

LOOKING BACK ON 2021

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Scripture Reference: 2 Timothy 2:10–2:16

Please stand for the reading of God's word. Good evening Doxa family. We're going to read second Timothy chapter two, verse 10 through 16. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. With eternal glory, the saying is trustworthy for if we have died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful for, he cannot deny himself, remind them of these things and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to as one approved a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth, but avoid irreverent babble for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness. This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Hi Doxa. How are we? We doing all right. All right. Uh, this is one of my favorite Sundays of the entire, uh, liturgical calendar year. Uh, today we get to do something that, uh, I've been looking forward to for a long time. And it's one, like I said, one of my favorite Sundays, we're gonna do something that many people inside and outside of church do this time of year, but we're gonna do it with a particular flavor in a particular way, because we are God's people. And that is to reflect and to remember, and to look back. And so today we are going to, uh, recount and remember a tiny sliver of the unreal and massive kindness that God has shown to Doxa over this past year, we're gonna look over our shoulder and let the many ways that God showed up helped move us towards gratitude, towards joy, and honestly, just a deeper awareness of who he is.

And I think that piece is important when we celebrate and look back, it's a, it's a theological thing that we're doing together. It's not just, uh, for the purposes of celebration. Now, you may not

know this, adjust that just slightly. Now you may not know this, but God is a God of joy. That's right. God is a God of celebration. In fact, he invented celebration, man, didn't look around on a Wednesday and say, Hey, things are going pretty good. Let's make a fancier meal than we normally would or drink more wine than we normally would, or have more people over than we normally would. That all that we know about celebration comes from God because he is a God of joy celebration is something he gave us as a gift. In fact, if you go back far enough, everything that we know about feast and parties and holidays and celebration starts with God and his design.

When he looked over mankind and eternity passed and said, I want this to be a part of how people live and operate. It's important to God that you know, that he is a God of celebration. That's important for us, especially you've been in church for a long time. Uh, God is often coined the cosmic killjoy, and that's actually not who he is. He is not the cop that breaks up the party. He's actually the host that invites you to the party in the first place. And maybe for some of us, especially if we've been around church for a long time, we know God has instructions and some rules and some designs, right? Designs for our life designs, for our relationships designs for our celebrations, maybe along the way, we've forgotten that just because he has guardrails for our life. We've lost sight. That God's word is not meant to make us a solemn bunch of rule-following bored out of our mind party-poopers.

But in fact, his word is actually designed to maximize our joy, to turn up our joy, not turn it down to maximize the fullness of the life that we experience, not strip it back. So today, Doxa, I want us to celebrate. I want to walk through this passage of scripture and, uh, set the stage just to remind us a bit on why remembering is essential in the life of the Christian, because we historically as God's people, I don't just mean Doxa, but just the church, capital C uh, sometimes we're pretty awful at this. There's a reason why there's 55 times in the scriptures that God says some version of. Please remember, don't forget this. Right? In fact, I would go so far to say that all of discipleship really comes down to this, that you're fed by your practices, that you're formed by your relationships, but that you fight your battles in your discipleship.

By remembering that remembering is an important weapon and defense that we have. So I'm gonna quickly walk through one of those many times in scripture when God tells us to remember, we'll be walking through second Timothy two together, and then I'm just gonna brag on God for a bit. I'm gonna report back to you. Some of the incredible ways that God flexed this year, some of the ways that God in his sovereignty said, I'm going to move in the people of Doxa. I I'm gonna show up in ways that they do not expect because Doxa belongs to him and he wants to bring the people of Doxa into their calling and life purpose. After I spent some time bragging on God, you're gonna all get a chance to do that as well. Uh, if you've been a little reflective or a little contemplative of these last couple of weeks already, again, a natural rhythm, maybe you've already put some time into thinking about some of the ways that God has done this stuff.

And we want to hear that we're gonna have a chance. Some of our, uh, staff and elders are gonna run mics around the room and you'll have a chance to publicly talk about what you saw God do. I love that cuz those stories are not just yours, right? They're a way to worship God by retelling his wondrous works. So be thinking about that. If you'd like to share something in the gathering here in a little bit, you're gonna have a chance. Again, we look back every year we take at least one Sunday to do this because you're fed by your practices. You're formed by your relationships and you fight your battles by remembering let's pray together.

Jesus, uh, I'm just mindful of the fact that we could spend hours and hours and hours talking about the many ways that you have shown up the ways you have saved, the ways you have provided the ways you have healed, the way, the ways you have spoken. So many of our people in this last year, they just needed a word from you. They needed direction from you and you did that. And so this is such a, such a blessing. It's such an opportunity. I don't want this to be lost on us, that we get to look back with gratitude and joy and recall these things to help us do that. Well, help us do that in a way that glorifies you, you and especially for those that are feeling tired and apathetic and honestly worn down. I pray that as we recall these things that you would, uh, minister to them, that you would warm their hearts up, that you would stir in them, perhaps for those that have been walking with you a long time and lost some of that passion that you would reignite in them, some fire and passion for you. We pray these things for your glory. Amen.

All right, we're gonna be in second Timothy two. So go ahead and turn there. Starting in verse 10, it says, therefore, this is Paul speaking. I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. So here's what we know. Paul seems to think that we should expect hard times that we're not surprised when challenge or opposition comes to us in this life. And we are hopeful in the midst of that because not only does God say that there will be loss in challenge and hardship, but that he's actually going to use it for good and not the kind of good that quickly, but the kind of good that lasts for a really, really long time that we fight and push back on the darkness in this life.

Knowing that one day the pushing stops that the fight resolves and that war is replaced with peace eternal peace. That is, uh, Sally Lloyd Jones says for those of you, the parents in the room to have the Jesus story book, Bible, that we will have eternal peace that she says all the sad things become untrue. I love that phrase with all my being Paul says in this next verse, he says, here is a trustworthy saying, you know, for all of the writing that Paul does, this is a pretty significant moment that he's calling us out saying you can bank on what I'm about to say, here is a trustworthy saying, if we died with him, we will also live with him, right? This is the picture of baptism. We got to baptize a lot of folks in that baptismal this year. We'll talk more about that in a moment, but that's the picture of baptism. You go down underwater, joining Christ in his death, and then you come up out of the water, joining Christ in his life. So if you in this room have trusted Christ. If you are confident that Christ died, you should be confident that his resurrection power will work for you too.

Now, maybe you're new to the faith or you don't consider yourself a Christian. You should know that we Christians believe that we are born into this world in the family of Adam, the original man, and in his family, we inherit sin and rebellion and ultimately death. But that Jesus, invites us to enter into his family by his sacrifice that we get to actually shed and ultimately leave the life of Adam, the life and death of Adam. And instead walk in the life and death of Jesus Christ that Adam gives us a heart of stone that resists God and tries to pretend despite mountains of evidence to contrary that we are the center of the universe that we control our destiny, that the most important thing in our lives is to be true to our broken selves. That's Adam's message. And then Jesus comes along and gives us a heart of flesh that embraces God that adores God, that submits to God, that enjoys God, that receives from all of the things that the world cannot possibly provide.

So if we place our faith in Jesus Christ, as many of us here in this room have done, Jesus says that when we die, we die the way he did and not Adam, we die in such a way that our bodies cease to live in our souls. The very essence of we are goes on. We're given a new body. We go back to the original design, the original blueprint, and we live forever in those new bodies that hear me, church cannot age, deteriorate, get COVID or cancer or break down or turn against us. Amen. Amen. Every Christian in this room has died with Christ in according to God's perfect word. And you will absolutely positively beyond the shadow of a doubt. Live with Christ in his resurrection and real talk. I know there are moments and times when that feels far off, feels like it can't be true or feels like God out has maybe changed his mind about you.

I'm here to say that is not the case. Paul continues. If we endure, we will also reign with him. Now, some of you read that and go, okay, there it is. I was waiting for the shoe to drop. Here comes the conditions right now, this isn't meant to create anxious doubting of your salvation. This is Paul's way reminding us that sometimes things are not as they seem. The Bible has lots of examples of this people who talk the talk, but don't ultimately submit their lives to Jesus Christ. And if you've been in church longer than five minutes, you know that that is a, uh, pretty common thing a lot. Not that the world should be expected to love everything that we're about, but a lot of the world's problem with the church is that there are a lot of people who talk the talk and don't live this stuff out just because somebody calls themselves a little Christ does not mean that they are just because somebody has made it back to a church address over and over and over and over again does not mean that they belong to God.

Paul continues and says, if we disowned him other translations, say, deny or turn our backs on him. He will also disown us. Now this phrase is pretty jarring, right? This verse speaks to what we as Christians believe that salvation being saved from death and ultimately paying the punishment, uh, for our rebellion against a perfect God is a free gift. And God always initiates that. He loves us first. That's why the Bible says we are spiritually dead, uh, dead people don't do a lot to help themselves out. And you and I before Christ were spiritually dead. But in Christ, we do have a responsibility to respond that God provides an opportunity for us all to receive his grace, that everybody gets a shot. And that those that decide ultimately to pay the price for this, their sins themselves are rejecting Jesus' his offer to pay for their sin.

So that's what it means when it says, if we disown him, he will also disown us. It's his desire that we would all be saved. Now here's one of the many outcomes from that following Jesus Christ. Uh, it is personal, but it is not private. Do you know what I mean? When I say that? It is personal, but not private. It is impossible for anyone to truly encounter Jesus Christ to not experience some form of transformation. And that, that transformation always ends up bubbling out and bubbling over and spilling out of us. And his point here is that if our life with Christ concealed and buried, it is possible that we don't really know the life of Christ, the love of Christ, the grace of Christ. It is a natural and inevitable outcome that you would share your faith with others. If you are born again.

And that goes for all the introverts here and on the east side, it's like 90 10, right? We got a lot of introverts and that's okay. Is that going to look different for people is sharing your faith, going to look different for folks with different personalities and different gifts and different strengths and different interests. Yes, of course, but all of us here are witnesses. Every single last person here who claims to know follow and love Christ is a witness. And all of us are given opportunities to share in small ways what God is up to in us. Listen, I want you to hear me. There is a truly

special joy and amazing experience that happens when you recognize that God is using your life as good or messy as it may be in that moment to show someone else who he is. That's what it means to be a witness.

Some of you have been a Christian a really, really long time, and you've never really shared your faith. And I'm telling you that you're missing out on some thing really amazing. So maybe 2022 is gonna be a year to turn a corner here. We'll talk more about ways for us to remember, and then let that spill out into witness, uh, in a couple of messages that are coming up here early in the year. So our faith is personal, but it is not private. God works in us and through us. And even though these words have been hijacked by a number of fools, they are true when they say that we are blessed to be a blessing. That's true. That's biblical.

Paul continues. He says, if we are faithless, he remains faithful for, he cannot disown himself. So just in case we think that all this is by our works. Paul always holding God's sovereignty and our responsibility intention as the Bible does, he reminds us again, a trustworthy saying, he's saying that God's faithfulness is the anchor of our soul. It is our raft of rescue in the drowning waters of life. That he is the one who accomplishes it. And that we can't have that any other way. He won't go back on what he said. He's not changing his mind about you and I, because he is steadfast and truthful to the very essence of who he is. Do you ever see, uh, on occasion in those reports of someone who decides to keep a wild animal as a pet, right? And then of course that goes sideways, right?

And the article always says something like, um, you know, unexpectedly or in a turn of events. Uh, I don't think that's a turn of events. I think everybody, I think the kid down the street, every friend and family member that person had, they all knew that keeping a Wolf in your backyard was probably a bad idea. And yet, uh, we act surprised why is that? What's because that animal, that wild animal is being true to the essence of who it is. It's the very nature of what it is, right? And in a similar way, God's nature is unchanging. God is not going to deviate from his nature. If his nature is loving and gracious, that's not going to change. Can I tell you one of the best things about being a Christian specifically about belonging to the one, true God is that he is fantastically consistent.

He is fantastically consistent. He is so steady. And in some ways predictable, now don't misunderstand me. God works in ways that surprise us all the time. That's not what I mean, but he is true to his character. The things that he deeply cares about are very consistent and very predictable. He cares a lot about his glory, that all of creation would point back to him and know who he is and be sustained by him. He cares a lot about his kids, you and I, humanity being the pinnacle of his creation. He is incredibly consistent in making sure that his glory is revealed in all things. Listen, you can bank on the fact. I do not know every life situation in this room, but you can bank on the fact, no matter how good life is right now or how hard life is right now, God is going to get his glory.

It's predictable. You can bank on that. And as a Christian, one of the greatest privileges is to know that God is that kind of consistent. He's not fickle or changing his mind or feeling proud of you one day and disgusted by you. The next God doesn't have mood swings. He's not an, an emotional roller coaster. He is consistent in his love and power in the morning. And in the evening, he is consistent in his love and power in the summer and the winter. He's consistent in his love and power in your younger years. And your final days, he's constant as the book of

James says every good and perfect gift is from above. Coming down from the father of heavenly lights does not change like shifting shadows. A lot of stuff in our life changes like shifting shadows. You heard me say this, uh, last week, if you were here, sociologists have said that the year 2017 had more in common culturally with the mid 1970s than it did 2021. What does that mean? That means culture has changed more in the last four years than it did the last 40 plus.

It's crazy to think about that. Lots have lots has changed, but God's activity in his character. They're inseparable. He does not go back on himself. He is not a mostly gracious God with a little bit of a temper, right? Paul says, we can't forget this one. I'll tell you one of the things, uh, that happens in our house is a bit of a confession. When I lose my cool with my kids. Usually the way it plays out is they let me know, um, which is good. And then I apologize and we talk, talk it out. And I try to own the things that I have done that are not helpful. And you know, they say, you know, I forgive you daddy or whatever, but it usually ends with me saying something to the effect of, Hey, um, dad was frustrated, but God does not get frustrated with you. I want them to know early on and repeat, uh, in their minds. The ways in which I fall short is not an accurate reflection of who the father is.

God cannot disown himself, cannot change. Why does it matter? Because he is fully satisfied and pleased with you today. If you are in Christ because of Christ's work on the cross. And that is not going to change because we, as Christians can have real peace, knowing that God understands our weakness. He knows that we are all a work in progress. In fact, he promises to see us through all the way to the very end whereby your death or Christ return. We will be perfect and free of that weakness. Do you ever just think about the fact that you are in God's hands and that cannot change? Isn't that great news? Isn't it good to know that you can't even mess it up, cuz it's not dependent on you. Your broken family can't mess it up your career, making a hard left turn. Can't mess it up. You can't mess it up. God's hands are consistent. His heart is consistent. That is something we're celebrating. It's one of the many reasons why he's worthy of our praise.

I'm gonna close with these last few verses here. Verse 14. Paul says, keep reminding God's people of these things, warn them before God against quarreling, about words, it's of no value. It only ruins those who listen, do your best to present yourself to God. As one approved a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth, avoid godless chatter. Because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. I love, uh, Eugene Peterson's paraphrase this passage. I feel like it just, it does something for me. It says, he says, repeat these basic essentials over and over to God's people warn them against pious nitpicking, which chips away the faith. It just wears everyone out. Can I get an Amen? Has anybody felt worn down last year from a bunch of pious nitpicking. Yeah. Eugene continues. He says steer clear of pious talk. That is only talk, words are not mere words. You know, if they're not backed by a godly life, they accumulate as poison in the soul.

So Paul seems to think that church, what we're doing right now is a part of that is not just for preaching singing, watching your kids, training them equipping. He would say that part of what it means to be at church is to come together and remember to remind each other of what's true because we're not great at that. That's the bad news. The good news is is that you and I are, are in the same boat. In fact, it's a pretty big boat cuz it's true of all of the saints from past present and future one big forgetful boat. He says, keep reminding God's people of these things. And I can promise you that culture will continue to turn left and right, the economy will continue to turn

left and right, many parts of our lives will vacillate, but here in the church and I can speak for us at Doxa that we're gonna continue to preach and remind us all of the unchanging gospel that Jesus Christ is the only Messiah.

The only salvation, the only name by which we are saved. And he's the only one that's worthy of our worship. We all need help remembering all of us. So we're going to remind each other through this pulpit and the songs that we sing and the prayers that we pray and the programs we offer and the training that we offer. We're gonna remember together. One final thought here, Paul Warren against quarreling with words and godless chatter. And maybe for you, if you're super honest, when you look back on 2021, you would say there's a fair amount of that stuff. The Bible teaches us that words matter words, guide us. They shape us. This is why it's easy to forget the basics of, the faith. When you're caught up having arguments about secondary issues. We saw plenty of that in the last year, we can spend all of our best energy fighting over things that are ultimately not even related to salvation. This is why if you spend 98% of your time talking about the chaos at work and the chaos at home and the chaos on the news or the chaos on your favorite sports team, any of it, life feels chaotic.

I had the thought, if you took all the words that you said in 2021 and put them in buckets based on category, it'd be really interesting to see how those buckets turned out on the flip side. This is why memorizing scripture, writing God's word on your hearts. Talking out loud with others, about the ways that we have seen God be faithful. All of this shapes us. It always helps our hearts and our minds remembering, celebrating this stuff really matters because whatever lives in your mouth lives in our hearts. Now you might say, okay, well, hold on a second Bible says from the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. Isn't it heart first. And then mouth. I'll be honest. I think it's kind of chicken or egg. I think it goes back and forth, but here's what else I know really hard to control your mouth.

I think it's harder to control your heart. So if you're gonna apply some pressure, if you're gonna exert some effort in 2022, let's pay attention to what kinds of things come out of our mouth. James said that your tongue is like a rudder of the ship and it can directly influence the, the direction and trajectory of your life. So Paul is saying here, let's remember if we talk about good and hopeful things, it will probably realize that our life becomes more good and hopeful church. Here's your money back guarantee. If you make a practice of talking with trusted people about the kingdom, talking about what you really feel and applying God's words to your own life, actually showing up to community. I mean, some of you that's the biggest and best thing you can do in 2022 is to get back to showing up. And I mean that in every possible way, you can apply it, but showing up to your community and celebrating them and letting them celebrate you.

It is extremely likely if you do that, that some of the peace, the Bible promises us, that we are all desperate for will actually show up in your life. Maybe you'd say, pastor, I don't have a spot to do that. Uh, you know, I don't, I don't care if you call 'em new year's resolutions or goals or objectives or initiatives, you brand it however you want to, but you have got to put that at the top of the priority list that is so much more important than dropping five pounds. So much more important. I mean, take care of your body by all means. But if you do not have a safe space to talk about what's really going on in your life, you absolutely cannot flourish as a Christian. If that's you hear me, don't leave the building today. Don't put it off. Don't say I'll get to that next week or yeah, that's a good idea.

Maybe sometime before you leave the building today, make a quick stop at the connect desk on your way out, Alison and our staff will be there and she will help you out. Let you know about all the options we have for you to find spaces like that. So we have mountains of things to celebrate as a church Doxa, uh, even after a tough year. Uh, if you would give me a few moments, I want to tell you about some of the stories and the numbers that represent real lives changed real people, real discipleship in the everyday stuff of life. So we've got a few different categories here. First up. We're gonna talk about new servants. Okay. Now by way reminder, this is a celebration. So I want us to celebrate this stuff. Well, in other words, staring at me, blankly is not an appropriate celebration. We have seen a bunch of people respond to God's invitation this year to the joy of serving and stepping in one of our teams. We had 14 new servants show up in kids' ministry. Yeah.

We have five, five new deacons. We had one elder confirmed our church planning resident. Ken Flower was confirmed as an elder. Yep. We have two elder candidates, uh, Eddie Williams and Rusty Neraki who was up here during the scripture reading. Uh, he oversees the deaf community. Yeah. And we hired a, a lead teaching pastor, which is pretty awesome church. We're not even able to function in, in any form or fashion without these people stepping into the gaps. Right? I mean, most of us would say, yeah, the church, uh, really should pay attention to. And kids are the church of today and leaders of tomorrow. We would agree with all of that stuff. But these people are stepping in and really doing something about it, especially to all those who jumped in on kids this year. Thank you. On behalf of the elders of this church, thank you for doing that.

We do believe those kids lives and their discipleship matters. So thank you for making a difference. It's great. Our, our deacons have taken on responsibility because they believe that the local church is God's rescue plan. God does not have a plan B. He doesn't need one and as messy and ridiculous as the local church can be at times the local church exalting Jesus Christ is God's rescue plan for the world. So for all those that became deacons, all five of you. If you're here in the room, God bless you. Thank you for stepping into that. You know, our elder candidates are taking on a high calling and responsibility to care for the flock and govern the church as God leads us. And lastly, uh, I wanna say, you know, we brought Eddie William onto our staff October, what month? August, August. I wanna brag on, on Eddie just for a moment. Uh, he has been such a refreshing addition to our team. I mean, working with him, uh, here publicly and sharing Sundays, but even just behind closed doors and planning and praying for all of you, uh, I could tell you that he absolutely desires to faithfully preach God's word and to be a part of the team here. And I think Doxa is way better for having him here, uh, and he's energized about doc's future and that is energizing to the rest of us and encouraging. So yeah. Thank you. Thank you, Eddie.

All right. Category number two, we talked about new servants. Talk about new relationships. Uh, we saw 52 people get plugged into a missional community. Yep. We saw 18 people step and become a leader in training for a missional community. What we, what we call apprentices. And so, yeah, let's thank God for them. I already mentioned this, but we as Christians, we need each other and we need to create spaces where people can do the things that we've talked about in this message. So 52 people jumping into community, that's not a small thing. And for all those people who would say, you know, I don't think it's good when the church talks numbers. Uh I'm I think you're wrong. I'll just say it plainly <laugh> numbers represent people and souls. People love by God. So it matters. It matters a lot. It's not the only thing we use to measure godliness or the

success of a church, but absolutely we will continue to pay attention to, to, to numbers because of the people that those numbers represent.

So not only that, you've got 18 of these apprentices and they're making the sacrifice of time and not just to go to a community and receive, but to truly give back and to help create that space for others. And that is beautiful. So let's celebrate that. Yeah. All right. Next category. One of my favorites, new mission is a variety of ways that Doxa showed up into a space and made it better. Made it look more like the kingdom. Uh, we saw a variety of ways. This played out. We had 160 holiday gift cards come in, valued over four grand, uh, for those in need we had, yeah, we can clap that.

Let me, let me, uh, read off the rest of these and we'll do one big clap at the end. Okay. All right. So we had 60 active care community participants. These are people that are specifically serving families that are fostering children or trying to adopt children. And so they came around them in, in their community and cooked meals and provided and ran errands and did all these things to support these families. And that is awesome. I love that we had 46 Thanksgiving baskets delivered for the foster care system. We knocked it outta the park at Thanksgiving, 44 Easter baskets for the foster care system and almost a quarter million dollars given to church planting. All right, let's celebrate that.

Nice job. So thank you. We, we thank God for that. And we thank our members because you were the ones that helped make that possible. So thank you for contributing to that. You know, one of my favorite things about Doxa is that I consistently hear people say things like, uh, I really just want to live out the stuff that I believe, right. And I love the heart of that. That is the antidote to the reputation of hypocrisy that the world sees in the church. It's the antidote to the boredom and apathy. You feel in your own spiritual life, all of the best and most exciting parts of your walk with Jesus are on the other side of obedience, all of the best parts you can't microwave. It, there's no shortcuts, all of the best parts of your Christian walk are on the other side of obedience.

And so when I see this kind of stuff, it just, you yeah. Fires me up. All right, next category, new learning. You know, we believe that God's word should permeate and inform every single thing that we do as a church. And that's why if you come to a gathering, you're gonna see and hear, uh, God's word all over it. We're gonna sing God's word. We're gonna pray. God's word. We're gonna open up the Bible and walk through together, or maybe tackle a topic that's beneficial for all of us in our walk with Jesus, but you're gonna hear the Bible over and over and over and over and over again. And God has been so gracious to us to give us his word. It's such a gift. He didn't have to do that, but he speaks directly to us through his word and through his spirit, we've got some great sermon series, uh, lined up for 2022.

You're gonna hear more about that next weekend. So make sure you come back for that. But looking back over this last year, we had seven sermon series. We walked through four books of the Bible and second Peter, Luke Colossians and John, we had our values series setting up a new chapter for Doxa. As we looked to the future, we had three spiritual formation Sundays, because again, you're fed by your practices. You're formed by your relationships and you fight your battles by remembering. So let's thank God for the preachers and the teachers and the artists and the musicians and the counselors that made God's word clear to the people of Doxa this year. Let's thank God for that.

All right. Last one last category, uh, in many ways is the most meaningful to me personally. You see, from the very beginning, Satan has been a deceiver and a bully and has sought to bring destruction to God creation, including you and I. He is the prince of darkness and angel of death, but Jesus Christ is the source of all good and life in the universe. Jesus participated with the Trinity and creating the world. I think sometimes, you know, we forget that. It's why when you look back at Genesis, it's the collective pronouns of we shall make man in our image, Jesus participated in creating life. And so when we, as a church, see new life show up new life appear. We know that God is at work and he has done that in several ways at Doxa. This last year, he's done this work of creating new life, physically and spiritually.

I mean, physically, he brought new life through many of our families, uh, growing by one or two over the last year, we saw eight new sets of parents, uh, commissioned, which is such a beautiful little ceremony that we have here at Doxa. We saw two foster placements, saw a whole lot of babies COVID is good for babies. Uh, yeah, actually not to go off a total side trail here. I saw stats showing that the national birth rate went down quite a bit in the last two years. I do not believe that is true of Doxa. So, uh, Spiritually, God has brought new life through salvation, through the incredible miracle of somebody crossing from darkness to light from being lost, being found. Yeah, so we saw this last year, we saw 23 baptisms. That's the second highest we've ever seen, which is pretty crazy when you consider the last year.

So we thank God for that. And, and this is all really hardly scratching the surface. I mean, I could stand up here for a long time and tell endless stories of how God saved and moved and healed and heard our prayers. Uh, but I wanna give you all a chance. If you are a parent, you can go grab your kids. I'm gonna pray for us. We'll take communion together. And then we're gonna just spend a little bit of time hearing from all of you, what God has done. Love this for our church. Love this.

Jesus. Thank you. Thank you for the many people that these numbers represent. Thank you. That you are so gracious and patient. When we forget, we may be, uh, in a season of celebration right now, and honestly have just kind of distanced ourself from the memories of you bringing us through the hard stuff, or maybe we're in hard stuff right now. And we need to remember the fact that you have done this with us before that you have brought us through, you have carried us through, you have sustained us.

So please help us. I pray that we would be a, uh, mindful people that are constantly looking for ways to tell each other in the world about what you've done. It is all by grace. Even when we forget you don't love us any less, you don't belong to you any less, but you're just kind and gracious to us. We are so excited to see what you have in store for us this next year. Truly believing that the best is to come for Doxa that you have so many plans. We want to seek you and ask for your direction and understand what your plans are and get behind that, not come up with our own crazy ideas and then ask you to rubber stamp it. We want to hear your voice. So please continue to lead us and guide us. Thank you so much for the people of Doxa, thank you for our members. Our members have shown up this last year in huge, significant ways. It's because they love you. It's because they know they're not crazy for giving what they have to things that last things that really matter that most of the stuff that attacks us and comes at us in this life will ultimately end and go away. But you and your kingdom go on and on to help us, help us focus our minds and hearts on these things to pray these things for your glory. Amen.