

Brothers and Sisters of the Solid Rock Association,

It is with much nervousness and prayerful consideration that I compose this letter to fulfill my obligation to our association. I appreciate and am honored by the belief and support that the brothers have in me, and I pray that through my words the kingdom of God is uplifted. If my words cause hurt, then this is not my intention. In fact, fear of not doing the will of the Father is what has made crafting this letter the most difficult. I cannot do anything without leaning on the Lord for strength and guidance. After many prayers and careful consideration, I submit this letter in hopes of approval of the association.

Our world has become a very scary place. I do not think anyone could have predicted everything that we have witnessed over the past few years. Between natural disasters like the once in a thousand-year flooding that we just witnessed in Eastern Kentucky to our country being currently polarized about so much: who to vote for in various elections, our response to COVID, wars in foreign lands, gun control, the economy, etc. It seems each day brings a new problem, a new woe. Despite all of the arguing and negativity associated with these issues, the one unifying quality we all need to have is serving the Lord. The only thing that truly matters in this life is finding Jesus before we die. All the material possessions that we are able to obtain in this world cannot go with us in the afterlife. Mark 8:36 "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Further, we need to build our houses on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ. Let us not worry about going too far left or too far right. Let us not worry about figuring out the problems of this troublesome world. Instead, brethren let us focus our attention on God and look up. In Luke 21:28 we are admonished: "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." God will deliver His faithful flock. The problems of this world are only temporary. God is eternal.

So how do we, ordinary humans, walk in our faith? The answer lies in gratitude. We should be grateful for what the Lord has given us by counting our blessings daily and discounting our troubles. The Lord woke us up this morning—be grateful! We all struggle, or will struggle in this life at one point or another. We cannot escape the hand we have been dealt, because it rains on the just as it does the unjust. God never promised us that this life would be easy, but Jesus did promise to send the Comforter once He had returned to the Father. Friends, I myself am so grateful for the sweet presence of that Comforter. One of the hardest things I have experienced in my short life thus far was the loss of my dad in 2016. I am so fortunate that God was a knee bend away anytime I needed Him throughout my grieving. I could not have made it through without Him. It is in these dark times of challenges and adversity that our true character is revealed. Instead of becoming depressed due to the loss of my natural father, I remained optimistic about the eternal Father, the father I gained when I accepted God into my life in 2010. After learning to lean more on God while coping with the loss of my father, He gave me even more blessings for which to be grateful. The Lord answered a need for myself and my wife in a beautiful, bountiful way. Our effectual, fervent prayers were answered with not just one, but with three beautiful children. They are a daily source of joy, and an every-second reason for gratitude. God is so good! He has blessed me beyond measure. I am a child of the King, I have a beautiful wife, a healthy family, a fantastic church to worship at, many close friends, a great job, and the list could go on. There is nothing of me that has deserved any of

those blessings. If we take a grateful glass is half-full approach, then our cups are much closer to running over than opposed to them being half-empty. I encourage you to make a conscious decision to be intentionally grateful each day.

Each day holds twenty-four hours, and multiple decisions. In fact, it is estimated that we make over 35,000 remotely conscious decisions each day. If we account for approximately seven hours of sleep each day, that equates to us making roughly one decision every two seconds. Some of these decisions are simple, while others are more complex. Some decisions have lifelong repercussions. This is precisely why it is so important for us to put our trust in God. If we do, He will guide our paths. Understand though, that God is not going to be as explicit as a GPS is in giving us turn-by-turn directions, because where would our faith be if He were? If we had all the details ahead of time and knew the consequences of every decision we had to make, then every decision we made would be easy. When God is trying to tell us something, we need to listen. We do not want to be like the Israelites who took 40 years to make it to the Promise Land when they could have made the journey in 11 days. We trust the captain of a ship, the pilot of a plane, and the carpenter who builds our home. Why do we trust imperfect people, but still have a hard time trusting God? We must be willing to do the will of God, because His ways are better than ours.

Friends, God has placed you here for a specific purpose. No matter how big or small we may feel our roles are within the church, we all have a job to do. We do not have to have a title of a preacher, deacon, or any other in order to serve the Lord with thanksgiving. We are all unique and have something special to offer this world. Do not take what the Lord has blessed you with for granted. Do not waste your God-given gifts, but rather share them with the world. Everyone in the Bible plays a role. Even Judas was a critical disciple. Without his betrayal there would be no crucifixion, without Jesus' crucifixion there would be no resurrection, and without His resurrection there would be no salvation.

Above all else, we need to continue to show this world love. There is a drawing power about God's people. I remember feeling like Ruth when I started coming to church and came to know the Lord. I wanted what those church members had. The greatest act of love was when Jesus came to this world to pay a debt that we could not pay and that He did not owe. Friends, that gift of love is infinite. It is immeasurable and all-consuming. That love has the power to wash our sins clean; it holds the omnipotent power of salvation. The most priceless gift anyone could have is salvation, and it is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It is my most sincere desire that anyone who hears or reads this letter will find Jesus before it is everlasting too late. We Christians need to be telling everyone about what the Lord has done for us. We need to be a daily, living example of gratitude for that priceless gift. We need to show love. Except for the few who met Jesus in person, every single person that has ever believed, believed because they saw Jesus in someone else. Let them see Jesus in you.

Your Brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas Pinion". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Deacon Thomas Pinion