



We continue to be hopeful that God is at work blessing the church, seen here at our fiftieth anniversary party. We have had many prayer requests answered. We were encouraged by the youth teachers coming to a second training session, and sharing thoughts about what they have been reading in Hendricks' book, *Teaching to Change Lives*. Many of the children's teachers also are reading this book, and their first training was an encouragement. We have started new curriculum for Sunday morning in both of

these ministries, and overall we think that is going well. The Sunday afternoon and midweek programs for the youth also are going well. We have met with the young adults a few times, and are delighted by the conversations we have had about what they are seeking spiritually this year, and excited to begin a weekly study of Schlegel's *Satellite Bible Atlas* together. We have a new men's Bible study that is off to a great start. We have had some counseling opportunities which seemed to prove helpful. The elders are praying more together, all three of us on Sundays and two of us with others on Wednesdays. We had successful Christmas events with lots of visitors. We even had lots of visitors to our two "family night" events, as relations came to see the little children participate in the activities. We are finishing chapter three in our verse by verse study of the gospel of John, and have received lots of exciting feedback about the sermon-based devotions.

All those are positive signs as we continue to invest in experiencing and sharing God's truth, grace, and love. Still, there is so much struggle in the lives of any body of people. We are a small church, but we have several people who are chronically ill, others battling acute health issues, others who are just getting old. Then there are the stress and anxiety that attacks us all and which for some requires constant vigilance. There are deaths in families, even suicides among school friends. We gather each Sunday to rejoice in the hope we have, that our salvation is assured and we will one day be in Heaven without such pain and sadness. And we do rejoice; but even Christians suffer in this life, and LeeAnn and I mourn with those who are mourning.

As a church, we still face some challenges. God blessed us with generous giving in December to bring the budget into balance, but giving is down this year, probably in part due to lower attendance with the inclement weather. One couple who has been coming for many years from an hour away just announced they were done making that trip, and they not only were generous givers financially, but with their time and talent also. We are not seeing people take outward steps yet: accept the gospel, ask for water baptism, ask to join the church, seek mentoring or training. We continue to pray and rely on God to bring these blessings. All we can do is give our best to what he has asked us to do; it is up to him to bring results.

As we typed that line originally [a couple of weeks ago], the power went out. Not a sign from Heaven, we hope! Or if it is, we hope we can interpret it to mean God is saying, "Yes, you should rely on me alone!" In ministry, you learn that lesson over and over if you need to, and are reminded over and over regardless. Only God can bring someone to faith or transform someone; yet he chooses to work through humble us. It is a fearsome privilege...

Wm. LeeAnn

We would love to hear how your life is going! We appreciate your prayers and encouragement. Blessings...

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