

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/16/2022 Sunday morning  
“State of the Church Address 2022: *It Is Well with Our Soul*” 3 John 2  
Pastor Brad Brandt

**It Is Well with Our Soul:  
Looking at 2021 from God’s Perspective**

*“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.”*

How are things as we head into 2022? We could answer that question in so many ways! As far as the world goes, we could talk about COVID once again, as we did last year, for the pandemic continues. As far as God’s work in the world goes, we could talk about a recent email I received from Wycliffe missionary Andy Minch (who served the Amanab people group right next to Bob and Shirley Litteral in PNG), Andy shared, “At the end of 2021, the complete Bible, all of God’s Word, is available in 720 languages for 5.78 billion people. 79% of the world’s population has access to all of God’s Word. This is unprecedented. Work is in progress in 2,845 languages of the world, including 77 signed languages. Praise God that 217 of PNG’s 840 languages have had New Testaments (NT) published (with several in the last stages getting ready for printing), and work is ongoing in 134 languages.”

So how are things going at WBC? That’s the question we’re considering with this state of the church address, and here’s my answer. *It is well with our soul.* I’m taking that language from the apostle John, who used a similar phrase to describe a man of God in a local church in the first century. The man was Gaius, who was a faithful servant in his church. And this is how John began his God-inspired letter to Gaius, a letter we call 3 John.

*“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.”*

It’s that last phrase that keeps coming to mind when I think of Wheelersburg Baptist Church as we head into this new year. By God’s grace, it goes well with our soul.

When it comes to church life, there are *seasons*. Churches go through seasons of pruning, as we did a few years back. There are also seasons of planting, and watering, and dealing with pestilence. And certainly, there are seasons of waiting. Just like the farmer who drops seed into the ground and then *waits*, so do we as a church do some planting, and watering, but then a lot of waiting on the Lord who alone brings the harvest. At times the Lord takes away. At other times, the Lord gives. It is His church, and He does as He pleases.

Indeed, there are all kinds of seasons. There are seasons of peace, when church is an enjoyable place to be. But there are also seasons of controversy, which are not as pleasant, but just as vital. This is Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 11:18–19, “I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.”<sup>19</sup> No doubt there *have to be differences among you* to show which of you have God’s approval.”

That’s odd, isn’t it? There *have to be differences*? Why would that be? Why are differences necessary? What good can come out of a season where we wrestle through our differences? Paul tells us. He says these differences are necessary in order to *show who has God’s approval*. So we learn in seasons where we differ to look carefully at God’s Word and find out what meets His approval, and *who* meets His approval.

And of course, there are also seasons of growth. When our Heavenly Father (whom Jesus calls the Gardener in John 15:1) says it's time for the fruit to come, the fruit comes. "All things are from Him, through Him, and to Him. To Him be the glory forever (Romans 11:36)."

Every January for the past three decades we've taken a Sunday to address this question. What season are we in? What's the Lord been doing at WBC, and what are we anticipating? As we enter 2022, I believe the answer is this. By the grace of God, we are in a season where we can say, as did John regarding Gaius, "It is well with our soul."

I believe this verse provides a helpful grid from which to assess the state of the church in January 2022. This is a verse that's been on my heart for nearly two years, since COVID began. I've been praying this verse for our church. I've been praying "that you may *enjoy good health* and that all *may go well with you* even as *your soul is getting along well*."

There are two requests and one reality in this verse. The two requests? One, that you may enjoy good health. And two, that all may go well with you. The reality? Your soul is getting along well. Those have been my two requests, and this is the one reality.

Your soul is getting along well. I believe there are Spirit-produced evidences of that reality, and I'd like us to reflect on them together, all to His praise.

But first, I want us to look carefully at this letter and answer this vital question. What's true of a follower of Jesus of whom it can be said, "It goes well with your soul"? Furthermore, what's true of a church of whom it can be said, "It goes well with your soul"? How do you know if it is well with your soul?

John's third epistle shows us the answer. So let's read the letter, and then discuss the evidences in the life of Gaius, and then discuss the evidences that it is well with our soul at WBC.

*Scripture Reading: 3 John*

What a marvelous New Testament book! Though only 14 verses, 3 John tells us much about life in a first century church. We learn about the importance of truth and love. We find instruction concerning missionary support, why it is necessary, and who needs it. We read about a political scandal amongst the church leadership, meet a self-absorbed man who tried to dominate the local church, and another man who faithfully served it. All this and more in one small book!

But for today, we're seeking an answer to a very specific question. What are evidences in this letter that the soul of Gaius was getting along well? To broaden the question, what are evidences that it is well with our soul, personally, and as a church?

As I've meditated on 3 John, I see ten evidences. You can say it is well with your soul when the following is true.

### **1. You are loved by those who love Jesus (1).**

Who wrote this letter? Verse 1 says, "The elder." The term *presbuteros* refers not just to age, but to an official position. The word indicates that a "fatherly" relation existed between the author and the recipient. Tradition, as well as the style and simplistic vocabulary of the letter, indicates that the Elder is actually John the Apostle.

What do we know about John? He was the son of Zebedee, the brother of James. These two brothers left a lucrative fishing business to become fishers of men. John belonged to the inner circle of Jesus' apostles (Matt 26:37), and was referred to as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20).

After Jesus returned to heaven, John was a key leader in the early church in Jerusalem. He later went to Ephesus in about 65-70 AD, where he labored among the churches until 95 AD. At that time, he was exiled to Patmos under the persecution of Emperor Domitian, where he wrote the Revelation of Jesus Christ. He then returned to Ephesus in 97 AD and died there around 100 AD, the last of the apostles to die.

He wrote this particular letter to a man he identifies as “the beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.” Who was Gaius? Several men are called “Gaius” in the Bible (1 Cor 1:14; Rom 16:23; Acts 19:29), and “Gaius” was a popular name in that day. It’s impossible to identify this precise Gaius, other than by what we find in this letter.

Verse 4 hints that Gaius owed his conversion to John. While that’s subject to debate, this certainly isn’t. Gaius had a very special relationship with John. John affirms his love for Gaius twice in the first verse alone. He calls him “well beloved” (AV), and then says, “whom I love in the truth.”

Agape is a key word for John. He tells us elsewhere that God is love (1 John 4:8). He informs us that we are to love, not in word, nor in tongue alone, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:18). Gaius demonstrated love in his life, and John testifies that he “loves Gaius in truth.”

Here’s the point. You can say that it is well with your soul when you are loved by those who love Jesus. John loved Jesus. And John loved Gaius, because Gaius loved Jesus and showed it. They both loved the same person, and therefore they loved each other.

When that’s true, when you know you are loved by those who love Jesus, you can say, “It is well with my soul.” How it encourages one’s soul to know that you are loved by those who love Jesus!

Secondly, you can say it is well with your soul when...

## **2. You are known for the truth (3a).**

Notice verse 3 again, “For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth.” It’s interesting that John says the brothers testified “to *your* truth.” Literally, it reads “to the truth of you.” It’s not that the truth originated with Gaius, for it certainly didn’t. It’s that he made the truth personal. *The* truth is *his* truth.

The KJV says that the “brethren came and testified of the truth *that is* in thee.” The truth is the objective, historical, message of Jesus Christ, His perfect life, His death for sinners, His triumphal resurrection. Gaius didn’t invent that message, but he did internalize it. He believed it and made it his own, so that it showed up in his life.

The NIV says the brothers testified to “your faithfulness to the truth.” The CSV says “testified to your fidelity to the truth.”

Truth is important to John, and we see the term throughout his writings. Truth was important to Gaius, people could see it in his life. The brothers who visited Gaius testified when they returned to John. “That man loves the truth and is faithful to it! He’s a man of integrity and makes sure nothing in his life distracts people from the truth!”

This is basic, but essential. If it is to be well with your soul, you must first believe the truth, specifically about Jesus and His atoning sacrifice, and then you must, by God’s grace, develop a reputation for the truth. When you become known for the truth, when that’s the testimony people are giving about you, then you can say, “It is well with my soul.”

Related to this, thirdly, you can say it is well with your soul when...

### **3. You walk in the truth wherever you go (3b-4).**

John uses the word “truth” a second time in verse 3. He says concerning Gaius, “For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, *as indeed you are walking in the truth.*” So not only was Gaius known for the truth that he personalized, but he walked in the truth. To Gaius, the truth was personal and public. Others could see the truth when they watched his life.

And this thrilled his spiritual mentor, John, as he declares in verse 4, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are *walking in the truth.*”

Turn that around and you’ll discover a sure way to be miserable. Learn truth but don’t live it. Specifically, learn the truth about Jesus, but don’t live in light of that truth. Talk it, but don’t walk it. Say you believe it, but don’t show that you believe it. Do that, and it will *not* be well with your soul.

Is this not why there are so many frustrated and joyless professing Christians in our country? They could learn a valuable lesson from Gaius. You too can say it is well with your soul, but you must *walk in the truth wherever you go.*

You ask, “So what does that look like in living color, to walk in the truth?”

Good question! In the very next verse John gives a specific example of what it looks like by identifying something tangible that Gaius did. And this reveals a fourth evidence. You can say it is well with your soul when...

### **4. You love and help missionaries (5-8).**

“Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, <sup>6</sup> who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. <sup>7</sup> For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. <sup>8</sup> Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.”

Apparently, the church where John was serving sent out some missionaries to take the good news of Jesus to unreached peoples. On their journey they spent some time in the church where Gaius was serving. They were “strangers” to Gaius, for he’d never met them before. But John commends Gaius for all he did to help them. What did he do? Perhaps he let them stay in his home, or shared food with them, or money. Whatever he did, these missionaries talked about it later to John and the sending church. And it’s one of the reasons John is now saying, “It goes well with your soul.”

It’s so easy to have tunnel vision, to think that God blesses us so we can be comfortable. Not Gaius. He loved and helped missionaries, and John commends him for it, and urges him to keep doing it, for when we help missionaries, we are “fellow workers for the truth.”

Some of the most joyful people I’ve known in life are those who love and help missionaries. They share their home, their food, their money, their time...with strangers who quickly are no longer strangers. And it’s a powerful evidence that it is well with their soul. As is this.

### **5. You are devoted to The Name, and to others who share that same devotion (7).**

Why did Gaius love and help the missionaries? Was it because he loved people? He likely did, but no, that’s not it. It’s because of something deeper than that, namely, that he loved *the name.*

Notice the middle of verse 7 again, “For they have gone out for the sake of *the name*.” There’s why the missionaries left their homes, and there’s why Gaius opened up his home. For the sake of *the name*. What name? The name that is above every name.

Does your soul feel dry, my friend? If so, start taking inventory right here. Are you living your life for *the sake of the name*? You can know that it is well with your soul when you are devoted, not to business ventures and social causes and success in athletics, though there’s a place for such pursuits. But they can’t bring lasting satisfaction to your soul. Only He can. So be devoted to The Name, and to others who share that same devotion.

This brings us to number six. You can say it is well with your soul when...

#### **6. You are devoted to the church, a churchman (6, 9).**

We don’t use the word “churchman” much these days, but it’s a good word. It’s a fitting word for Gaius, and for anyone else of whom it can be said, “It goes well with your soul.”

Gaius was devoted to Christ. It’s not surprising then that he was devoted to what is precious to Christ, namely His church. We see the word “church” twice in this section of the letter. In verse 6 John says that the brothers “testified to your love before *the church*.” And in verse 9 he says, “I have written something to *the church*.”

The point is so obvious we might miss it. Where it comes to the Christian life, where is the action happening? In the local church. We see missionaries sharing testimonies of God’s working. Where? Before the church. We see John writing a letter to help Christians mature, and where does he send it? To the church.

Gaius was devoted to the church where he lived and served. He was likewise devoted to helping strangers from a sister church. Where did he learn this devotion to the church? From John, who learned it from the Master Himself, as will any of whom it can truly be said, “It goes well with your soul.”

Here’s a seventh evidence. You can say it is well with your soul when...

#### **7. You are not self-seeking, and refuse to protect your own turf in the church (9).**

As we’ve seen, John commended Gaius and said it was well with his soul. Unfortunately, he couldn’t say the same thing about another church member by the name of Diotrephes.

Right after I became a pastor, I read the book, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, by Marshall Shelley. Here are the words I noticed as I began the first chapter:

Dragons, of course, are fictional beasts—monstrous reptiles with lion’s claws, a serpent’s tail, bat wings, and scaly skin. They exist only in the imagination.

But there are dragons of a different sort, decidedly real. In most cases, though not always, they do not intend to be sinister; in fact, they’re usually quite friendly. But their charm belies their power to destroy.

Within the church, they are often sincere, well-meaning saints, but they leave ulcers, strained relationships, and hard feelings in their wake. They don’t consider themselves difficult people. They don’t sit up nights thinking of ways to be nasty. Often they are pillars of the community—talented, strong personalities, deservedly respected—but for some reason, they undermine the ministry of the church. They are not naturally rebellious or pathological; they are loyal church

members, convinced they're serving God, but they wind up doing more harm than good...

Sightings of these dragons are all too common. As one veteran pastor says, "Anyone who's been in ministry more than an hour and a half knows the wrath of a dragon." Or, as Harry Ironside described it, "Wherever there's light, there's bugs."<sup>1</sup>

Diotrephes was a dragon whom John describes this way in verse 9. "I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority." The KJV says, "Who loveth to have the preeminence." In the NIV, "Who loves to be first."

Apparently, the arrival of the missionaries brought out the true colors of this dragon. "Support them? Why should we help these traveling strangers?! What will we get out of it? We have our own ministries to think about!" And so he dug in his heels, and guarded his turf, as though the church was "his turf" to guard.

While so much more could be said about Diotrephes, here's something we do not hear John saying. *It is well with your soul.* For it wasn't.

Brothers and sisters, you can say it is well with your soul when you are *not* self-seeking, and *refuse* to protect your own turf in the church, because you joyfully acknowledge that the church is *His*, not yours, nor mine.

This brings us to evidence number eight. It is well with your soul when...

## **8. You deal with problem-people in a Christ-honoring way (10).**

Like John did in verse 10, "So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church."

So apparently, John had written a letter to the church, urging them to do what Gaius had been doing, help the missionaries. But Diotrephes intercepted the letter, resisted John's counsel, and said in essence, "Old man, what right do you have to tell us what to do?! I'm the leader in this church!"

How did John respond to this turf-war-battle? He responded by writing another letter, this one directly to Gaius. Why Gaius? Because he knew this man's soul, and he wanted Gaius to know precisely what needed to happen with Diotrephes.

We can't let Diotrephes continue to control the church. When I come, says John, I will let the church know exactly what he's doing. I'll tell them how he's resisted our efforts to help, how he's resisted the missionaries, and how he's been kicking people out of the church without grounds. That's what we're going to do, Gaius. We're going to protect the church, and we're going to do it just like Jesus instructed us to do. And if he repents and changes, we'll rejoice! And if he doesn't, we'll put *him* out of the church.

You say, "That doesn't sound very loving."

Actually, it's just the opposite, and John knew it. And he knew Gaius would agree. To ignore a dragon in the church like Diotrephes is, frankly, *unloving*. If it is to be said that it is well with your soul, you must deal with problem people, but always in a Christ-honoring way, for their good, for the church's good, and most of all, for His glory.

Friends, there will always be problems and problem-people in churches. That's a given because we're all sinners. It's easy to ignore problems, or to leave when there are

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall Shelley, *Well Intentioned Dragons*, pp. 11-12.

problems. But John knew Gaius would do neither, which is why he could say, with confidence, “It goes well with your soul!”

This brings us to a ninth evidence. It is well with your soul when...

### **9. You value relationships with your brothers and sisters (13-14).**

I love the practicality of how John finishes his letter in verses 13-14. “I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. <sup>14</sup> I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.”

John said he had much to say to Gaius. About what? About ministry? Doctrine? Personal matters? He doesn’t say. What he does say is that he is looking forward to seeing him in person and talking *face to face*. If John was writing this today he’d say, “I’d rather not text this, nor email it. There are things we need to talk about face to face.”

This too is a wonderful evidence that it is well with your soul, when you have people who want to spend face-time with you, as John did with Gaius.

When you think about it, that’s not a given. There are people with whom it is very difficult to talk face to face. Like whom? Like people who aren’t good listeners, or people who just love to hear themselves talk, or people who know it all, or people who are abrasive. Concerning such people you don’t say, “I hope to see you soon.”

No, this is a powerful evidence of God’s grace in the life of Gaius, as in any person, when it can be said in all honesty, “I hope to see you soon, so we can talk face to face.”

One more evidence. You can say it is well with your soul when...

### **10. You greet your brothers and sisters by name (15).**

Don’t miss the final words of the letter in verse 15, “Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, *each by name*.”

Interesting word choice, *friends*. Not “brothers,” as we might expect, but *hoi philoi* (the Greek term). This is the only letter in the New Testament in which Christians are called friends, but it reflects a powerful reality that Jesus talked about in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

You’ve been doing that Gaius, laying down your life for your friends, including the new ones you’ve just made. Now keep doing it. Greet your friends.

And how? Greet your friends “each by name.” The RSV interprets this as meaning “every one of them.” The NEB says, “one by one.” I like how John Stott’s reminder, “The Good Shepherd calls His own sheep by name (Jn. 10:3); undershepherds and sheep should know each other by name also.”<sup>2</sup>

It’s easy to come to church and say hello to six or eight people you already know (and like). It’s another thing to purposefully greet everyone you see, *by name*. That takes effort and intentionality. And that’s a powerful evidence that it is well with your soul.

So this is why it could be said, in John’s assessment of Gaius, “It is well with your soul.” And this is why, in my assessment, the same can be said of you, dear church family. It is well with your soul when...

1. You are loved by those who love Jesus (1).
2. You are known for the truth (3a).
3. You walk in the truth wherever you go (3b-4).

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<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *The Letters of John*, p. 234.

4. You love and help missionaries (5-8).
5. You are devoted to The Name, and to others who share that same devotion (7).
6. You are devoted to the church, a churchman (6, 9).
7. You are not self-seeking, and refuse to protect your own turf in the church (9).
8. You deal with problem-people in a Christ-honoring way (10).
9. You value relationships with your brothers and sisters (13-14).
10. You greet your brothers and sisters by name (15).

Let's take time now to look back at some of the evidence from 2021 that leads to the conclusion that it is well with our soul at WBC. And then let's talk about some implications as we head into a new year.

### **Evidences from 2021 That It Is Well with Our Soul at WBC**

Let's go back to our theme verse, 3 John 2. "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well."

I see here a fitting summary of what's happening at WBC. We've seen an answer to these two prayer requests—*good health*, and that *all may go well with you*. And we've seen this one bottom line reality—*your soul is getting along well*.

Indeed, the Lord has protected us during this pandemic. Many churches have lost a lot of people and income due to COVID, but we've been spared. We've actually seen growth and financial abundance.

Our current membership is 157. Our last two new members classes have been the largest in three decades. In terms of the numbers, our weekly Sunday morning average attendance for the year 2021 was 99. In 2020 the number was 94. In 2019 the number was 101, in 2018 the number was 102. But of course, with COVID-19, the 2021 number is misleading, for this is not the only place we're meeting, as some of our brothers and sisters joined us from their homes, around their phones and tablets and televisions. More than ever, church isn't restricted to what's happening in this building at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday morning.

When it comes to, "that all may go well with you," we need to talk about our finances. Indeed, it's a joy to talk about our finances, for these numbers testify to the faithful generosity of our God. Because of the coronavirus, we stopped passing the offering plate in 2020. And what happened? The answer in 2020 was \$255,396. The answer in 2021 was \$280,986. That was the general fund income. Once again, the Lord didn't just provide for us in the past twelve months, but did so super-abundantly through the generosity of His people. Last year's GF income (\$255k) represented the highest in the history of WBC. The 2021 GF income exceeded 2020 by \$25,000.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For comparison purposes, here are some giving and attendance averages from previous years:

2021 - \$280,986 (weekly \$5403) – attendance AM 99 with others at home due to COVID?  
 2020 - 255,396 (weekly \$4911) – (attendance AM 94  
 2019 – 241,352 (weekly \$4641) – (attendance AM 101, PM 51, Wed PM 49)  
 2018 - 231,897 (weekly \$4459) – (attendance AM 102, PM 47, Wed PM 38)  
 2017 - \$234,425 (weekly \$4434) – (attendance AM 109, PM 58, Wed PM 44)  
 2016 - \$247,509 (weekly \$4828) – (120, 55, 47)  
 2015 - \$239,625 (weekly 4609) – (127, 60, 59)  
 2014 - \$228,253 (weekly 4367) – (124, 64, 78)  
 2013 - 226,507 (weekly 4355) –  
 2012 - 206,588 (weekly 3973) – (136, 73, 86)  
 2011 - 199,633 (weekly 3839) – (129, 69, 89)

And this all continues to happen during a pandemic. As did this. We were able to pay all of our bills on time, which includes fulfilling all of our missions' commitments each month. That's not insignificant. When the coronavirus hit, we had discussions at the leadership level about potential cut-backs to make sure we could fulfill our financial obligations. But week after week the Lord has provided for us beyond our needs.

This over-abundance enabled us to make some important facility improvements (thanks trustees for your work on leading the way in these projects!). In fact, we were able to utilize over \$70,000 for non-budgeted expenditures.

-New carpet on the main floor - \$55,587

-Carpet for youth room downstairs - \$3988

-New AV & Livestream equipment in the auditorium— over \$17,000

This brings me back to the bottom-line reality. *Your soul is getting along well.* I can't see your soul, but I can see the evidence that it is getting along well.

Allow me to explain more fully. Here are some of the evidences that stand out to me when I look at you, dear church family. To use John's word, *friends*, this is what I see, and it's all by His grace, and for His glory.

*You love Jesus, and are loved by those who love Jesus.*

Consider the new technology, for example. Why did we spend a lot of money on new sound and video equipment? It's because we love Jesus and want to do all we can to help others to come to know Him as we do. This new equipment enables us to communicate His word with people that most of us may never see personally.

This is why we do all that we do. We love Jesus, and want others to know and love Him. Here's an example of what that love has produced, again, by God's grace.

Last year we offered for the twenty-second year our Counseling and Discipleship training. It took place in the winter months on Monday evenings, and then went on the road to Grace Gospel Church in Huntington, W.Va. in September. Listen to this testimony by a pastor from Peebles who participated this past year:

CDT has been a great learning experience. Seminary simply did not prepare me for practical biblical counseling. Yet CDT offers a comprehensive launching pad into this critical area of knowledge to meet needs every Christian leader encounters with respect to counselling. CDT helped me to see that Christian counselling is more than a Christian that counsels. It pointed out, several key paradigms of counselling which absolutely contradict the biblical mandate. It also helped by distinguishing very real medical issues of which a biblical counselor should be aware. This course has been hugely helpful to me personally, and I trust God will allow it to help those I serve into the future. The reading alone is worth committing to this course, but I dare say, any person who gives themselves to this educational experience will come away enriched for it. --Dave H., Pastor

*You are known for the truth, and walk in it wherever you go.*

I see a vibrant, growing love for the truth at WBC. You want to hear it, apply it, and share it with others.

This past year we memorized God's Word together. Each month we worked on a different passage that we might be better equipped to preach the gospel to ourselves and others.

We certainly studied God's truth together, and in many ways. I'm thankful for a faithful team of Sunday School teachers, and youth workers, and Kids Club workers, and others, who open the Scriptures weekly. I'm thankful for the Preachers in Training who took us through the book of Galatians on Sunday evenings.

And what a joy it always is for me to open God's Word with you. On Sunday mornings, we resumed and eventually finished our series on Jesus' sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7. But we didn't just hear God's Word. We chewed on its implications in our community groups. Later we had a series in Judges, entitled, "Gideon: Ordinary Man, Extraordinary God." Then came a series in Ephesians 6, "The Christian and the Armor of God," followed by a series in 1 Timothy 2, "What Matters Most in the Church," as we contemplated the importance of prayer. In November we returned to the book of Acts and entered into the final leg of this important book. In December we finished the year with, "He's Coming! Isaiah Helps Us Prepare for Christmas."

On Wednesday evenings, we engaged in a doctrinal study called, "Union with Christ—Those Beloved Prepositions!" In December Pastor Matt did an Advent series to help us celebrate Christ's first coming.

*You love and help missionaries.*

I mentioned that the GF income in 2021 was right at \$281,000. Of that number, \$44,740 went to support our team of missionaries (including those we've sent out from WBC: Bob Litteral, Erin Wawro, Gary and Nancy Storm, and Jade Burley) and other ministries that help us fulfill the great commission (like Scioto Hills Camp, CRADLE, Tri-State Bible College, ACBC, and others). This means that about one-fifth of our income goes to minister elsewhere.

But that's not the whole story. On top of the GF income, there was nearly \$37,000 in special designated gifts (such as our harvest offering, \$3,075, which we gave to the Baptist Children's Home, and many other special gifts to help our missionaries).

Also, it's not uncommon for our members to be out ministering God's Word other places, filling the pulpits, making camp and Bible college presentations, representing CRADLE, and more, in other places beyond these four walls. We miss those of you who are gone ministering elsewhere, but we also rejoice at the privilege of helping other ministries.

In November I was privileged to go as your representative assist missionary, Tom Carr, in teaching church leaders in Nepal with Tri-M.

We love our missionaries at WBC. We were able to send a special gift of \$1,100 to provide one month's rent for the Mission House utilized by the Kincaids in Rome Italy, during the lean summer months.

In August we sent a love gift of \$2000 to Paul & Kathy Holritz to help with internet costs for students they are training in North Africa and the Middle East.

In December you authorized a special Christmas gift of \$100 just to express our love and appreciation for our retired missionaries.

*You are devoted to The Name, and to others who share that same devotion.*

This was seen in the fall when you voted to approve a pastoral internship opportunity for Michael Dow.

As we did last year when COVID hit, we did something special once again on Wednesday evenings during the summer months and into the fall. We used Zoom to interact with our missionaries and other ministry leaders.

Back in the winter, we learned that for the second year in a row, due to COVID, there would be no regular youth camp at Scioto Hills Camp. We love youth camp. So many lives have been transformed over the years at youth camp. No youth camp? So in May we allocated approximately \$9,500 to do our own week of youth camp. These funds made it possible for 26 campers and 6-8 counselors from WBC to have a week of camp at Scioto Hills.

From my perspective, friends, all this is evidence that you are devoted to The Name, and to others who share that same devotion.

*You are not self-seeking and refuse to protect your own turf.* I'm so grateful there's a wonderful spirit of humility in this church. I see it at the leadership level with our current combined board of six deacons, five trustees, and two pastors. It's a blessing to close the door as we do when we meet on the second Sunday afternoon of each month, and "speak the truth in love."

We saw this Spirit-produced refusal to protect our own turf when the former Hardware property went on the market. Since we've used this parking lot for years, it seemed wise to explore the possibility of purchasing this property. To say there were many opinions concerning this potential venture would be an understatement! But by God's grace, it brought me great joy to see how the Lord enabled us to put our opinions aside as we sought His mind together. We eventually made an offer to purchase the property, but in God's providence another party ended up buying the building. Thankfully, our new neighbors have granted us permission to continue to use their parking on Sundays, and we plan to express our appreciation by resurfacing their lot when the weather permits.

Most of us have heard stories about churches splitting over carpet choices. I'm so thankful to remind you that this was NOT our story in 2021, again, by God's grace. In addition to the carpet project, we were privileged to organize a decorating committee in 2021 (thanks Pastor Matt for overseeing this), and allocate an initial \$2500 for the committee to utilize in helping our facility reflect the excellence of our Savior. And our facility not only looks beautiful now, but it's ready to be used in gospel ministry as we move into the next chapter of our story.

Here's another example of God's provision. With the help of a donation from her family, the library was remodeled and is now the Katherine June Conley Hospitality and Learning Room.

*You deal with problems and even problem-people in a Christ-honoring way.*

There's no need to share specifics regarding this point, other than to say, "Praise God it's happening!" Did we have some problems, some misunderstandings, some hurt feelings in 2021? Indeed, we did. We are sinners doing life with other sinners. But thanks be to God for His indwelling Spirit who is helping us deal with our problems in a Christ-honoring way! There will always be a Diotrephes in the church, but thanks be to God when you see a John, and a Demetrius, and a Gaius too! And praise God, these Christ-honoring problem-solvers can be seen at WBC!

*You value relationships with your brothers and sisters. Indeed, you are learning to greet them by name.*

Speaking of names, this would be an appropriate place to mention the names of three long-standing members of WBC who finished their journey well in 2021. The Lord called home to heaven Dick Bays and June Conley (who were both in this church since the 1930s), and Jean Kohart (who was a member for many decades and passed away in her 90s).

Relationships matter to us, don't they? I love to watch what happens after our worship services end. So many of you refuse to go home! I look around and see people talking with each other, encouraging each other, at times, praying for each other.

Community groups are another vivid demonstration that you value each other. Even in COVID times we are seeing about half of our people (that's my estimate) carve out time to participate in these gatherings.

In the fall, some of you launched a weekly seniors ministry in the community center. I hear of our teens gathering on an informal yet regular basis in the homes of our youth leaders. These are just a few of the many powerful evidences that you value your relationships with your brothers and sisters.

And so, as I put all this evidence together, this is my conclusion. It is well with our soul at WBC, to the glory of the One who makes it so.

But this raises a question. To what end? That is, it is well with our soul *to what end?* Why has God blessed us so? In truth, to be able to say, "It is well with our soul," is a stewardship issue. This is a gift from the Lord. He has blessed us, so we can now share this blessing. How?

### **The Opportunities Continue at WBC in 2022**

In last year's state of the church address, I concluded with two challenges. The first, let's make it our top priority to *get to know Christ better in 2021*. And the second, let's make it a priority to *help others know Christ better in 2021*.

I want to reissue those same two challenges for 2022. And here are some ways we intend to help.

On Sunday mornings, we plan to return to our Acts series and finish Acts 1-28. As we work through this passage, we'll be seeing how the church continued to advance its mission in spite of great opposition from the world. Quite relevant, yes? I look forward to hearing how our community groups wrestle through the implications of this portion of God's Word.

On Wednesday evenings, Pastor Matt has organized a team of men to lead us through the timely message of Ecclesiastes. You don't want to miss this instruction and the valuable prayer time that follows.

And of course, our Sunday School classes, and children's and youth ministries, and summer camp and retreats at Scioto Hills, and many other ministry opportunities continue. There are Two:Two groups for the training of future leaders. There is a special prayer time for men called Pastor's Prayer Partners that meets every Sunday morning at 8:30. The Lord willing, there will be another ministry trip to Nepal in November.

And there's more! Friends, there are still plenty of people all around us in this community who need Jesus. There are also plenty who profess faith in Jesus who need to become part of a Christ-exalting, Word-centered, discipleship-emphasizing local church.

And the nations are still there, brothers and sisters. So let's keep loving our missionaries, and praying that the Lord of the harvest will send more servants, perhaps from our own number.

There is no such thing as a perfect church. The church where Gaius lived and served had problems, with problem people like a leader who wanted to control things. But it also had godly people who sought to please the Lord. And the Lord worked through this imperfect church.

May He be pleased to continue to make Himself known through WBC in 2022. And may we, by His grace, be able to say next year this time, should He tarry, "It continues to be well with our soul."

**Closing Song:** #493 "It Is Well with My Soul" (all four verses)

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning's message was entitled, "*State of the Church Address 2022: It Is Well with Our Soul.*" We considered 3 John verse 2 as an appropriate text to summarize what the Lord is accomplishing at WBC. Take time to read again the short epistle of 3 John. What stands out most to you from this brief letter?
2. In 3 John 2 the apostle John says to his friend Gaius, "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul." What does it mean to say that it is "well with your soul"? What are some evidences of a healthy soul (for a person and a church) that we see in the letter of 3 John? What are some challenges to a healthy soul?
3. What evidences of a "healthy soul" do you see the Lord producing at WBC? Take time as a group to share these, and then turn them into a prayer of thanksgiving.
4. What encourages you most about what the Lord accomplished at WBC in 2021? What excites you most as you anticipate what He may have in store in 2022?
5. Have two or three people share their testimonies of how God saved them. Nothing encourages the soul quite as much as reflecting on the stories of God's grace!