of disciples.

A key word at WBC is *training*. We're all about training, for a couple of important reasons. A very practical reason is the fluid nature of our congregation. Our people continually move to other regions of the country (we have former members in 17 states or so). There are only 30 people at WBC today that were here when Sherry and I first moved to Wheelersburg and I became your pastor in 1987. So if we stop training, we go out of existence.

But training isn't just a pragmatic necessity for us. It's at the heart of our mission. Jesus told the twelve, "Go, make disciples." They were to do with others as He had done with them, to build into the lives of others, to teach them God's Word, and equip them to repeat the process with others. Disciples making disciples making disciples.

And so training is vital at WBC. We exist to train others to do what we are now doing. Jesus concluded His great commission charge by saying, "Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age." It's His faithful presence that makes the training of disciples a reality.

In recent years we've been seeking to ramp up our commitment to train others. I've challenged you to not just *do* your ministry, but to *recruit and train others* to do the same. And we are seeing the glory of God's faithfulness in making it happen.

Six years ago Chuck Spears was on staff here working with our youth. Then he served on staff at Scioto Hills Camp. This past year he returned from North Dakota to share with us how God is using him to lead Cooperstown Bible Camp as their executive director.

This past summer Oliver Thompson returned to us after serving with Chuck in a one year internship at Cooperstown Bible Camp, and we rejoiced as we saw evidence that the training process continues.

Our Biblical Counseling team was privileged to train another 35 or so individuals from a dozen area churches in this year's Winter CDT on Monday evenings. In addition, the team traveled to Charleston, W. Va. for the second year to train the staff of the Union Mission and others from West Virginia churches (about 30 people).

It thrills my heart as a pastor to see you as a congregation training others to partner with you in a host of ministries; to see Barb training Rebecca in our women's counseling ministry, to see Ruth Ann and June equipping Fox to do compassion ministries, to see Matt and Bethany incorporating Alan and Jade in our youth ministries, to see Scott adding new faces to the children's team, to see Denise training Laura to assist in the logistics of the CDT ministry, to see Greg and others recruiting Adam and Joey for facility care. It was a blessing for me to work with Matt, Austin, Kylee, and Abby in this year's children's growth group. Speaking of new faces in ministry, Adam and Haleigh served in VBS this past summer, and according to Matt, have agreed to lead VBS for the first time next summer. We have a new deacon this year, as Aaron Cook begins in that role. Aaron has involved Matt in leading our worship. We've seen new people trained and working with babies in the nurseries this year (much needed, too, since we are now ministering to about a dozen babies!).

And this is just a sampling. When I see new people being recruited, trained, and incorporated into the ministries of WBC, I not only see the future of the church at work. I see the glory of God's faithfulness on display in the present.

But it's not just happening in organized ministries. God put His glory on display last year in lots of unprogrammed, often unsung ways, as He moved our people into contact with other needy people. I'll put it this way...

We saw the glory of God's compassion radiate through relationships.

We saw it radiate when Aaron and Laurie adopted little Lila. We saw it radiate when Joey and Elaine became foster parents and brought little Julie and little Moriah into our midst. We saw the glory of His love radiate when Denise got involved in working with hurting women at the Sojourner House, when Kevin began a ministry to reach out to teen boys using soccer, and Aaron used basketball to reach young men.

And on and on we could go! We certainly have reason to say, "I love the house where you live, O Lord, the place where your glory dwells!" Now, having looked back, let's look ahead for a few moments.

Looking Ahead: How does God want to put His glory on display at WBC in 2012?

We really can't answer that question definitively, for we don't know what tomorrow brings. But we can, to borrow a phrase from Philippians 2, *work out what God is working in*.

So what are some of the things that God has been working into the DNA of WBC recently? Three words come to mind: *radical*, *training*, and *restoring*. From my perspective, those words sum up three vital ways we can cooperate with God in putting His glory on display in 2012.

The first is a commitment to be *radical*. By radical I mean being committed to the fundamentals of true, biblical Christianity. A little over a year ago we read together David Platt's book, *Radical*. In last year's State of the Church address, I challenged the church to seek to fulfill five goals in 2011 which Platt calls *The Radical Plan*.

1. *Pray for the entire world.*
2. *Read through the entire Word.*
3. *Sacrifice your money for a specific purpose.*
4. *Spend your time in another context.*
5. *Commit your life to a multiplying community.*

I'd like to extend *The Radical Plan* for another year. Let's keep working out what God has been working in us. I challenge you to invest your time and money into the same five goals in 2012, and in so doing, partner with Him in putting His glory on display.

Sharing Time: Let's take a moment to reflect on these five goals one by one, answering two questions. One, did you do it in 2011? And two, if you did, how did it affect your life? Let's listen to some testimonies. And then, let's do it again this year.

When I think of working out what God is working in us, the second word that comes to mind is *training*. I've just shared with you how training has been a vital emphasis at WBC in the past, but the opportunities abound for the future. If you are currently doing a ministry in the church, here's my challenge. Prayerfully identify someone (or more than one) to train to do what you are presently doing. If you are teaching a class, give someone else the opportunity to teach a lesson or two, by helping them develop the lesson and then giving feedback afterwards. If you're visiting shut-ins, take someone with you and show them how to care for the homebound. The same goes if

you are working in the nursery, or in the greeting ministry, or doing outreach, ask the Lord to give you someone you can train for His purposes.

And if you think the Lord is preparing you for a new ministry, then prayerfully seek someone to train you. Be teachable. Be open to constructive feedback. Be willing to change and even be redirected if your gifts would better fit in another ministry. And be ready for the joy that comes from serving!

Also, as I mentioned in our *Healthy Church* series, we're going to be reassessing our church structure this year, and specifically, what we call our leaders. We have a "board" with "deacons" and "trustees." Is there a more biblical way to identify the elected servants of the church? Please be in prayer as we address this.

The third word is *restoring*. I have in mind two groups in our community. One is comprised of lost and even some saved people who have no meaningful relationship with a local church. They need to be *restored*, first to God obviously through Christ, but then connected to a church. God can use us to be ministers of restoration with those people.

But I have in mind a more specific group. There are some 50 to 75 people I can think of who used to worship at WBC who, as far as I know, aren't meaningfully connected with a local church. Some went through our youth programs years ago. Some left us in recent years. And now they're just "out there."

Brothers and sisters, our God is a restoring God, and I believe He has given us the opportunity to put His glory on display by praying for and reaching out in love to those who are now on their own. In some cases, there are hurt feelings and even unresolved problems that need to be addressed. But God's grace is sufficient and His glory will shine brightly as we do with others as He has done with us.

That's what the state of the church is all about, dear friends. His glory. As we wrap up our time together, let's join with David in proclaiming, "I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells!"