

The Fellowship of Believers

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Preacher: James Tang

[0:00] There's a group of us here at the gathering that went away to scatter. because what we're saying is that actually, I apologize about the seats, I but actually I quite like the fact that this church lacks comfy seats.

because if we made you believe that this is where you should stay, then we've done something wrong. There's something about needing to be on the edge of our seats where we need to go out. And I want to just applaud a few people today because this week, you may have heard, I think Aaron mentioned we were at Young Life Camp, which is to scatter to reach the next generation. And there were people here in this church who volunteered their whole week, took off annual leave to go and stay in a cabin with a group of teenagers and sleep there overnight. And they averaged two, three hours a night.

And they came back yesterday. If that's you, can you stand up? If you did work crew, if you did Young Life, Florence, stand up. Ellen, Gabs, Gabe. Ethan, Jade. Man, I was just so proud of these people that, feel free to take a seat now, that they would just do that. They would just do that. There was an issue that we had to do with that to walk into a room, a girl's dorm.

[1:19] And I was like, whoa, whoa. A bomb just went off in here. And they're living like this for the whole week. I was like, I didn't even walk into a guy's room. So I didn't even, so if you were, was it bad?

It was bad. Oh, my goodness. Thank you. Thank you. It must have been so bad. Just nine teenage boys just in a room together. Oh, my goodness. And on that last night, was that last night or the night before?

I forget. The night before. No, no, yesterday. The say-so. We got a chance to hear from the young people and to hear them say something that the Lord had spoken to them about.

Young Life calls that the say-so because it's based on scripture. We're let the redeemed of the Lord say-so. And they stand up very courageously and they say something, what the Lord has done, what the Lord has taught them.

And it's incredible. You know the thing that really came out the most through all of that was, I found out this week that I am not alone. And that wasn't just students.

[2:20] It's leaders. It's adults. This issue of loneliness that all of us deal with, it's a real thing. The loneliness epidemic has just swept through the planet and COVID just made that so much worse.

There's a survey that was done in the West that said from 1990 to 2020, the number of people who said that they don't have a single person who knows them, who feel as though they don't have a single person who knows them from 1990 to 2020 quadrupled.

Quadrupled. It is the biggest health scare in the West right now. Another survey done within the church said the majority of people turning up at church, that's you and me, couldn't tell you three people within the church that truly know them.

Isn't that... Doesn't that hit you? It hits me. It's maybe just helpful to give you a little bit of context of where I come from in the UK.

The church that I come from, that Joe and I grew up in, that Francis grew up in, similar to maybe the church that Gabs grew up in in London. These are small churches. And I went to a Chinese church that spoke Chinese and English, two congregations, three congregations.

[3:34] And these churches were small. They were not attractional. The services were long because you'd have to listen to it in all three languages. And the trilingual services, we've all been there.

There's nothing that makes you yearn for Jesus to return more than sitting in a trilingual service. Like, come Lord Jesus, this is the moment to come. And then the worship, honestly, is not great because the resources are limited.

And so we grew up in that. And you know what? We went every week. Why? Because there were girls. No, no, because there were girls and there were boys and there were friends and there were brothers and sisters in Christ.

But I'll tell you, that was all we had. There was no one else. You want to go to another church? Like, good luck. Good luck hanging out with the white people. They don't serve food.

And that's all you had. And then I come here. Five years ago, I come to Hong Kong. I'm a pastor here. And then one of the jobs was, hey, go and find out. Go and just check the lay of the land and go and see the city and the churches that are there.

[4:42] And I walk into one church. And I won't say which. And don't try guessing. And it's just a big international church. And I walked in. And I was like, wow. Finally. So many fellow yellow people here who speak English, who love the Lord.

And I'm sitting down. And then the lights dim. And then the pads come on. That's the Holy Spirit, by the way. And then the worship is good. And then the pastor is brief and funny.

And I was like, this is so cool. Because I grew up watching Hillsong videos. And our church would sing Hillsong songs 10 years after they'd been written.

And we're still singing the same ones now. But to see something in my context, people that look like me, sound like me. I was so blessed. But then something happened.

At the end of the service. Actually, not even at the end of the service. Before the service even finishes, people start leaving. I'm like, what's happening? Why is everyone going?

[5:45] And then they just go. And of course, I'm generalizing here. There's some people who stay. And there's some people who talk a little bit. But then people just leave. You know what it was like? It's something I'd never seen before.

It wasn't church to me. It was a cinema. And I was like, wait. But how do you? Who knows you here?

Oh, wow. And then I hear, as time goes on, I hear, oh, no. I can not go to church for a year. And no one will know that I've not been around. In my head, I'm like, how can you even? That's not your church then. Where's your pastor who, when your baby is in ICU, will come out in the middle of the night and sit by your baby and look after her whilst you're running to the other side of town because your wife is going into surgery in another hospital?

That was me, by the way. Where's that pastor where, when you're a teenager and you're confused and hormonal, you just need someone to talk to who sits with you in McDonald's for three hours listening you talk about the most stupid stuff? Where's that guy?

Where are your bros who, when you say, hey, I'm having one of those days, they know exactly what it is and they'll bring around some beers and they'll sit with you.

[6:54] These are all my own experiences. And, of course, I'm generalizing here because these churches have those things, right? They do. But in that moment, I was like, but we just showed up to a show and then we disappeared.

I want to give you that context because I think that helps you understand a little bit about what we're trying to do here. And maybe just a little disclaimer here.

If you're here for the first time and you're just visiting, I apologize for this sermon that's about to come out. I find myself apologizing a lot every week, but this one will be probably particularly bad. I'd like to say that it's not like this every week, but it is a little bit like this every week. But this is my heart. Because, actually, at the end of it, I was in tears. I was like, how do these people feel known? And how do you walk with one another? Because that's my experience of church. And it was messy. And it wasn't always great. But they were my people. How can you get by in life in church and not have your people?

[8:02] And so fast forward a few years, I'm talking to my brother Joe. And we're like, hey, we've got all these people that God's placed in our lives that we love. Who are just scattered across in all these different churches. You know, hashtag one church.

So I go to every other church around. And what about, can we just have a thing that's just us? The people that we walk with, that we know, that we love, that we cry with, that we laugh with. Why don't we just do that?

Because the Lord didn't tell us to build the church. He told us to make disciples. And so that's what we tried to do. And this leads me on to today's sermon. Because we're doing a summer ensemble, is what I'm calling it, which is the Bible's greatest hits.

We did the Ten Commandments. We did the Beatitudes. And this week we're doing a very special passage in the book of Acts. And it's Acts 2, 42 to 47. And it's the Fellowship of Believers.

And it's talking about how the church started. But maybe even just before I read it, I want to just give you a little bit, a second disclaimer here, which is this. The book of Acts is not necessarily prescriptive.

[9:01] It's not necessarily telling you what you should do. That's not what it is. It's descriptive in that Luke here, the physician, is basically keeping a record of what actually happened. So it's not necessarily what the church should do.

It's what the church did and how it grew. Does that make sense? So as we're looking at this, I think this is an important passage. And I'll tell you, this is an important passage to me. Because as I'm looking around the city, I love the big church.

I love the small church. But the thing I keep hearing time and time again that can happen in both churches is no one knows me. I don't have community. And yet I look at this book and how it describes the church and how it started.

It was a room that lacked seats. Definitely no comfy seats. To even get in would mean you're putting your life in danger. And whilst it's not prescriptive, I want it.

That's why we started this. So if you're visiting here, I want to encourage you, hey, is this what you want? Why do we do that? Why gather thing? It's not because we want to be religious. It's not because we want to start a cult.

[10:07] But it's because I'm just wanting to remind myself why I'm here. That's it. Because it's so easy just to get caught up into all of it.

So Acts 2, 42 to 47 is what we're going to do. We do this always because we truly believe this book is the word of God that has the power to bring life, to speak into every circumstance.

So one of the ways we do that to remind ourselves is that we stand for the word of the Lord. So can I invite you to stand? Sorry to all those on the beanbags and the cushions. Lord, we hang off every word.

All we want is to hear from you, to know you. So Holy Spirit, would you move through these words now? From the book of Acts, chapter 2.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all came upon every soul. And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

[11:19] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. So we see here, they're meeting and they devote themselves to a few things.

And we're just going to go through the scripture and we're going to see what the Lord has for us in this. And all I ask of you is just to have an open heart and ask God, actually, what is it that you're trying to speak to me about?

And I'll start with the first word here. And it says, and they devoted themselves to the four pillars. They devoted themselves to the four pillars. And let me frame the whole time that we're going to have here.

I'm going to ask you this question. Are you devoted or are you dabbling? Are you devoted or are you dabbling? Okay. That's the question I'm going to ask you as we open up the scripture and ask the Lord what he has in store for us.

[12:33] That's what I'm going to ask you. The first thing is this. They were devoted to the apostles teaching. So you imagine a group of people. Jesus died, rose again, flew up into heaven.

They're confused. They don't know what to do. They head into a prayer room. And then suddenly the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Peter stands up and preaches. And then suddenly just masses are at it.

I mean, this feels cramped and crowded. But 3,000 turn up in a place together. Can you imagine the bathrooms? Can you imagine the hunger?

And they devote themselves to these four things. And the first thing is the apostles teaching. What were they teaching? Was it like the apostle Peter going, standing up going, today we're going to teach through the gospel of John, chapter 2.

That didn't exist, right? The New Testament wasn't there. So these apostles would stand up and teach. What are they teaching? They're teaching whatever Jesus taught them. The Beatitudes we did last week, the Sermon on the Mount that we see, basically maybe a collection of all of Jesus' teachings through Matthew chapter 5 to 7.

[13:39] They're basically just repeating what they heard. They're saying, okay, this is what we learned from Jesus and this is what we teach to you. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. There's an emphasis here. And it's not on the word apostle.

It's on the word teaching. Why? Because this is the word that gives life, not me. Okay? This is something that I think modern church, the contemporary church needs to understand and realize. This is the word. This is what we devote ourselves to, not the apostles' teaching. Those guys were illiterate. I mean, come on, think about Peter. Obnoxious, impulsive. Only when he was filled with the Holy Spirit, then he preaches.

He preaches the kerygma, which is basically a proclamation of the gospel. And then everyone's cut to the heart. They're devoted to the apostles' teaching. But how many times have you heard this?

Oh, who's preaching today?

Oh, okay, then I won't go to that church. Then I'll go to the other church. Oh, yeah, I love that preacher. So I'm going to go there whenever he preaches. And then I'm not going to go when it's not because the other ones aren't good.

[14:41] And then what do you hear? And then you hear, yeah, that church doesn't really feed me. It doesn't help me grow. Have you heard that? Let me just, let me just, again, I already prepped you about the zingers that are coming.

Your pastor, your preacher is not responsible for your growth. Like, if you're not growing, it's not because your pastor is preaching bad sermons. Think about the dentist in the room. Think about Florence. If I go to her, she's my dentist, and I go to her, Florence, I know I came and did that whole hygiene thing that really hurt, and you made me cry.

I mean, but it's six months now, and I'm really upset because my teeth aren't clean. And then she asked me, why are you in teeth? Have you been brushing your teeth? I'm, no. It's your job to clean my teeth. It's not your, no, it's not her job to clean my teeth.

It's not my job to just feed you. So if you're sat here going, oh, yeah, that pastor's saying, don't hit her. Well, that's just Sunday morning. Are you telling me you're not eating the rest of the week?

Don't blame your lack of growth on a pastor. We are human. We are, we do not have a perfect church. In fact, what I'm trying to do is convince you that this church is a very imperfect church.

[15:49] But don't be devoted to that. Be devoted to the apostles' teaching, what Jesus taught. This word right here, that's the key.

I'd say I only started growing when I prayed to the Lord, God, this Bible is so boring. Help make it interesting. I want to find this interesting.

I want to be hungry for this word. Because this word I know in my head provides me the words that gives me life. Holy Spirit, we don't understand this without the Holy Spirit.

So when we're reading it and we don't understand it, we're not understanding it, why are we not asking him to help us? So every time just before you, Holy Spirit, I just, I know I need something. I know I need to spiritually clean my teeth.

And I know I need this. I want to want this book. I want to want your teaching. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. Are you devoted or are you dabbling?

[16:50] Are you relying on that little Instagram post account that you follow that tells you God will give you peace that the peace world cannot give? Oh, okay, that's okay. Are you devoted or are you dabbling?

Or are you just walking past your fridge and seeing the fridge magnet? And it's going, oh, okay.

Okay. Jesus says, take heart. He has overcome the world. That's it. Don't dabble. Devote yourself. The reason why I have courage for this, I can say, is a couple of weeks ago, I was just getting very distracted and very discouraged about a lot of things.

And I was like, you know what, Jesus? I want to know what you were like. Now, I know what you said. John 16, 33. Take heart for I have overcome the world and love one another. And I get all these things. But I want to see a whole picture of you. So I read through the whole gospel of Matthew and then the whole gospel of John. And I was like, I don't want to exposit each verse.

I just want to get a picture of who you are. And, you know, I came out of that going, man, Jesus is terrifying and gentle.

[17:59] Steadfast but unpredictable. And most of all, he doesn't care what people think. The amount of times he said something and people walked away from him. Whereas so often I find myself trying to scratch your rich ears to make sure that you feel as though you've had a good sermon to listen to.

Jesus would tell them the truth in love and it was a take it or leave it situation. That's what I said. And that came from me looking at the whole gospel and just going, wow.

But so often we reduce the gospel, reduce this book to sound bites, to Instagram posts, to fridge magnets. And then we wonder why we're not full. We wonder why we're not growing.

Last week we talked about the Beatitudes, blessed. That word blessed from Psalm 1. Blessed is the man who's planted by the river and his tree will flourish. Why? Because he's meditating on his word day and night.

They're devoted to the apostles' teaching. They are not dabbling. My world exploded. My spiritual world exploded when I started memorizing scripture. Try it. Start with 1 Corinthians 13.

[19:09] It's the easiest one. Just do something to get yourself into the word. Devote yourself to the word and not to James' preaching. It's convenient.

These next few weeks I'm flying and I'm going to be with my family. I'm going to have my brothers, Gabe, and I'm going to have Johnny come up. And they're going to just preach from the word. And I know they're going to be faithful. I know they're going to be saying exactly what the Lord wants them to say.

Receive it. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. Emphasis teaching. And then do it. When we were praying there before the service, actually Trevor affirmed this in his prayer.

He was like, let us be doers of the word. Some of us, I'm not going to lie. Some of us, I know you're here because, well, because mum brought you here and you're sat here. And you're just going to listen.

And you've heard all these Bible stories before. And you walk out and you won't do a single thing about it. The book of James says this. Don't just be hearers of the word. Be doers. Actually do something. If you're just listening and it's just at an intellectual level, it doesn't mean anything.

[20:11] It doesn't go anywhere. Francis Chan gave this example, which I love. It's like, imagine a parent leaves the house. But before they leave the house, they leave a note for their child because their room is a mess.

And it says, tidy up your room. And then the parent leaves. And the child wakes up and then looks at the note and says, oh, tidy up your room. And then he calls his friends to come to the house.

Hey, my parents left me a note. We're going to study it together. Come on, let's hang out and let's study this word together. Let's look at the etymology of the word tidy. What does the word tidy actually mean? Actually, what does it even mean in the original language?

Maybe we need to look at that. Let's do that. And let's study. And let's talk about it. Let's talk about tidying my room because that's important. That is such an important.

And I think I know why the author said this. And then they high five each other, sing kumbaya, and the friends leave. And the parents come back and the room's not tidy.

[21:10] Why? Because they were just hearers of the word. They were just studyers of the word. They were not doers of the word. When you look at this book, this book should hit your head and then drop into your heart and then push you into action.

When you come into church and you gather, it should push you into scattering. And if it doesn't, there's a problem. There's a disconnect somewhere. Again, I'm mostly speaking to those who have committed to staying here who believe in the mission statements here.

So if you're visiting, hey, welcome. Good to have you. Why? Because this book is the only reliable guide to teach us how to live in this broken world. This is the only reliable guide that will show you how to deal with a horrible boss.

This is the only reliable guide that will show you how to deal with that loneliness. That loneliness that St. Augustine talked about this and he does so much writing on loneliness. And he says, actually, loneliness is the best word we have to describe this gaping hole in our hearts.

The moment we severed ourselves from God, the moment we chose sin and chose to walk away from him, we felt lonely. Ecclesiastes 3 says he planted eternity into the heart of man.

[22:15] We were built and we were made for eternity. We were made for a relationship with him. The moment we chose to go the other way, boom, loneliness kicks in. That's what we're all feeling.

And this book is the only reliable guide to navigate this broken world. That's why they devoted, not dabbled, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. And then they did the second thing and they devoted themselves to fellowship.

Fellowship, being together. That's why we stuff ourselves into a room because we like people.

Introverts keep reminding yourself, you like people. You need people around you.

The old proverb that says if you want to go somewhere fast, you go alone. But if you want to go somewhere far, you go together. And life is far. Life is long. It truly is.

I wouldn't be where I am were it not for my pastor being with me in McDonald's. If it were not for my friends being around me when our dad passed away and they came and moved into our house for weeks.

[23:14] We're here because there were people around us. And what we're trying to do here is, I wouldn't say reaction. And if it is a reaction, I pray that we never overreact and overcompensate and go the other way and become too intense.

But it is just a response going, this is what we need. This is what helped me. I would like to be there for you. Because someone was there for me. And they devoted themselves to it.

And they said day by day, they attend the temple together and they go home and break bread.

They do both. So this argument of, oh, should it be, oh, that church is too big or this house church is too weird or whatever it might be.

It doesn't matter. Both have great points. Both have great things. A big church has small things.

They gather in the temple. They go and they worship in a big setting.

And then they go home and they continue to hang out in a much smaller group. That's what you need. That's what you need. Because you need people. Hebrews 10.25 is the one that don't stop meeting each other.

[24:13] Don't stop. Do not neglect to meet each other. Encourage each other as the day draws near. Stir each other up in love and good works. And I hold on to that all the time.

When I feel I want to spend a moment quiet. Now, there is a whole case that we need to have balance. We need to have Sabbath and we need to have rest. But I think for many of us, we're just so busy with so many other things.

We're not even having that. It just stops us from also committing to community. That word in Hebrews talks about gathering together. Episynagoge. Synagoge is synagogue.

So you meet. But actually, the epi word was maybe them trying to disassociate from the Jewish side of things. Epi. I mean, I was a biology teacher. Epithelial cells. What are those? On the surface. On the top.

It's on top of the synagogue. It's on top of church. And I've always said this. If we want to build community, don't rely on just this setting. It's too busy here. It's too busy here.

[25:10] There's too many people. You won't build your community here. I would argue the next step is then that you have a group that you meet minimum once a week. And I know for some people, that's even a lot. And I'm like, well, in that case, I can't help.

There's nothing I can do. But actually, I'd argue, and I think the midweek guys will agree with this, and the girls, is that actually the relationships aren't even just built in the midweeks.

It's in the breakfasts and the lunches and the dinners afterwards. It's those times. It's on top of the times where you're supposed to meet.

That's when you start building community. And you have to commit to seeing each other. And this is the sad thing. I'm supposed to hear to preach the good news, but there is some bad news. You want community, but you can't handle community.

You aren't willing to pay the cost of what it is. What is the biggest problem in Hong Kong? Time. I don't have time for it. And I don't believe in those four words, I don't have time.

[26:08] I believe in another four words, which is, it's not a priority. That's your four words. So when you say I don't have time, when you say I can only come to church two weeks out of the four, because the other one, I have a tennis session that I go to, and the other one, I have to go on a junk boat.

Don't come back here and then say, but I don't know anyone. Can you see? Can you see how unfair it is? Don't do it. Because it costs time.

To be with people costs time, and sometimes we can't handle that. Another part of this is, it's not just time is the problem. Say you have committed time.

Something else happens. You get to know a group of people, and then you realize those people are idiots. They're selfish. They're broken.

But they're people. We all want this time where, oh, I get to hang out with the people that I love, who are like me, who do the things that I like to do, and only then will I have community and fellowship, because only then I'm vibing with the people that are my people.

[27:31] You look at the church in this book, you look at the church in Philippi, there was a slave girl, there was a prison guard, there was a businesswoman. Can you imagine what they had in common? No, you can't.

There's nothing they have in common. But they gathered together. Scripture then says in this passage, and all who believed were together. They had all things in common. That wasn't that suddenly they all became the same social class and all have the same hobbies.

No, it was they all had their eyes on one thing. It transcended social class. It transcended hobbies. I love so much all our interest groups, and they are really, really fun.

The wine tasting, the baking, the climbing, the reading, the listening to music. I love all of it. But that's only a part of community. You'll know you're really in community when you're sitting there with someone who's really hard to love, but you're sitting there to love them anyway, and you're sitting there to listen to them anyway, to care for them anyway.

That's what we're trying to build here. Devoted to the apostles' teaching. Devoted to fellowship. And actually, blood breaks into the final two.

[28:40] Breaking bread. They're just devoted to worship, to being with people, to worship God together. And it starts off this way. They're breaking bread in their homes, and they're receiving their food with glad and generous hearts.

Can you imagine that? Just a whole group of people gathered. They're just so excited about being together. They break bread. They remember Jesus, and they receive their food with glad and generous hearts. That's so fun, right?

But you know, mankind has this knack, has this incredible ability to mess things up. Because only a few years later, the apostle Paul talks about communion.

And what does he say in 1 Corinthians 11? You'll see pastors stand up here leading communion. We'll say 1 Corinthians 11. This is what Jesus said on the night that he was betrayed. And he took this, you know, that passage? Do you know why that passage is even there?

That passage is there because there were a group of people in the church in Corinth who were sitting separately because they had nothing in common. They had the rich people sitting there, eating their caviar, breaking bread, drinking their nice wine, and they had another group that didn't have any food to eat.

[29:41] And that's what causes Paul to go, hey, that's not what communion is about. That's not what being together is about. Do we have that here?

Do we have those who have more, who aren't sharing, with those who do have, who don't have anything, sorry? It's like Francis and Wes being decked out in all their Ludo lemon and hanging out in all their breathe of all the tire.

And then in the other corner is just the rest of the people who are wearing Uniqlo. And they're not sharing. They're not sharing the love. They're not, Francis isn't sharing his discount.

Where are you, Francis? He's hiding. That's what Paul is saying.

This isn't church. You guys got people who are in need who don't have anywhere to live and you guys own apartment buildings and you're not doing anything to help them. This isn't church. And they were selling their possessions and distributing to all who had need.

[30:44] Doesn't mean you have to sell everything right now. It's when you see there is a need, will you help? Sometimes it's money. Sometimes it's possession.

A lot of the time it's time. Are you willing to spend time with people? That sharing envisages the social character of the kingdom of God.

When people walk in here, do they see people who are willing to share? That is a social character of the kingdom of God that there is no one in need.

You cannot, if Western society in its pursuit of individualism has told us anything is that you cannot flourish on your own. You cannot flourish on your own. Loneliness will be your shadow always. Look at the, go into a cemetery and look at a grave. You look at two graves. One says, this man was a CEO, a board director, and a millionaire. And this one says, he's a dad, father, friend, husband.

[31 : 54] Who was happier? who flourished? And yet we spend all of our time trying to climb up the ladder to be the CEO, to be the billionaire, to get all these things, and we'll never put it on our grave.

You cannot flourish on your own. You can only flourish with people around you. To share with people around you. And then prayer.

I'm not going to talk about prayer because actually, after this Summer Ensemble series, we're going to spend a lot of time talking about prayer. And just to give another warning here, from mid-August onwards, we're going to be talking about prayer and we're actually going to be praying.

So you won't get to just hear a sermon about prayer. You will actually have to pray. Okay? So just be aware of that. The sermons will be shorter and we will, as a community, practice what it means to pray. Okay?

That's what we're going to do. So what's the result of this devotion? These guys were devoted and they were not dabbling. Sometimes we are dabbling and we are not devoted and then we're wondering why we're not growing. These guys were devoted.

[32 : 53] What was the result of it? They were devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer and awe came upon every soul. They were just filled with awe and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

Can you imagine how does this community even exist? It's because everyone's eyes are just up there. They're just, it's an attractive community because everyone is just focused on anything but themselves and awe came upon every soul.

If we, those who gather here, come in here with the sole objective of Psalm 27, which is, Lord, I just want to dwell in your house. I want to gaze upon your beauty. I want to inquire in your temple and learn from the teaching and fellowship and breaking bread prayers.

What kind of community would that be? One that isn't absorbed with its own problems. One that isn't looking down on other people. And then, verse 47, it says this, and they were praising God and having favor with all people.

Can you imagine this group that was growing and they were beginning to speak just called The Way. These guys, oh, they're part of The Way. They followed The Way. What is The Way? Well, there was a guy, Jesus, that came and he showed them The Way and now they're living in The Way.

[34 : 08] But you know what? You know what? That group of people really are like, they're really cool people. They're really fun. They're really nice. They're filled with joy. And they had favor with the neighbors.

We don't have great favor with our neighbors currently because we're too loud. But they had favor with the people. That means the people outside were sort of, there's something about you guys that's different.

There's something about you guys that's different. What is that? That's the healthy community that we're praying for. So sociologists have this thought that they're all pretty much agreed that the ideal number of people is about 150.

Like, it's basically a village. The ideal number for a human to flourish, a human to community to flourish is about 150 people because if you get too big, people start not knowing each other and there's a lot more troubles and there's kind of, and then suddenly there's gangs and West Side Story and it just all gets really messy.

But 150 people is nice. It takes a village to raise the children. That's the village. That's nice. And I find myself asking this question. That's what I've always said. 150.

[35 : 22] I would, Lord, would you give us a church that is 150 people who are devoted to the teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayers and that's it. That's all I need.

And then I realize I shoot myself in the foot because if, let's just argue for health and safety reasons here that we only have 150 people here right now and so this is it.

And this is it and we just commit to one another. We devote ourselves to one another, teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayers. I realize I shoot myself in the foot because my ideal dream group of 150, if it really was that good, it can't stay at 150.

Do you know what I mean? If you're growing in the Lord, if you're becoming a doer of the word and you're gathering, you can't help but scatter and you can't help but invite. That means 150, even if it's going well, cannot stay at 150.

And we're desperately trying to figure out how to deal with this, how to do that. But I'll tell you one thing. We must always, always still have that welcoming, inviting spirit.

[36:30] And I've shared this example before because it happens because of selfish people like you and me and that is the Hong Kong elevator problem. When you're running, walking towards the elevator and it's just about to close but you're like, ah, and then you manage to squeeze in and then you squeeze in and then what's the next thing that you do?

And you're like, oh, I'm so grateful that I managed to squeeze into this elevator. What's the next thing that you do? You ram that close button. You're like, now I managed to get in but no one else is now allowed in because he's going to waste my time.

But I'm kind of grateful that I managed to make it in. Do you have that? I literally just had that as I was coming up. In my defense, I really needed the toilet. But that old lady probably has a lot of time on her hands anyway.

But don't we have that in church? Don't we have that? We come into a community, want to find our place because we have loneliness and we want to find belonging and then we find our friends and we go, you know what?

This is the perfect size. Guys, we don't want any more people. And we completely forget that we were once one of those people on the outside. We forget that we were hoping that we would catch that elevator, that someone would open it for us but the moment we walk in, boom, we seem to forget and we now start closing.

[37:44] Isn't it interesting the depravity of man that we have that selfishness in us? So let's be a community that invites people. It's been a year now since we moved here.

It's been a year now since we had the small little gathering. Let's just call that the OG gathering and KFCI. And I wanted to dispel something that I've heard multiple times which is this.

Yeah, there's a lot of people and I was from KFCI and I only know my five KFCI people and the other gathering people I don't know. And then we've got the OG gathering guys who come and get, oh yeah, it's nice but it's getting bigger because I only know the OG gathering people and the rest of the KFCI people I don't really know.

I can dispel that rumor right here. It is not just two groups. What's happened and what the Lord has done as he's brought more of you to us of which I am grateful for and I apologize if I'm sounding like I'm not grateful for you.

I am grateful that you are here truly. Is that there's a mindset that we are always in the minority. Do you know what I'm saying? That you walk in and you're like, oh, I'm just on my own and everyone else knows each other and are besties and they are so good, such good friends and I'm the only one alone.

[39:04] Can I tell you that's not true? The majority of people here are neither associated with KFCI nor the OG gathering. Okay? Because we've grown since then. We've had a lot of new people coming in integrating into our community.

Jesus is a perfect example. You came here and this is all you ever know. And you're just part of this. So I'm going to encourage all of us to drop the, ah, I only know those five people from KFCI. Oh, I wish I had, this is all one group. And what your perception of your being a minority is, actually, I will kindly, politely say, it's actually not accurate.

There's so many people here. We have so many guests here and visitors here. That's part of being in Hong Kong and a city and being in Admiralty and I get all of that too. But the community is a mix of everyone.

And I think it's now around about the right time for us to just drop that. And I've loved, honestly, I have loved seeing Rocky. I just want to highlight Rocky. This guy, this guy is like OG KFC.

[40:05] You were, you were even before, you were, you were before KFC. Right? KFCI, sorry. You were like, you grew up in KFC. But these last few weeks, I saw him on Monday night coming

here, doing BJJ.

Tuesday, he was doing Muay Thai with the group. Then he's playing bass and then we're celebrating Annabelle's birthday. And I'm like, man, this guy's getting stuck in. And it's good, right, Rocky?

You have no choice but to nod right now, but it's good, right? Yeah, it's really good. Okay, cool. A healthy body has to grow. And we're trying to figure that out.

I assure you, those of you who are standing, I promise you I'm finishing soon. But we're trying to grow. But we want to grow in the right way. And it starts with the heart. It starts with the mindset. Maybe just a very, very polite one. If you're literally here, you're like, look, James, I get it. But I'm actually just here to dabble because I actually don't have time.

[41:06] Yeah, I know it's not my priority. I'm just not there yet. Actually, to you, no shade, just grace. That's okay. May I recommend to you all these other churches around that have tons of space and tons of seats and go dabble.

Go dabble until you're ready to devote. And you can devote yourselves there too. We're not the only, I am not saying we're the only ones that have the only way. There are so many churches doing great things for the kingdom of God here. But I would encourage you, if you're here like, oh, I don't really know, I think I'm just going to dabble here and just take up a seat and take up the oxygen, then there's other places to do that.

Honestly. But I pray in my heart of hearts that you would devote yourself to this. Because I pray that you would be filled with awe and wonder for him. And that you would know what it means to be in community.

That you would know what it means to not be lonely because you can look to the person next to you. Just as C.S. Lewis says, when you're looking and you think you're journeying on your own and you look to your side and you see someone and you go, what? You too?

That's friendship. I pray for that. Because I couldn't do it alone and I can't do it alone. And neither can you. So I'm praying that you would think about that.

[42:23] What's a healthy body look like for me? And this is where I'll wrap up. It's a community that has a certain few values that I really want us to hold on to. There's a book that I was reading about just church growth and direction.

And one of the things is the type of community that attracts people is one that has joy. I'm praying that we would be a community of joy. Not just joy because everything's going well, but joy despite sadness.

Remember what I said last week from the great movie Inside Out? Gabs and I love that line.

Honestly, there's this, hey, I'm spoiling it for you. When joy says to sadness, where you go, I go. Man, grief and gratitude together. Can we be a people of joy despite everything that might be happening in our own lives that we choose? And you can only do that with people who are committed to you, who know you, who share the same passions as you.

Can we be a people who have joy despite sadness? Can we be people who have hope despite darkness? That you look at this world and you see all the things that are going on and you turn on the TV and it's the presidential debate and you see all these things and you're like, you know what, I still have hope because kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall but Jesus was the one that will be reign above it all.

[43:41] And I have that hope and that he is coming back again and he is a hope that will save me. I cannot see him right now but he is coming and he has a name and because of that I can grieve but I can grieve still with hope.

Can we be that type of people? Can we be a type of people that has peace despite differences? We look across the room right now, we have people of many, many differences but can we, actually, that's exactly what church is.

That's what Keller says. Church is a group of people who otherwise would have no business being together. That if I walked past you in the street, I would have nothing to do with you because of the way you do your hair and I'll just be offended by you because you're wasting your hair and I don't want to talk to you.

But because of Christ, we're united together. Social class, hobbies, interests, preferences, music, whatever it might be, can we be a people that deliberately goes across the barrier to the other side and go, man, I love you.

In school, we would not have been friends but here, we are friends. Peace despite differences. And finally, to have love despite inconvenience.

[44:58] Do you know how we all kind of go, hey, love you and love you, bro? Do you know how I personally measure whether a community loves each other or not? when a community goes out of their way to do something for you.

When they didn't have to do that and they did it. That's, that's when I'm like, that's love. Right?

Because if they're just hanging out with you, having a good time and having banter when everyone's supposed to be here anyway, that's nice but I wouldn't call that love just yet.

But when someone deliberately chooses to take their time to get out from home and come and find you or do something for you, basically inconvenience themselves for you, that starts to look like love for me. Can we be a community that is willing to do that?

When we hear someone is sick, can we go out of our way? And Trevor did this for my family when I injured myself dunking in an NBA game. He went out of his way at 7 a.m., woke up from his house, drove all the way to my house, picked up my kids, drove them to Kowloon to school and back again. I'm just, that's love. Why? Because he inconvenienced himself to do it. And we have that modeled because Jesus went out of his way for us.

[46:06] He traveled the ultimate distance for us from heaven's throne down into the stable in Bethlehem. Why wouldn't we do that for each other?

And if you're thinking, well, how do I show love? Well, do that. Go out of your way for someone. Can we be a community that loves despite inconvenience? And you might, okay, well, that's a lot of things.

Joy despite sadness, peace despite differences, hope despite darkness, love despite inconvenience. How are we supposed to do that? Well, that's the point. We're not able to by ourselves. How do we even have Acts 2, 42 to 47 that they devoted themselves to these things that they were filled with awe and wonder that they had glad and generous hearts?

How? Why? At the beginning of Acts, you see the Holy Spirit coming upon them and then the gospel is preached and they are cut to the heart. Acts 2, 37, they are cut to the heart and they go to Peter, what shall we do?

And then he says, repent and be baptized and you are forgiven. This kind of community only comes when it is spirit filled, when it understands the gospel, the good news that Christ went out of his way for us and we are cut to the heart, we repent and only then do we have a chance of having this kind of community.

[47:25] only then. And that's what I'm praying for, that we would have this and if you're just sat there going, oh, but that's, yeah, I'm not there, I don't understand the Holy Spirit, I don't really know the gospel and you don't know the stuff I've done.

Just before this passage of Fellowship of Believers, 239 says this, for the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off. This message is for you, man. Ephesians 2 is that Christ came and preached peace to those who were near and to those who were far off.

So whether you feel like you're very close to him or whether you feel like you have no business being in his presence, he came for you and he went out of his way for you and if we remember that and if we rely on the Holy Spirit, if we remind ourselves of the gospel, if we are cut to the heart and we ask, what shall we do, then this is what it looks like, a healthy community.

That's what I'm praying for. Do we have answers? Do we need to deal with fire, health and safety and numbers? Yes. But I like to think that we can figure it out together so long as we have these values, so long as we have this heart, this commitment to one another, this commitment to Christ. Paul's going to lead us in a final response song. I love this song because it gives us the words to remember actually what is it that we're even doing.

[48:58] In order to have the kind of community that I'm praying for that we're envisioning here that we can see being described here, we need an utter, utter focus and reliance on Jesus to be completely devoted to him, to not dabble anymore.

and to commit together to following the Jesus way. Can I pray for us? Amen. Jesus, we want to be filled with your spirit.

We want your good news to truly penetrate into the depths of our souls, that we would be cut to the heart, but with a godly grief, a godly grief that leads to repentance.

presence. And then by your grace and by your strength, you would allow us to have the strength to be devoted to your teaching, to fellowship with one another, to worshipping you with, through communion and prayer.

Would you fill us with awe and wonder again for you? Allow us to have glad and generous hearts, favor with all people, because we are people of the way, a way that is different to the way of this world, the way that brings life.

[51:14] As Paul and the band sing this over us, would you ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength to comprehend his love to you?

Would you ask to you? And then for him to show you how to live out that love. You didn't just offer us the blueprint to flourishing.

You then showed us how, and then you made the way yourself for us. So as your body, we worship you. As your body, we glorify you.

As your body, we look to you as our head. Fill us with awe and wonder for you. Fill us with glad and generous hearts for each other.

And we know that we cannot do this by our own strength. but through you, Lord, we can do all things. So we commit to being devoted to you, not to just double.

[52:47] And we trust that your grace is enough. Thank you, Lord. Thank you for this time that we've been able to gather together, to gaze upon your beauty, to inquire in your temple.

May we dwell in your house all the days of our lives. May your goodness and mercy continue to follow us everywhere we go as we scatter from here.

In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.