

Title: "A Heart Full of Thanks: Our Final Sunday Together"

Opening Prayer

"Father God, we come to You with humble hearts. Thank You for this family, La Primera Iglesia Bautista. Thank You for every smile, every prayer, and every 'amen' we have shared these past six months. Today is a special day — our last Sunday together. Help us to make it holy. Help us to say goodbye with grace and hope. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Scripture (Philippians 1:3-5)

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."

(Read slowly, twice.)

Sermon Narrative (approx. 20 minutes)

Introduction – A Bittersweet Final Sunday

Good morning, familia. How many of you have ever had to say goodbye to someone you love? [Pause for nods.] It's not easy, is it? That's how I feel today. This is my last Sunday as your guest preacher. After today, I will not be back in this pulpit. And my heart is full – full of thanks, full of joy, and yes, a little full of tears.

But today is not about sadness. Today is about gratitude. Today, I want to thank you for the greatest gift a pastor can receive: the gift of serving people who love God.

Part 1: How This Journey Began

A little time over 6 months ago, I walked through those doors for the first time. I didn't know your names. I didn't know which pew you liked to sit in. I didn't know that Brother Freddie always sits on the left side, or that Sister Elena always records the Sunday sermons on Facebook, every Sunday, reaching hundreds of people, every week.

But you welcomed me like family. You didn't say, "Prove yourself." You said, "Come and eat. Come and pray. Come and preach."

And that's exactly what you did. Every Sunday, you showed up. Some of you brought your Bibles – some of them so worn out that the pages are falling apart. And you know what? That's a beautiful thing. A worn-out Bible means a well-loved God.

Part 2: What You Taught Me

You think I came to teach you? No, mis hermanos. You taught me.

You taught me that faith is not about fancy words. Faith is about showing up when your knees hurt. Faith is when it rains, but you still show up to church. Faith is about singing "Cómo no creer en Dios" even when life is hard. Faith is about passing the offering plate even when your own wallet is thin.

I saw a widow here give her last five dollars. I saw a grandmother pray over her struggling granddaughter right there in the third row. I saw teenagers help their abuelitas walk up the ramp. That is church. That is the Gospel with skin on it.

You also taught me that it's never too late to serve God. Some of you are in your 60s, 70s, and taking care of loved ones approaching their 80s. And you are still praying, still giving, still loving. You are not retired from God's work. You are re-fired!

Part 3: The Power of Saying “Thank You”

The apostle Paul wrote our scripture from a prison cell. He was in chains. He had every reason to be angry or sad. But what did he do? He said, “I thank my God every time I remember you.”

Paul understood something powerful. Gratitude changes everything. When you say “thank you,” you are not just being polite. You are telling God, “I see Your hand in my life.”

So today, I want to say thank you – publicly, from this pulpit – for the last time.

- Thank you for letting me stumble over your names.
- Thank you for the meals you brought me. My first tamale, my daughter, and my wife’s first bowl of Menudo.

Thank you for the cards, Brother Freddie, the hugs, the texts of encouragement during the week, and the prayers on Sunday morning before I preach. Thank you to brothers in the sound booth, to Sister Angie for leading the service.

Thank you Sister for making sure I sing, “God is Good.” When I came here I was in a place where my family’s life needed prayer and then God answered, when that song played, I realized God is good, and our daughter enjoyed her first bowl of menudo with us here in this church, our first New Year’s Eve together as a family, in 10 years. So that is why I get excited, when I hear that song. Because, my family knows, “God is Good!”

- Thank you for saying “Buen mensaje, pastor” even when the sermon was too long.
[Laughter.]

But most of all, thank you for letting me be part of your family. For six months, you didn't treat me like a guest. You treated me like a son, a brother, a friend.

Part 4: Goodbye Is Not Forever

Now, here is the truth. After this Sunday, I will not be here. But in God's kingdom, goodbye is not forever. It is "hasta luego" – see you later.

Because one day, we will all gather around the throne of God. There will be no more wheelchairs, no more hearing aids, no more arthritis. There will only be joy. And we will worship together again – no time limit, no tired voices, just glory.

Until that day, remember this: You are not alone. God is with you. And I will carry you in my heart and in my prayers – always.

Summary (approx. 2 minutes)

Let me leave you with three simple truths:

1. God brought us together for a reason. This season of six months had a purpose.
2. Gratitude is a weapon. When you thank God, the devil loses his power over your sadness.
3. You are a blessing. Never think you are too young, or too old, or too tired to be used by God.

Call to Action (approx. 1 minute)

Church, this is my final request to you. Today, after church, I want you to do something. Find one person in this room – someone you have never thanked before – and say these words: “Thank you for being part of my church family.” Just that. No long speech. Let’s fill this final Sunday with gratitude that echoes into heaven.

Call to Discipleship (approx. 1 minute)

Now, I am going to ask you to make a decision – a final decision with me today. Whether you are here in the congregation, or whether you are watching on social media, will you continue to follow Jesus – not just on Sundays, but every day? Will you read one verse of the Bible each morning before breakfast? Will you call one church member each week just to say, “God loves you”?

If you say yes, I want you to stand up with me right now. [Pause for standing.] Lord, we say yes. We will keep walking with You – even after I am gone. You may be seated.

(Words of Encouragement for the Week (approx. 1 minute)

Family, here is your homework from God for this coming week – the first week after I leave:

(Isaiah 41:10, says)

“Do not be afraid. I am with you. Do not be discouraged. I am your God. I will give you strength. I will help you. I will hold you with my right hand that does what is right.”

Write that on an index card. Put it on your refrigerator. Read it every morning. God has not forgotten you. And He never will.

(Final Prayer (approx. 2 minutes))

“Padre Santo, we thank You for these six months – every Sunday, every prayer, every ‘amen.’ Today we say goodbye as pastor and congregation, but we never say goodbye to You. Lord, protect this church. Send them a new shepherd when the time is right. Give them health, peace, and joy. Wrap Your arms around Sage, as she continues to live for you. Protect her and her boyfriend from the evil forces that are attacking their lives. Strengthen Brother Freddie and his wife, as he continues to serve this church, we pray for every senior, every widow, every parent, every son, every daughter, grandparent in this room, and our members who are sick and shut-in. Let them feel Your presence tomorrow morning when they wake up and I am not here. Remind them that You never leave. We give You all the glory – for the past, for today, and for forever. En el nombre de Jesús, Amén.”

God bless you, La Primera Iglesia Bautista. This is not “goodbye” – it’s “hasta la vista, familia.” 🙏