

New Year's 2026 | Jeffrey Smith

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Preacher: Jeffrey Smith

[0 : 00] All right. Good morning. Let's go and open a prayer. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for this morning. It's been a great Lord just season to be able to remember your son's birth and thank you for that Lord. Thank you for just the celebration of Christmas, the time together with friends and family.

A little bit of break from work for maybe a few of us. Lord, we just thank you for just all of 2025, Lord. And as we kind of reflect back here this morning, we just want to give you the glory. So we say thank you. In your son's name, amen. Okay. We're going to do something a little bit different than normal. If you, I don't know if you guys ever see the schedule, but we've been obviously going through Acts.

Christmas was kind of a break from that. And then this morning will be kind of a continued break from Acts. So just kind of an open week. And, you know, last Tuesday, the elders and deacons met here at church for one of our regularly scheduled meetings.

We meet as a combined group about every other month, about every nine weeks. And the elder group meets probably every three weeks. The deacons have kind of their own frequency.

[1 : 14] If you're not sure, just to give a little bit of context here of who's who, we've had some new folks here. The elders consist of David Baumgartner, John Kluppel, Kevin Stiles, Tom Grass, and myself.

And the deacons are Brad Kluppel, Teddy Tash, Kent Stiles, and David Vineyard. And so every one of these meetings is open with some type of devotion, question, passage, challenge, something, right?

And so this past meeting, it was a reflection back on 2025. And so as we were going through the highlights and some lowlights, I'll kind of mention that here in a second, of 2025, it became just extremely evident that the Lord has been faithful.

He has answered prayers, and he has really blessed us abundantly. And so in light of that, I just thought it'd be great to just share a few of those examples.

Kind of a Bethel wrapped, if you're a Spotify listener, a Bethel wrap for 2025. Just highlighting four things that happened in 2025, some context behind them, and just seeing how the Lord delivered just beyond we could even imagine, really.

[2 : 34] Okay? And all of this is for the purpose of his glory. I'm not saying these things to glorify those that organized them or to lift us up, saying we came up with this great plan.

Honestly, a lot of those things that we talked about, we were like, oh, man, that plan was pretty faulty. But you know what? The Lord still came through, and he still delivered it. And so the purpose of this this morning is to bring glory to the Lord and to thank him for just his faithfulness, his answer to prayer, and his abundant blessing.

I don't think we'll touch on this. I was looking at the schedule. I think next week is Acts 15. But if you're, if you look at Acts, I think it's like Acts 13 and 14, that is Paul's first missionary journey. And so Paul and Barnabas go out. They leave Antioch. They go to Cyprus. They go to Galatia, and they come back. This is where John Mark kind of splits off from the group.

But there's a really interesting verse that I never really caught towards the end of Acts 14. If you have your Bibles and you would turn there, great. Otherwise, I'll read it. Acts 14, 27.

[3 : 42] He returned to the church in Antioch. This is Paul. And he gathered the people, and he reported all that God had done through them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

He gathered the people together, and he reported on what the Lord had done in this journey. And so many of you were part of this Bethel 2025 missionary journey.

I'm going to kind of throw that up in quotes. And so this is going to be a bit of a reminder of what happened for some of you that maybe are just visiting. Like, this would be somewhat new. But, again, the time this morning is going to be spent on remembering how God, what he has done, and how he has opened the door for the gospel to go forth. Really an exciting thing. On a personal note, I've been kind of going through the chronological Bible, and if you do that, you're kind of getting towards the end, and it's a lot of these pastoral epistles, and you get to Revelation. And so I'm going to also just, like, cherry-pick a couple passages I've been reading that I think connect with each of these four highlights.

[4 : 46] So, again, a bit of an abnormal message, but I think it's going to be a great reminder of what the Lord has done. So the first thing that I wanted to highlight was an event that happened in January of 2025, January of this year.

And that was our first-ever ladies' conference. Let's go back to the genders question, David. All right. Raise your hand if you went to the ladies' conference.

There can only be one gender that it— Okay. A pretty good showing here. And this is open to all genders now. Raise your hand if you contributed in some way, shape, or form— food, cleaning, babysitting, whatever.

Okay. A lot more people. And so this is just a great way to kind of start this list. This conference was organized and led primarily by Lydia, Anna, Lila.

And as many of you know, it was a two-day conference in January. And it was a huge success. The Lord brought in 150 women from the greater St. Louis area and beyond and from out of town to receive great teaching.

[5 : 55] Joanna Lynn was kind of the primary speaker. I know there were some other breakout speakers as well that were really good. Some just wonderful time of worship. Just beautiful fellowship.

You know, it was encouraging myself to hear the feedback from some folks that came with Teresa that weren't from kind of this circle of Bethel. And they were just like, wow, that was really good Bible teaching.

They were really, really encouraged and challenged by that. And so I was reminded of the passage in Titus 2, which says, But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.

Kind of skipping forward. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanders or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good and so train the young women to love their husbands and children and be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may be reviled.

And so I was talking to Ted about this. I think, Lydia, you had maybe had this idea come to mind back in the summer of 2023, he mentioned. So, you know, a good 18 months prior to this conference happening.

[7 : 09] And so it's just neat to see how the Lord orchestrated everything to come together for that. You know, obviously there was a lot of diligence in this room, a lot of hard work and organization put to it.

But none of that happens without the Lord. None of that happens without his, you know, opening of doors and provision of certain things and laying it on the hearts of people to volunteer their time and to contribute.

You know, this passage in Titus 2 is also really interesting as it exhorts us to teach sound doctrine. And it lays out this model for older women teaching the younger.

Teach what is good and so train the young women, it says. And so to see how the Lord used this conference to bring women of all ages together and to see the beauty and the benefit that that brings.

Older women bringing wisdom, younger women maybe bringing some of that energy. And so the first thing I want to just kind of close with on this first topic is just how...

[8 : 13] Here, I think, here at Bethel, we do discipleship a bit differently. We do it in a very organic way, I like to say. We don't necessarily have this, like, very structured discipleship program.

We're not, you know, necessarily pairing up. You're with this person. You're with that person. This is your discipleship group. There is some of that. But a lot of this is this very kind of organic discipleship.

And I thought the ladies' conference was not only just a highlight to the year and just an opportunity to give glory to God for just the success that it was, but just what a beautiful example of this, like, organic discipleship.

You know, Lila's not here, so I'll kind of pick on her. But, I mean, it's been awesome to see what she has been doing and to see her kind of coming behind and Anna and Lydia to do that.

Like, that is how this organic discipleship happens. And so that was just awesome. So we just thank the Lord for his blessing. And we pray for this year's as well, you know.

[9 : 13] It's not to say that we're just going to expect this to, like, happen every year. We're going to ask the Lord that he would bless 2026's ladies' conference as well. The next highlight from 2026 is kind of a broader category, and that is related to camp work.

You know, specifically kind of camps over the summer in 2025. You know, this is something I've been thinking a lot about, but if you had to describe Bethel, like, what is the personality of Bethel? Whether you've been an attendee here for a long time, you've been a member, or you're coming here for the first time, or maybe you've been here for six months, how would you describe Bethel? I think one thing you would probably say is, like, Bethel is, like, in love with camps.

Like, it is in our DNA. It's in our blood. We're very much involved with Dayspring Bible Camp.

We're involved with Turkey Hill Ranch Bible Camp. We're involved with Storybook Lodge for Christian Camp. It is just ingrained in who we are. So why is that important? It's important for a lot of reasons, but, you know, there are many things we could focus on.

[10 : 27] I have a friend who goes to a church, and their focus is on immigrants coming to St. Louis. That is a great opportunity. That's a great mission field. That is a big need that needs to be ministered to.

You know, we're down the street from Webster University. There's churches that really focus on college campus ministries. Another great thing. Maybe it's a ministry addressed to homelessness, or whatever it is.

There's just so many things out there. Like, a church of our size can't be involved in everything, at least not deeply, or with, you know, we can't do that, like, real well.

But what is one thing we do really well? We do a lot of camp ministry, and that's an awesome thing. That is who we are. And so, in 2025, I couldn't help but think of the verse in Ephesians 3, verse 20, which says, The Lord's doing way more than we could ever think.

Okay, so why would I think about that passage for the topic of just highlighting what the Lord has done with camps this year? I texted Kent earlier, and he gave me some good stats.

[11 : 47] In 2025, approximately 640 kids came through Dayspring and heard the gospel. 640. Over 11,000 meals were served.

There were 49 kids that professed salvation. In addition to that, think about all the volunteers and helpers and speakers and directors, and all of that goes off pretty well.

I mean, I'm not saying, like, everything was perfect. I'm kind of looking back to Kent and Nicole.

Like, it probably wasn't perfect, but, like, for the most part, man, what an awesome thing that the Lord did with camps this year. He delivered way more abundantly than I could have even thought.

Like, I'm just trying to keep five kids alive and serve them meals every day. Man, 640 kids, that is so many kids. It's remarkable to reflect on what the Lord has done, how he has orchestrated all of this together, how he has put his hand of protection on us.

I mean, there is just, like, man, that's a lot of lives, a lot of kids, a lot of things that could go wrong. And to see how he has protected us and seen us through it is awesome. He has answered prayers for staffing needs.

[12 : 59] He has kept us safe. Hearing 49 kids profess salvation, that is, that's amazing. That's why we're doing this. The Lord is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or think.

The third highlight is from 2025 was the youth group's trip to Watsonville, California. On January 14th of 2025, the idea came up amongst the elders of taking the youth group on a mission trip to the freedom teams.

Approximately seven months later, the Lord provided a way for 35 of us. I believe it was 35. Does that sound right? 35 to make that trip.

And the Lord blessed that trip far beyond what we could have asked or imagined. The cost of the trip was \$15,823.47.

And between a small fee that each person paid, extra giving money, money from the Rockathon, total income for the trip was \$18,822. If you're doing the math here, that is a surplus.

[14:10] The Lord provided \$3,000 in excess of what was needed. That's amazing. Flying 35 people from here to California for a week and back.

We were able to add about \$4,000 to that amount and send that all back to the freedom team's families. He provided big. He provided small. An anonymous giver from the church asked how this person could give \$500 to a food-related item in California.

I thought, what an interesting way to earmark the giving. And sure enough, we were like shopping for a Blackstone grill so we could cook for everybody.

That was \$500. And to see how the Lord provided for small things like that as well as big things was just awesome to see. It was awesome to see how the Lord not only used us to, I think, bless the team in California, but how he really used that time to teach us.

I think everybody that went would probably be nodding their heads like, yes. That was a hugely impactful thing for us. We were challenged in a good way on the topic of prayer and what it meant to have this deep, rich fellowship with the Lord where we are going to him constantly and in depth, calling on him to give us direction on what he would have us to do.

[15:34] We were going door to door sharing the gospel, hosting complete strangers at a kid's camp in a park. And the passage that came out to me was 1 Timothy 4.12, which said, Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct and love and faith and purity.

It was pretty awesome to see these young people going up to the door, knocking on it, and sharing the gospel with whoever answered. Does that make anyone nervous just kind of hearing that?

Like, yeah, it makes me nervous. And to think, you know, here we are. We're hearing these youth going up and sharing a clear gospel to these people. And not only in a way of just like, let me check the box and kind of go on to the next house and drop off the next flyer, but like legitimately wanting to share the greatest news that they've ever heard with whoever answered that door.

That comes across different when it's coming from a genuine, authentic way or approach or delivery. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct and love and faith and purity.

Let no one despise you for your youth. You know, going back to what I said with the ladies' conference, you know, we have a very much organic approach to discipleship here at Bethel. You know, our youth are being given the foundation of the gospel.

[16:57] There's no doubt about that, you know, between Sunday school and youth group and what's taught here from the pulpit. The foundation of the gospel is laid.

That is the most important thing. And then on top of that, we're training these youth in how to share the gospel and what it looks like to be a good example of speech and conduct, how to act, how to love, how to, you know, walk in faith.

And so I thought that was awesome. Yeah, the trip to California was great. And then to kind of see what has come from that.

You know, our brother Syrian has, you know, been there since, and he's obviously here on a break now, but kind of in that discipleship program with the Freedom Teams. Cynthia Paramathis, I mean, just a couple days after getting back, asking, Lord, what would you have me to do?

So she's kind of at this, I don't know, crossroads in her life where she had a little bit of freedom to kind of decide what is next. And then to see this opportunity open up for a teaching position in South America and to see her take that, that's awesome.

[18:06] That's really neat. To see how we've really picked up an emphasis on prayer in Sunday school. To see this college and career group meet every other Sunday evening, kind of going through the True Discipleship book.

You know, I know the girls have, you know, this prayer partner program, and that's awesome to see. So it's just like not only this like week in California, which a week will come and go. Obviously, we know that. Time goes by quickly.

But like to see, you know, what follows after that is just super encouraging. The last thing I wanted to kind of highlight before we kind of jump to a couple things we're excited for in 2026.

2025 brought some hard things as well. On April 24th, our brother Frank Lemunia passed away. Frank was 86 years old.

He was a special member here at Bethel. His son David attends. And if I can say one thing about Frank, he was an impressive man. I'll just say that. He was an impressive man.

[19 : 08] From the moment I met him, I was struck by his intelligence, his good memory. And then later to see kind of his love for his family, his desire for God's word, for teaching, for good teaching.

I thought it was remarkable. And so with Frank, the two passages that came to mind were 2 Timothy 4, 7 through 8, which says, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

In Psalm 116, 15, which is precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants. And to see a man like Frank who is faithful in his walk with the Lord, is faithful in just his desire to serve and lead his family, which is great.

But that's not obviously a highlight of the year. You know, it was a tough thing. You know, in 2025, several families here at Bethel also went through some significant trials.

And I don't want to like rehash tough times, but I think it's just worth, I kind of went through the prayer book, and I was just like looking through all the things that we had been praying about, and what were some of the recurring things. You know, obviously the Park family, you guys went through quite a bit.

[20 : 22] And so to see kind of a bit of a conclusion, I don't want to say it's like completely, but a bit of a conclusion to a multi-year court case, like that was something we were praying for.

And to see kind of how the Lord answered that, we want to give him glory for that. Just say thank you for answering prayers. You know, to our brother Wally, I mean, I was just kind of reading through and just the various like living in housing situations.

And that's tough to really, you're kind of making decisions on behalf of someone else. And there's just a lot of variables there. And, you know, there's a lot of challenges, you know, just physically for Wally as well.

And so just praying for Wally and just seeing that. I was thinking about the Meyer family. I mean, you guys have been displaced for your, you guys were displaced from your home for months after the storm back in May. Praying for Matthew's heart surgery.

Praying for Brenda's cancer diagnosis. Being able to celebrate a new job for Tom Grass. That's awesome. We continue to pray for my mom, and I appreciate that just in her brain cancer situation.

[21 : 27] And so there's a lot of things. There's, believe me, I'm just going to say this right now. I'm forgetting things and skipping over things. So if you're like, oh, you forgot one. Yeah, I forgot a lot. But like, just to think back and to see the Lord's faithfulness in so many good and challenging situations.

It's all for his glory. And many of these stories, frankly, are still being written. You know, we prayed for Brenda and the cancer situation.

We're going to continue to pray for her. We've been praying for my mom. We'll continue to pray for her. A lot of those are still ongoing. But this is an opportunity to pause and give thanks and glory to God for delivering us through hard times in 2025.

So I just want to take the opportunity to recognize that this is just real life. This is just how it goes. If I stood up here and said, everything's fine and dandy, I'd be lying.

You know, we go through hard times. And this is just part of an authentic, genuine group of believers that meets together. We are humans.

[22 : 34] We live in a fallen world. It is what it is. Romans 5 says, Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings.

Because sufferings produce endurance. Endurance produces character. Character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame. But God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Sufferings, endurance, character, hope. Sufferings, endurance, character, hope. All through the Holy Spirit.

So those are the four things I wanted to highlight. Obviously, the ladies' conference. The summer camps.

The youth group trip. And then some of the challenges that we went through. Excuse me. So looking forward to next year. On behalf of the leadership. I just want to say we're excited to see what the Lord will do in 2026.

[23 : 48] I don't want to be overly optimistic. But it feels like we have a bit of a wind at our sails. You know, we have a tailwind here. And so we're excited to look forward. It's an interesting exercise to look back.

To see how things have turned out. You know, again, Lydia, I mentioned this.

Or I think Teddy and I talked about it. You know, the conference, you know, starting to kind of come to fruition as far as an idea a year and a half before it happened. And, you know, the youth group trip kind of came about.

The idea of it, you know, in October of 2023. So it's interesting to see kind of things from start to finish and kind of what that looks like. But you have also many situations, quite frankly, where, like I said before, we just maybe we had a desire, a prayer for something.

And it happened, but not because of anything we did. Right. It's just because of what the Lord wanted to happen. Excuse me. So from a big picture standpoint, the leadership here at Bethel continues to seek the Lord on a couple big items.

[24 : 58] And we'd encourage everyone to be with us in prayer. The first is just, you know, we continue to pray for whether or not we're going to pursue the hiring of a full-time pastor or not.

Sorry, guys, I am just coughing. I'm just coughing. Since our brother Dave retired, our appreciation for everything he's done continues to grow.

Hey, Mary Ellen. And so, you know, just to kind of give you a behind the scenes look, we've, you know, Dave's been gracious and kind of laying out everything that he did.

And this is what he'll continue doing. But we've kind of split up the responsibilities. And so a lot of that has kind of been shared amongst the group. And to be frank, it feels like it's working fairly well.

Like things are not, the ball is not getting dropped. But the prayer is whether or not that's the long-term play. Is that what we'll continue doing? You know, should we look to backfill Dave's role?

[26 : 06] And so just pray with us as we evaluate the needs of the church. Again, who we are as a church. What would be really an ideal fit for that role?

Pray for just continuity amongst the group. Pray for clarity as to what the Lord would have for us. You know, like I said, Bethel is a special church with a unique personality. We place the utmost value on God's word and the integrity of the gospel.

We have this very uncommon love for camp work. Our numbers are small but mighty. We value community and this organic form of discipleship.

Our mission is to what? Know Jesus and make him known. And so how do you take who we are and kind of run it through that mission statement of knowing Jesus and making him known?

To give us an idea of where we're going. Okay? If you know that, hey, this is who we are. We are, I'm not going to describe a different church. I'm going to describe who we are. And if this is our mission, what does that look like in the next year, in the next five years?

[27 : 11] And then how does that align with, you know, potentially backfilling a full-time pastor position? So that is, I think, a big prayer request.

Just praying with us in that. The second is somewhat tied to it as well. But our brother David is also very gifted in music. And if we could give him a little support in the music area, that is something that we are praying for as well.

And what I've also learned is David is literally a human jukebox. And so there is just no way we are going to, like, match that. But if there's anything that we can do to support him, to give him a little relief here and there, that would be great.

So really just praying for many things. But, like, those would be two things to kind of mention. The musicians, speaking of, want to come up? That would be great. I'll just wrap up by, again, the theme this morning is just Thanksgiving.

Guys, it's Thanksgiving. It's looking back on what the Lord has done here at Bethlehem 2025. How he has blessed us on so many things. And to be able to highlight the ladies' conference, just the work he's done at camps, the youth group trip, and really getting us through some more challenging, harder times.

[28 : 21] Like I said, looking forward to 2026, we're, you know, continuing to pray about many things. But thinking about, again, where are we going?

What is the church vision? How does that kind of tie into potentially hiring a pastor, giving David a little relief in the area of music, all those things. So I know it was a different morning.

I appreciate you guys being a part of that and just kind of reflecting back with me. I'll go ahead and close in prayer and then close in prayer. Yeah. As you're praying, one other thing, your sister's hoping to, from what Clint told me, hoping to be able to ring the bell this next day or two. Yeah, see, I knew I'd forget something important. Yeah, so my sister, like, going through her cancer treatment. I mean, that's a miracle. Like, they just said that this would never happen. And so to be able to, like, get to the point where it's like, hey, we're going to have you ring the bell. And I don't know if you really even need treatment from here on out. Like, we'll continue to monitor and check, and maybe something will come up. But that's just, like, not heard of. So that is just a huge blessing. So, yeah, thank you for that reminder.

[29 : 30] The Lord is just so good. Heavenly Father, just thank you for this morning. And we say this often. We are forgetful people. I can barely remember what I did yesterday.

And so, Lord, just to reflect back on the entire year of 2025 and to see just so many highlights, so many things you've blessed us in. And for nothing that we deserve or have done, Lord, but just we're just a humble body trying to seek what you would have for us.

And we appreciate the guidance and the success you've brought. You know, Lord, we appreciate just the Ladies' Conference. We pray for 2026's Ladies' Conference. I'm excited to hear Christina Williams or just kind of how that goes with her speaking, Lord.

Lord, we thank you for just the continued work at camps. And I even think just even with the offseason, there's just so much work being done just from a construction standpoint that, Lord, I just want to say thank you for that.

Lord, thank you for just the youth group trip and how you orchestrated that. But really just like how that has impacted lives going beyond just that week.

[30 : 40] And so that's been exciting to hear and see. And then lastly, Lord, just thinking about just the tougher times. Lord, just reflecting back on the passing of our brother, Frank. And that's a sad thing.

It's a hard thing. So, Lord, we look forward to next year. We would just, again, ask that you would direct our paths. And we kind of just hold these plans with an open hand, Lord, and just give it to you, Lord.

We're seeking your will on many things and seeking your direction on, you know, potentially this full-time pastor position, Lord. Just getting a little help with music. And so we, in a vulnerable state, just state these things, Lord, to you and just ask for help, you know, just putting our reliance in your provision there, Lord.

So we just say thank you. In your son's name, amen. Amen.