



**Embracing "Gladitude" in 2024**  
**By Pastor Bill Alderson - 12/31/2023**  
**Philippians 2:1-4 (ESV)**

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**Main Verse: Philippians 2:1-4 (ESV)**

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.<sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

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**[INTRODUCTION]**

Welcome, everyone, and Happy New Year! As we step into the fourth year of the 2020s, it's a moment to reflect. The year 2023 was a tapestry of both significant challenges and remarkable celebrations. Standing here on the eve of 2024, let's take a moment to appreciate the entire spectrum of our experiences over the past year and how they've shaped us and our community.

**Challenges of 2023:**

- **Healthcare and Public Health:**  
Even though we've moved beyond the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, our healthcare systems still face numerous challenges, including dealing with the pandemic's long-term effects and other emerging health concerns.
- **Economic Strains:**  
This year brought continued economic challenges, with inflation and market volatility impacting individuals and families worldwide, testing our resilience and adaptability.
- **Social and Political Divides:**  
Heightened social and political tensions have marked this year, with divisions evident both globally and within our local communities.
- **Depravity on Display:**  
2023 has also starkly reminded us of the moral and spiritual challenges in our society, with instances of human depravity challenging our values and beliefs.

**Celebrations of 2023:**

While it's easy to get caught up in the challenges, as Christians, we must remember that sin has been dividing our world since the fall in the Garden. Yet, it's in these shadows that the light of our celebrations shines even brighter. We are reminded of the profound truth of our faith: we have a good Savior who has triumphantly overcome our struggles!



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This realization brings us to a place of joy and gratitude as we reflect on the past year's blessings and celebrations. Despite the fractures caused by sin, our Lord's redemptive work continues to bring hope, healing, and unity, demonstrating His unending love and grace.

### **[WORKING ON MORE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES HERE]**

- **Bold Stances for Faith:** In 2023, we saw men and women across the country take bold stances for what is right and holy, inspiring us with their courage and faith.
- **Community Resilience:** Amidst challenges, we witnessed incredible examples of community strength and support.
- **Personal and Spiritual Growth:** Many of us experienced growth and development in our personal and spiritual lives.
- **The Impact of Our Church:** Our small church made a significant impact. We supported two mission trips, ordained two pastors, fed hundreds of kids and families, and engaged in many other projects, demonstrating that even a small church can make a big difference.

### **Entering 2024**

As we stand at the beginning of 2024, we each carry with us our personal hopes, dreams, and goals. These aspirations shape our journeys, guiding our steps into this new year. But as a community, as a family in faith, we share a collective vision - a vision that transcends individual ambitions and unites us in a common purpose. This new year is not just a continuation of time; it's a fresh canvas, an opportunity filled with potential and promise. Whether it's in advancing our careers, nurturing our personal relationships, or deepening our walk with the Lord, 2024 stands before us as a field ripe for sowing and harvesting the fruits of our faith and dedication.

### **Introducing 'Gladitude'**

Today, I invite us to ponder a powerful concept - '**Gladitude.**' (tell story from Elder meeting)

Gladitude refers to **living in a state of Gladness and Gratitude, rooted not in the shifting sands of our circumstances but in the unshakeable foundation of Jesus Christ.** In a world where happiness is often tied to external conditions, 'Gladitude' challenges us to find our deepest joy in our relationship with Christ, independent of what happens around us.

Choosing Gladness and Gratitude is a conscious decision.



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It's not simple, but it can change your life.  
It can turn sadness and annoyance into hope and happiness.

Today we will briefly step aside from our series on Acts, and turn attention to the book of Philippians, a letter penned by Paul not from a place of comfort, but from the confines of a prison cell. Facing an uncertain future, Paul writes not words of despair, but a powerful message of hope, joy, and resilience in Christ.

This past year, the men of our church engaged in a 40-day study of Philippians, a journey I personally found incredibly enriching and uplifting. A particular passage that resonates deeply with me, and I believe captures a 'Main Point' of the book, is Philippians 2:1-4. This passage powerfully aligns with the concept of 'Gladitude.' As we explore these verses, I invite you to listen with open hearts, ready to embrace the profound truths they hold:

### **Philippians 2:1-4 (ESV)**

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.<sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Here, Paul speaks to us about the encouragement we find in Christ, the comfort of love, and the fellowship of the Spirit. He calls us to unity, urging us to be of one mind, bound together by the same love. This unity is not superficial; it's a unity that comes from humility, from considering others more significant than ourselves. It's a unity that looks beyond our own interests and reaches out to the interests of others.

This passage is not just an instruction; it's a reflection of the heart of Christ. It's a call to embody the very attitude of Jesus, who, though He was God, did not grasp at His divine rights but humbled Himself, taking the form of a servant. In doing so, He set an example for us to follow – a path of humility, selflessness, and love.

This passage does more than provide us with instructions; it holds up a mirror to the heart of Christ. In His life, Jesus exemplified the epitome of humility, selflessness, and love – qualities not just to be admired but to be actively pursued in our own lives.



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As we reflect on His example, let us consider how we – both individually and collectively as a congregation – can embody these Christ-like attributes. Here at Highlands, we have a simple phrase that we use to embody this: **Seek, Sacrifice, Steward.**

So, how do we get there? I'm going to talk about three key things that can help us follow Jesus' example. These aren't just *nice* ideas – they're real steps we can all take to be more **like Him** in the coming year. Let's dive into these ideas and see how we can really put them into practice every single day.

**[DISCUSSION POINTS]**

**1. Seek - Embracing Humility and Unity:**

Cultivating a mindset of unity and love within our church community is crucial. Let's seek harmony and understanding, as urged in Philippians 2:2:

**<sup>2</sup>complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.**

**1. The Power of Togetherness in Christ:**

Firstly, let's remember how the Bible teaches us about the power of togetherness in Christ. In Ephesians 4:3, Paul urges us **to 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.'** This means that as a church, we're called to work together, like different parts of one body. It's not always easy, but when we come together, pray together, and support one another, we're stronger. We're like a family, where each person is important, and we all need each other to grow in faith.

**2. Love as Christ Loved Us:**

Secondly, love is at the heart of everything we do as believers. Jesus said in John 13:34-35, **'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'** Jesus set the ultimate example of love – a love that's patient, kind, and puts others first. When we love each other like Jesus loves us, it brings us closer and shows the world what being a Christian is all about.



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3. **Diversity of Thought Combined With Unity in Spirit:**

Thirdly, God made us all different for a reason. Just like in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, where Paul compares the church to a body with many parts, we are reminded that diversity of function strength when combined with unity in purpose.

- **12** For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. **14** For the body does not consist of one member but of many.
- Each of us has unique gifts and talents, and when we bring these together, we can do amazing things for God. It's like a puzzle – every piece is different, but when you put them all together, you see the beautiful picture God is creating through us.

4. **Humility as Our Foundation:**

Humility as Our Foundation: Finally, we are encouraged to embrace humility, emulating Jesus' example. A different verse that captures this spirit is in 1 Peter 5:5, which says, 'Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."' This teaches us to put others first, to serve willingly, and not to insist on always being correct. It's about being more attentive and supportive, rather than just being the most noticeable. True humility involves recognizing the value in everyone, understanding that we are all cherished by God.

2. **Sacrifice - Selflessness Over Selfish Ambitions:**

Prioritizing others over ourselves, as highlighted in Philippians 2:3, is key to living out our faith.

**<sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,  
but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.**

1. **The selflessness of Jesus:**

Our call to selflessness is rooted in the example of Jesus Christ Himself. In the Bible, particularly in the Gospels, we see Jesus consistently putting others before Himself. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ultimately, gave His life for us on the cross. In Philippians 2:5-8, Paul tells us to have the same mindset as Christ, who humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross:



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**5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This selfless act of love is at the heart of our faith and serves as our ultimate example.

2. **The Teaching of "Love Your Neighbor":**

Another crucial aspect of selflessness is found in Jesus' commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself," as stated in Matthew 22:39. This teaching urges us to consider the needs and well-being of others just as we do our own. It's not just about avoiding harm to others; it's actively seeking their good. This means thinking about how our actions, words, and decisions impact those around us and choosing to put their needs and interests on par with our own.

3. **The Unity of the Church:**

Selflessness is vital for the unity of the church. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about the church being one body with many part:

**4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.**

**7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**

**8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,**

**10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.**

**11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.**



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**12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.**

**13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.**

**14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.**

**16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.**

**17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?**

**18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.**

Each part is different but equally important. When one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. This means in our church family, we're not just looking out for ourselves. We're called to care for each other, help each other, and support each other – putting the interests of our brothers and sisters in Christ ahead of our own personal ambitions.

**4. Bearing One Another's Burdens:**

Lastly, Galatians 6:2 teaches us to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." This is about more than just physical needs. It's about being there for each other emotionally and spiritually. When someone is going through a tough time, we're called to be there for them, to listen, to offer support, and to pray for them. It's about walking alongside each other in our journeys of faith, helping each other grow closer to God, and becoming more like Christ in our actions and attitudes.



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**3. Steward - Supporting One-Another**

We're encouraged to focus on the wellbeing of others, as seen in Philippians 2:4.

**4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

**1. The Thoughtfulness of Jesus:**

Reflecting on Jesus' example of thoughtful stewardship, we find inspiration in Matthew 25:35-36, where Jesus identifies with those in need: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me..." In this passage, Jesus emphasizes that caring for others, especially the least among us, is akin to serving Christ Himself. This challenges us to see stewardship not just as managing resources but as a profound opportunity to serve Christ through our care for others.

**2. The Great Commandment and Stewardship:**

In the context of stewardship, let's revisit the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30. This parable teaches us about the responsibility that comes with the resources God has entrusted to us.

**14** "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. **15** To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

**16** He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. **17** So also he who had the two talents made two talents more.

**18** But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. **19** Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

**20** And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.'

**21** His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'





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**22** And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.'

**23** His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

**24** He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,

**25** so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.'

**26** But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?

**27** Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. **28** So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.

**29** For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

**30** And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

What we see here is a call to actively use what we have been given for the growth of God's kingdom, not to hoard or hide it away. Being good stewards means being proactive in using our talents, time, and treasure to bless others and further God's work.

**3. Being a Cheerful Giver:**

Stewardship also involves a cheerful and willing spirit in giving, as highlighted in 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. Here, Paul reminds us that "whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." This passage encourages us to give generously and cheerfully, understanding that our giving is not just a duty but a joyful response to God's generosity towards us. It reflects our trust in God's provision and our commitment to His purposes.



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As we embrace the role of stewards, let's remember that all we have is from God and for His glory. Our resources, abilities, and time are not ours alone; they are given to us to manage for the benefit of others and the advancement of God's kingdom. This year, let us be intentional in practicing stewardship, serving one another, and being cheerful givers, thereby living out our faith in practical and transformative ways.

**[FOUR CHALLENGES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD]**

So, family, as we stand together on the threshold of a new year, let's take a moment to focus on what lies ahead. Each step we've taken, each lesson we've learned, has prepared us for this moment. We are not just entering another year; we are stepping into a fresh season of growth and opportunity, a time to put into practice the profound truths we've embraced.

With hearts full of hope and hands ready to serve, I want to share with you four important challenges that we, as Highlanders, should embrace. These are not just goals or resolutions; they are commitments that reflect our journey in faith, our dedication to Christ's teachings, and our desire to live out His love in every aspect of our lives. As we look forward to 2024, let these challenges guide us, strengthen us, and unite us in purpose and action:

1. **Deepen Our Unity and Love For One-Another:**

Let us strive to strengthen the bonds of unity and love within our church and our community. This year, I challenge each of us to look beyond our differences, to support and understand one another, and to work in harmony as Christ taught us. Let's make our church a beacon of mutual support and love, even when we face disagreements or diversity.

2. **Embrace Humility and Selflessness:**

This year, let's commit to living a life of humility and selflessness. I encourage everyone to find tangible ways to serve others - in our church, in our families, and in our communities. Let's put the needs and interests of others ahead of our own, reflecting Jesus' call to serve and value those around us.



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**3. Maintain Joy and Thankfulness in All Circumstances:**

In a world that often presents challenges and unpredictability, let us hold fast to *joy* and *thankfulness*, not because our circumstances always warrant it, but because our faith in Jesus does. Let's practice gratitude and find our joy in spiritual growth and in the support we offer one another, rather than in material or circumstantial success.

**4. Expand Our Community Outreach and Evangelism:**

Finally, I challenge us to grow our efforts in reaching out to and serving our wider community. Whether it's through new initiatives or bolstering our current programs, let's show Christ's love and compassion to those around us. I encourage everyone to actively engage in these efforts, embodying Christ's call to be lights in the world and to look beyond our own interests to those of others.

**[CLOSING]**

In closing, let's remember the Paul's words in our key verse from Philippians 2.

This scripture beautifully encapsulates the essence of the challenges we've set before us. It reminds us that our encouragement in Christ, our comfort from love, our fellowship with the Spirit, our affection, and sympathy should spur us on to be of one mind, united in love.

As we seek to deepen our unity and love, embrace humility and selflessness, maintain joy and thankfulness in all circumstances, and expand our outreach and evangelism, we are living out the very principles Paul encouraged in the church at Philippi. We are called to look not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others, **embodying the selfless love of Christ**.

This year, let these verses be our guide and our inspiration. May they remind us daily of our higher calling in Christ Jesus. As we embark on this journey together, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with each one of us, strengthening and uniting us in His love and purpose.

As we face both challenges and celebration together in 2024, let us remember that we are not just individuals, ***but a family in Christ***, united in purpose and love.



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May the Lord guide us and strengthen us as we seek to live out these commitments together in the coming year.

God bless you all as we step forward in faith and fellowship.

**[PRAYER]**

**[COMMUNION]**

**[BENEDICTION]**

**Philippians 4:8-9**

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.<sup>9</sup> What you have learned<sup>[a]</sup> and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.