



## **Jason Smith - My Ebenezer**

From time to time it's good to look back and see how far God has brought us.

Like Samuel, who set up a stone and called it "Ebenezer," we too can say, *"Thus far the Lord has helped us."*

Each of us carries our own stories of God's faithfulness — moments when His strength met our weakness, His grace carried us through, and His love held steady when life felt uncertain.

As a community, we raise our "Ebenezers" together, declaring that through every trial and triumph, God has been our help. Looking back becomes an act of worship as we remember that His faithfulness in the past gives us confidence for the future.

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 7:12

***"Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'"***

## **Introduction**

As this year draws to a close, I think it's fitting for us to pause—not just to mark time, but to truly remember.

**I have a lot to be thankful for.**

It's easy to rush into a new year, full of goals and plans and fresh starts. But before we step forward, it's good for our souls to stop and look back.

Because when we look back with eyes of faith, we begin to see something we often miss in the moment— we see that through every high and every low, every surprise and every sorrow, God has been there.

Maybe this year, this month, or this week didn't look the way you hoped it would. Maybe it was full of unexpected challenges, or maybe it brought blessings you never saw coming.

Whatever this year has held, I believe this truth remains: *“Thus far the Lord has helped us.”* It's from this position of faith and trust that we can look confidently into the future.

We know that He will be with us, no matter what happens, our God is faithful and good.

### **1 Samuel 7:3-14**

**<sup>3</sup> And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”**

**<sup>4</sup> So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the Lord only.**

**<sup>5</sup> Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you.”**

**<sup>6</sup> So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the Lord and fasted on that day and said there, “We have sinned against the Lord.”**

**And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah. <sup>7</sup> Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel.**

**And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines.**

**<sup>8</sup> And the people of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines.”**

**<sup>9</sup> So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. And Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him.**

**<sup>10</sup> As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel.**

**<sup>11</sup> And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.**

**<sup>12</sup> Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen<sup>[a]</sup> and called its name Ebenezer;<sup>[b]</sup> for he said, “Till now the Lord has helped us.”**

**<sup>13</sup> So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.**

**<sup>14</sup> The cities that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory**

from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.

## 1. The Meaning of an Ebenezer

When we hear the word *Ebenezer*, most of us immediately picture Ebenezer Scrooge — a grumpy old man who hated Christmas until God broke through his life.

But biblically, “Ebenezer” means something far more beautiful. The word literally means **“stone of help.”**

Not a stone of achievement, or a stone of self-reliance... A stone of *help* — a confession that says, “I didn’t get here by myself.”

To understand why Samuel set up that stone in 1 Samuel 7, you have to remember the season Israel was emerging from. They weren’t at a spiritual high point.

They weren’t walking strongly and steadily. To the contrary, they had drifted from God. They’d faced defeat.

They’d lost the ark of the covenant. **(Symbol of God’s presence, power, and covenant).** They were beaten down, discouraged, and spiritually scattered.

But Scripture tells us that when Israel *returned to the Lord* (1 Samuel 7:3), God did what He always does for repentant, returning people — **He rescued them. He strengthened them. He fought for them.**

In fact, verse 10 says that God *thundered* against their enemies — not because Israel fought well, but because God is faithful.

And when the battle was over and the dust had settled, Samuel wanted Israel to remember one thing: **“Thus far the Lord has helped us.”** So Samuel sets up a stone.

It wasn’t magical or sacred in itself. It wasn’t an idol — it was a **marker**, a memorial, a reminder.

A physical symbol to point them back to a spiritual truth: **God brought us through this. God carried us here. God has helped us every step of the way.**

This is a theme throughout Scripture:

- **Genesis 28:18–19** — Jacob raises a stone after encountering God, saying, **“Surely the Lord is in this place.”**
- **Joshua 4:6–7** — Israel stacks stones after crossing the Jordan so future generations will ask, **“What do these stones mean?”** and remember God’s power.
- **Psalms 103:2** — **“Bless the Lord... and forget not all His benefits.”**
- **Lamentations 3:21–23** — **“This I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.”**
- **Deuteronomy 8:2** — **“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way.”**

All throughout Scripture, God invites His people to pause, remember, and mark the places where His faithfulness met their weakness.

And that’s what we are being invited to do today. At the end of a year — with all its highs and lows, all its battles, blessings, and burdens — we raise our own “Ebenezers.”

And when we raise our Ebenezer, we proclaim a truth that strengthens everything inside us: **If God has helped us “thus far,” then He will continue to help us from here.**

## 2. **Looking Back with Gratitude**

When we look back over a year, our minds rarely drift first to the blessings.

Most of us can list the disappointments without much effort. We remember what didn't work out... the phone call that broke our hearts... the prayer that didn't get answered the way we hoped... the plans that fell apart... the moments when life felt heavy or unfair.

Because pain leaves a deeper imprint than ease.

But Scripture invites us into a different way of remembering. Psalm 103:2 says, **“Bless the LORD... and forget not all His benefits.”**

Not because God is worried we'll forget Him, but because He knows *we tend to forget His goodness before we forget our troubles.*

At the end of a year, one of the holiest things we can do is to choose gratitude—to intentionally look for the fingerprints of God's faithfulness.

Not in a shallow, “Everything happens for a reason” kind of way, but in a deeply biblical way: **Gratitude is the act of naming God's presence in our story.**

Maybe this year God carried you through grief, giving you strength to take the next breath when you didn't think you could.

Maybe He softened your heart so you could forgive someone—or maybe He helped you forgive yourself.

Maybe He provided just what you needed at the exact moment you had no idea how things would work out. Maybe He protected you from something you didn't even know was coming.

Scripture is full of this rhythm of remembrance:

- Psalm 77:11–12 — “I will remember the deeds of the Lord... I will meditate on all Your works.”
- Deuteronomy 32:7 — “Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations.”
- Lamentations 3:21 — “This I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.”
- 1 Thessalonians 5:18 — “Give thanks in all circumstances,” not *for* everything, but *in* everything — because God is present in all of it.

Gratitude doesn't pretend the hard moments weren't hard. It doesn't deny the pain, minimize the loss, or gloss over the struggle.

No — **gratitude reframes the story**. It allows us to say: “God, even when I didn't see You in the moment... You were there the whole time.”

That's what it means to raise an Ebenezer. Not to proclaim, “Everything went great!” But to proclaim, “God was faithful, even when life wasn't easy.”

To say, “Even in the mess, even in the confusion, even in the unanswered questions — God was present, sustaining me, helping me, holding me.”

When we choose gratitude, we're not rewriting the past... we're recognizing the God who walked with us through it. And when we recognize His help, our hearts are strengthened for whatever comes next.

### 3. **Looking Ahead with Confidence**

You know... when Samuel said, ***“Thus far the Lord has helped us,”*** he wasn't only drawing a line backward. He was drawing a line *forward*.

He was saying, “If God has been faithful up to this point, then I can trust Him with what's coming next.” And that's the posture I want us to carry into the new year.

Not fear.

Not anxiety.

Not this sense that the unknown is bigger than God.

But faith.

Because listen—if God has helped you thus far, He's not about to disappear now. The same grace that sustained you this year will sustain you in the next.

**The same love that carried you through the valley will meet you on the mountaintop.** The same mercy that picked you up when you fell will lead you into new growth, new peace, new joy.

We don't face the future hoping it all works out— we face the future trusting that the One who has carried us *this far* is the same One who goes ahead of us.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And because He has been faithful *behind us*, we can walk with confidence into what's *before us*.

So before we close, I want to invite you to take a quiet moment. Think back over this past year.

Where have you seen God's hand? Where did His grace surprise you? Where did He carry you through something you weren't sure you could survive?

Maybe you even want to picture setting down a stone in that place. You could whisper, "This is my Ebenezer. Thus far the Lord has helped me."

And maybe, as a church family, we could say it together: **"Thus far the Lord has helped us."**

Because He has.

## **Conclusion**

When we remember God's faithfulness, we find the courage to keep walking.

When we raise our "Ebenezer," we're not just marking what's behind us—we're worshipping the God who walks beside us.

So as we step into a new year, let's do it with hearts full of gratitude and faith. Let's remember the stories of His help, the evidence of His presence, the ways His love has shaped us.

And when next year's challenges come—and they will—we'll look back and say again: *"Thus far the Lord has helped us."*

Because the God who was faithful this year will be faithful still...

## **Benediction**

As you go from this place, may you carry with you the memory of God's faithfulness this past year — the moments of mercy, the quiet provisions, the strength you didn't know you had.

May gratitude steady your heart, and hope anchor your soul in the days to come. And may you walk confidently into the new year knowing this truth: **“Thus far the Lord has helped you — and He will not stop now.”**

Go in peace, and go in the faithfulness of God.

**Let's pray together.**