

Community

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[0:00] I'll confess to you, today, this week, I asked the question, and I asked it to Siri, and! I said, Siri, when does Lent end this year? And then, Siri is a troll. Siri misheard me and thought I said, when does Lent end next year? And Siri told me Lent ends on April 2nd. And I asked on April 3rd. I was like, what? Let's go. I was like, wait, that doesn't make sense.

And then I looked, it was 2026. For those of us who are still fasting, we're nearly there. I think we have a week and a half to go, is what it is. If you didn't fast through this whole time, then actually, it's still not too late. You could still do it now. I was talking to someone, I won't name them today, but who did something else and was kind of like dwindling, because 40 days is a long time. And afterwards, I was like, you know what? Just change it up.

Like, that's the whole point is, can we get close to God from this? Not just to kind of hold on to something, uh, just, just through the pain. So anyway, that's what we've been going through for Lent. We're nearly at the end. Next week is our final one on the spiritual disciplines. And we're going to be talking about confession, uh, as we lead up to Good Friday. But we have one here that's just a, um, that we're going to try and cover a lot with. So maybe just a quick recap, a rewind of our minds. What are the spiritual disciplines we've done so far? What have we got? Who remembers the ones that we've done?

Scripture. There we go. Pastor's wife. Remember what her husband put to about. Scripture. Shout out to Reverend Gabe. Uh, what are the other ones? Scripture is one of them.

Silence, solitude. That was last week. Lamenting was another one. Worship was one. And are we missing any? And of course, fasting. Uh, so all these ones that we've talked about, you can actually do on your own. You can do on your own and they are really inward focusing.

[1:55] They're really focusing you towards God. Uh, I know that, uh, Francis has taken up cycling more recently and I was, I was, I was driving behind a group of cyclists. Um, the, the, the cyclists, cyclists. I just made up a new word, cyclists. Uh, and I was like, oh, this is a very introverted sport. You kind of just, you're on your own and you're just kind of spending that time on your, but actually somehow people still like to do it together. Or sometimes you see people who are riding motorbikes who can go and cruise on their own, but they also like to do together. Runners are the same. You can do it on your own, but you also like to do it together.

And the ones that we've done so far, scripture and lamenting and worship, uh, and of course, prayer, you can do those on your own and you can do them together. I'm going to bunch a whole group of other spiritual disciplines together this week and you'll be just forgive me if it's going to be a little bit over ambitious, but it's going to be the spiritual discipline of peopling. I've just made up a new word there again, peopling, because there are some things that you can do on your own and together, but there are some things that you must do with other people. If we're to be disciplined disciples, we also need to learn how to people. We also need to learn how to interact with people, love people, serve people. And there is a, if we're looking at different lists of spiritual disciplines, one of them that keeps coming up is community and fellowship and the need to be together. And we need to be together. John Woodberg was the one who said, we generally sin alone, but we heal together. We generally sin alone, but we heal together.

There's something about when we are together that is so important in our healing process, in our redemptive process. Dallas Willard was the one who said, actually, Christian redemption wasn't made, designed for solitary living. It is something that you have to do together. I was talking to Wes about this last week, as I mentioned before. Where is Wes? I can't see Wes.

Hiding. Wes. I was talking to him. He hates it when I embarrass him. I was talking to him because he's my physios who've been, you know, physioing, rehabbing my Achilles. And one thing I said to him was actually, I can probably do these things on my own now, but there's something about me

going, you know what, if I was going to do it on my own, you know what will really happen? I just won't do it. So I have to call Wes. I go, Wes, I need an appointment. And then I spend that time and I enjoy that time, even though it's painful because it's someone there with me doing it. And he was reflecting with me and going, actually, you know, reading the Bible is hard. Memorizing scripture is hard.

And then I said, he said, well, but I want to be able to do it by myself. And I said, yes, that's so true. Just like my physio is hard and I can do it by myself, but there's something that's just so special when we are willing to help each other, when we get together to do it.

[4:41] And after the sermon on scripture, Paul was the one who took the initiative to start this scripture club, which is this WhatsApp group that we've all, well, a few of us have joined in actually helping us memorize scripture. And why, why do we have a WhatsApp group?

Because it's better to do it with other people. So shout out to Paul for helping us take initiative. And he actually sends us reminders throughout the week to, hey, get on it. Because memorizing is hard. But when you do it together, when there's incentive, when there's accountability, then it's just much, much better. During COVID, there was, I took part in an activity that I would never usually take part in. And that was the activity of camping. Who likes camping here?

Okay. Well, some people, we have, we have a husband who likes it and a wife who doesn't. That's the same as our marriage too. Praying for you as well. But anyway, during COVID, there was nothing else to do. And of course, everyone was like, so I was like, okay, fine, we'll go camping. And of course, part of the camping is that you have to stay warm. And part of the same warm is you've got to go and grab all these branches. And, and there was one spiritually edifying moment for me as I was stood there just watching the fire burn. I was like, these fires will only burn when all these branches have piled on top of each other. If you had one branch that was lit, it will light for a little while, but it won't last forever. Maybe you have been in that place where you actually lived and had a heart for Jesus and been on fire for him, but you were just lit on your own. And inevitably, you'll know at that point, at some point it will burn out. But when you heap them all together, when you pile them all together, when you keep adding, that's when the fire will continue to burn. It reminds me of the quote that I just quoted from Dallas Willard. It says this, the fire of God kindles higher as the brands are heaped together and each is warmed by the other's flame. The members of the body must be in contact if they are to sustain and be sustained by each other.

Christian redemption is not devised to be a solitary thing. I think about another movie that was transformative for my life was High School Musical. Wow, the judging face for grace was just there. The church that we were part of, we actually reenacted it, and there is somewhere in the deep ethers of the internet a video of me dancing to the song, but I'm just going to leave it there. Of course, more recently, The Lion King Mufasa has a song called We Go Together, which quotes the African proverb, if you want to go somewhere fast, you go alone, but if you want to go somewhere far, you go together.

[7:07] Hebrews 10 talks about this. He says, hey, this life is a long journey. Don't stop meeting each other. You have to encourage one another. You can't do it on your own. If we're to be disciplined disciples, we need people. We need to learn how to people, because when we know how to people, then we will actually be some good in the world. I finally got around to watching the film with Christina, The Two Popes. It was just interesting dialogue, just having these two popes talking about just their different emphases on life and on ministry. One of the quotes that really hit me was this.

One of the outgoing one, Joseph Ratzinger, he said, I was so scared of life, I hid myself in books and theology and doctrine, only to find myself empty and void of the world that the church is supposed to help. My prayer is that as we become disciplined disciples, we don't just focus on the things where we fill our minds with the things of God, but that they would actually drop into our hearts and that it would actually spur us on to living. And it is a discipline to people. It is a discipline to love people. It is a discipline to interact with people because people are hard. People are idiots. People are sheep, as we've just discussed these last few weeks. So I want to kind of fly around a little bit in scripture. Now, I know that sometimes I like to stay in one place, but today we're going to, as I sum up all these different themes, we're actually going to jump around a little bit. So bear with us. Don't worry. Those of us who really like just verse by verse after Easter, we're going to go through the book of Acts and it's just going to be one plume, just plain sailing going through there. But today I'm going to jump around a little bit to really hammer home the point of, wait, what did the

Psalms say about us peopling? And what did Jesus show us when it comes to peopling? So we're actually going to read from a different passage and I'm going to invite, I'm going to call you birthday boy, because in some ways the baptism was a birthday. So I'm going to invite Uday up to actually read the scripture for us. And I'm not going through this passage of scripture, but it's a passage that Christina and I were actually talking about yesterday and she was just struck by the tone of it and what it really is. And it's the title of that passage is the marks of a true Christian. And it really just got me thinking about what we were talking about today. So I'm going to invite Uday to read that passage from Romans 12 for us. So can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord? God, we stand because we are filled with reverence and awe and gratitude that you would speak to us, that you would reach out to us, you would pursue us, and that we would have an avenue, a channel to be able to know you, to learn more about you. And as we continue to ask the question, what does it mean to be a disciple? What does it mean to be a disciplined disciple? What does it mean to be a true Christian? We hang on every word that you say and we pray that you would speak.

So Lord, we listen to your word now from Romans 12. So we're reading from Romans 12, verse 9, and this is the ESV translation, if you're following along.

[9:59] Marks of the true Christian. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation. Be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.

Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved, never avenge yourself, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed them.

[11:15] If he is thirsty, give him something to drink, for by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Ude. Please take a seat. That passage in Romans 12, I would describe it as like the JD of a Christian.

If you want to know what it means to be a Christian, if you just read Romans 12, verse 9 to 21, it'll tell you what a mark of a true Christian look like. If you're a follower of Christ, this is what it should look like.

This is what you should be doing. You should have a genuine love. You should abhor what is evil. That means you hate what is evil. You should love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another. Be patient.

Be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints. And seek to show hospitality. If you just keep going down that list, it's like, wow, if I am going to be a follower of Christ, it must impact the way I interact with people.

[12:16] That's it. If I love God, if I say I love God, it must translate down and trickle down to how I love people. We can't get away from it. Being a Christian isn't just about, I'm going to get my Jesus on, and I'm going to sit on the top of a mountain.

I'm just going to read scripture. I'm going to memorize it. I'm going to pray. I'm just going to just stay there on my own. That is part of it, no doubt. But that can't be all of it. If you want to love God, you must love people.

And I'll tell you, and you will all know this, loving people is hard. That's why if you look at the New Testament, what does Jesus keep talking about? He's saying, love one another. Love one another. Go out of your way for one another. What does Paul keep saying? Bear with one another. Be patient. Why? Because when a group of people like this get into a room together and spend time together and start finding each other annoying and start finding the selfishness that exists in each of our hearts, it gets hard.

And the first thing you want to do is either fight or just flight and just withdraw. You're like, you know what? People are annoying. The only people that we can't run away from are our families, the ones who live with us. And so we're stuck with them.

[13:19] But we somehow get to choose this, so we instead choose to withdraw. So here I am to tell you that actually there is a huge discipline in peopling. It requires you to go out of your way to actually be in a community.

Genesis 1 talks about it. We were created from community. It was when the Trinity, the Godhead said, let us make man in our image. Let us, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, let us make man in our image, let us let them basically oversee, have dominion over the world.

We were built from community for community. Jesus' last words, just before he leaves, after spending the 33 years on earth, and what does he pray in John 17? He says, can they just be as one?

Can they just not bite each other's heads off? Can they not argue about theology? Can they not argue about how to worship, what songs to sing?

Can they just not argue about what they think a Christian, looks like a Christian, a true mark of a Christian, one who follows Christ, is one who loves God, but who also loves people.

[14:25] How well do we people? He prays for it, Jesus did in John 17, but then when he actually recruits and does the work, what does he do?

He recruits 12 bandits to help him. Imagine Jesus, he could have come in and said, okay, well, I'm going to save the world. I've got a few objectives that I need to hit. I need to upset the Roman Empire, the whole empire.

I need to do this. I need to do this. I need to basically shake up the mindset of the Pharisees. I could do this all on my own. And yet he decides, actually, you know what? I'm going to pick 12 people to live with for three years. And I want to walk with them.

I want to spend time with them. And even then, once I go, I'm going to say, hey, you guys go two by two. You can't do it alone. You must do it together. There is something about doing it together that is so, so important.

We talked maybe at the beginning of the church, of course, if you've come to this church and you read our mission statements, you'll know that we're trying our best to people. We don't succeed.

[15:19] Honestly, often we actually fall short. But we're trying our best. When we first started, we kept asking each other the question, who are your three? Who are your three? Who's your Paul?

Who's your Barnabas? Who's your Timothy? Who's your Paul? Who's your mentor? Who's pouring into you? Who's your Barnabas? Who's your friend who's just encouraging you? And who's your Timothy? Who are you pouring into? The idea is to constantly remind ourselves, hey, you can't do this alone.

You shouldn't do this alone. It's not a solitary thing. You should find someone to do this with. And now you might not have a clear Paul and a clear Barnabas and a clear Timothy, but hopefully you have people that play different roles that you can call your people.

So when you have something that's going on, when you're struggling to fast, when you're struggling with this temptation, you have someone who you can call and go, hey, I'm really struggling. This is a really bad week. Now, often it's been said, and I think I do agree to a certain extent, if you go to a really big church, you can basically go for a whole year and no one knows that you went.

You can also not go for a whole year and no one realizes that you haven't been around. But I'm here to tell you something even more scary. I think you could do that here too. Don't trick yourself into coming to the gathering and then make yourself believe that you have gathered when actually no one has really truly known you.

[16:37] It's important to ask that question. Okay, how can I actually know and be known? Why do I need to do this on a Sunday when actually as an introvert, all I want to do is just rest and chill and be on my own?

It's because I recognize that there is a need for people. More importantly, if my life is to become more like Christ, the only way I can become more like Christ is if I learn the discipline of peopling. That's the only way.

The only way we can become more like Christ, to be sanctified, to be looking like Him is when we have people around us to mold us and shape us. Spiritual formation requires, it is essential to have people around us to do it.

Who are your people? For those of us who have been Christians for longer, I think the question is, who are your people and who are you Paul to? Who are you pouring into? 2 Timothy 2.2, Paul says this, hey, what I've taught you, Timothy, can you teach to someone else?

Who will teach to someone else? And I heard a pastor say this recently, which is every Christian, every believer should be asking and praying God, how can I have my people? How can I go four deep with my people?

[17:40] How can I be Paul to a Timothy who will be then someone else to someone else? How can we be four deep with these people? How can we have people around us? It requires discipline because after a long day of work, all you want to do is go home and rest.

Those of you who are in life groups will know the joy of being in community, being with people. But all of you, I have no doubt will have wrestled with on any given Thursday or Wednesday or Tuesday, whenever you have your life group, where you're like, today's not the day.

I just want to go home. Have we all, can we just not, if you've been in a life group and you know that feeling, right? I know I should, but I'm really tired. Work's just been really bad and I just want to go. At that moment, when you decide to go, what does that require? That requires discipline. That requires you to say, okay, I'm still going to go. And more often than not, you come out afterwards and go, okay, that was worth it.

That was necessary. I needed that. But to get there, it requires discipline. I know some people like Jackie who work in China come back just in time for life group and they have to travel far.

[18:55] Some of us don't even want to cross the harbour. It requires discipline to get us to a place where we can be with people. And when you do, there is beauty.

That's when the formation comes. That's where the fruit comes. And you know what? One of my biggest joys, when people ask me, how's the gathering there? I was like, you know what? I don't know. It's really, what are the KPIs of a church? How do you measure disciples?

But one thing I do find great encouragement in is that people are connecting with one another. And of those of you who are really connecting in the life groups, I think not a month goes by I hear one group going away on a retreat, going on a ski trip, going to wine tasting, going to Taipei, even though they wanted to go to Bangkok and they knew that Bangkok was a bad idea, going to Bali, going to Saikong.

It's really fun to see this happening. I made you a side note here. I realize actually there's some things that I really want to give announcements for, but because I'm at the pulpit, I don't have much of a chance. So I'm going to use this chance today to talk about this.

If you have been here for a while and you really want to join a life group, okay, there are different ways to do it. One of the big easiest ways is you just come straight up to me after seven and go, hey, I've been here for a while now.

[20:10] I want to join a life group. Can I join a life group? Let me know you. Let me see your face. One thing that is interesting as I have the honor and privilege of standing here on any given Sunday is I actually get to see who's here.

And one thing I often will tell you, if you're here for the first week or the second week or the third week, I'm like, hey, it's really good that you're here. I really want you to be part of a community. But one thing that we do is we just stay, just stick around.

Hang out with us. Let us see you more. And once we see you more, then actually it'll take time because the last thing we want is for anyone to come for the second week and we enter into a life group. People don't know you. You join the life group, have one conversation with one person and then afterwards you disappear and you leave.

Okay? So what we're trying to do is take that fine line between having community that's intimate, that where people are willing to be vulnerable and who want to go on holiday with each other, but also being welcoming.

And I'll tell you, that is a fine line. And I also know, so you can come up to me and talk to me straight away, but I also know there are introverts who are like, this has already been too overwhelming for me.

[21:10] There is social anxiety here. So I can't eat. To have to walk all the way to come and talk to you, that is too much. That's why we created the QR code, which is right behind Rebecca right there. If you're an introvert and you're like, I know I need to talk, but I just physically can't right now, can you please scan the code and actually tell us that you want to talk?

And that is a way that we're going to try and do it. Christina and I are actually going to plan to start our own life group. So that's why if you've been coming, umming and ahing and you have been around for a while, please do let us know because we do want to include you and we do want you

to be a part of this because we recognize we need to have people around us.

Okay? If you've been here only for a couple weeks, keep coming. I know it's hard. Actually, we had a few people over last week and I was just talking about Therese and actually even, even Jackie makes me think of this.

I remember when these two people first came, you came on your own without really anyone around and do you remember how overwhelming it felt? I mean, do you actually, all of us remember when we walk into a place and you're like, oh my goodness, I don't know anyone here.

Everyone else here knows everyone. They practically grew up together. They're all besties. I assure you, we're not. But you feel like that because you're new here. And what I witnessed, at least these two examples, and actually there's countless more examples, is you guys just stuck around.

[22 : 28] Even when it was awkward. Even when Jackie was being awkward. He just stuck around. I was like, wow, Jackie, it still is awkward. And I was just like, oh, credit to you, man.

When we say, hey, stay for lunch, you literally stay. And then you just hung around until there's no one left. And the first week was really hard. And there's only so much small talk you can have, right?

And it's kind of, hi, so what do you do? Oh, you work in white? Oh, that's cool, cool, cool. So, and there comes the wall. That's the first barrier. And then you push through.

And then he shows up the week after again. And we, it was the time when we had, we had volleyball. So, and then he went to volleyball. Then he offered to give rides. And suddenly, because it's like, actually, what, after a while, oh, we know who he is. He's around.

He's here to stay. Same with Teresa. She came, we had friends from the UK who had known her, who recommended her to be here. And again, just a girl came in and of course, ends up meeting, seeing an ex in the church that she was at.

[23 : 31] And then ends up getting back together with the ex. And, and, what I'm telling you is this, to people is hard.

It is awkward. It is uncomfortable. But we must do it. Psalm 133 says this, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in harmony. He said, oh, it is so good.

It is so special. It is so hard. That's why we have so many commands. How to love one another.

How to be, stop talking together. Focus, focus on the sermon. There's a book that I've been reading called The Anxious Generation.

Who's read that book? Wow. No one. Good. I can tell you whatever I want about the book. Wow, wow, wow. The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt. His whole premise is that, actually, we have a whole generation now that are incredibly anxious about anything and everything.

And his premise is that they are, children growing up in this world now are overprotected in the real world and underprotected in the virtual world. We just, his point, his first example is interesting.

[24 : 40] He says, hey, if your kid comes home from school and says, hey, I would love to move to Mars. There's a school trip to move to Mars. Can I go? You'd be like, well, obviously no, because you're a child and you won't survive. And we know that and we understand that and yet, we have young people now coming home and go, hey, I'd like to go into the virtual world.

Can I go there myself? And parents just like, yeah, sure, go there. And so that we're overprotecting in the real world because now we don't feel safe letting our kids go out, but in the virtual world, there's basically just the Wild West and we let them go.

And then we see mental health plummeting and we see people, as I always joke and you've heard me joke, someone who grew up in the late 1900s, what he described my childhood was, was a, I forgot the word now.

Well, he says, the current childhood goes through a phone-based childhood, so we go through a play-based one where it's basically, we had, who remembers being out on the street as a child and having to be bored and make things up, make games up.

Yeah? Do you remember that? Where you just hung out, when you go and knock on someone at a friend's door and you're just going to hang out, what do you want to do? I don't know, let's just walk. Do you remember that? Do you remember the, do you remember the gift of boredom?

[25 : 49] Do you remember, do you remember that's where the friendships would come because what do you want to do? I don't know. But now we end up in a place where we're so scared of the real world, we don't even let the kids cross the road without worrying about them.

Whereas my parents, we actually, we were just hanging around on the road. I remember using chalk and drawing a badminton court on the road and just playing there. And then of course every type of car goes by, we just have to jump across.

We've lost the art. And one of the biggest things that I won't show you the whole book, please do read it, was actually, we've lost the art of synchronous communication. What does that mean? It's when, it's when I'm talking to Josh here, I'm reading his body language, which most of the time is quite serious because he's got his arms crossed because he's a very serious guy.

I say something, he responds. I say something, it causes him to have just a reaction to it.

And he'll tell me through his body that actually, I mean, he's an Enneagram aide, so he likes to challenge most things. So I say something, he'll be like, oh, I don't know about that. And then we'll have a conversation.

[26 : 56] Sorry, I keep saying, challenges. We'll have that, we'll have that thought go through in us. But then I learn what he likes. He learns what I like.

And we're learning, it's synchronous communication. It's us learning to behave with one another, interact with one another. Even interactions like that is good. But what's the next generation doing now?

How are they learning to communicate? It is not synchronous, it is not time-based because you send a message and then you wait for them to respond at another time. So you don't learn the cues. You don't learn when you've upset someone until much later.

They just leave you blue ticked and then that's it. And then you're just left with your own thoughts. There's something beautiful about being together where that's how we learn, that's how we are formed.

John Mark Homer says this, the radical individualism of Western culture is not only a mental health catastrophe, it's a death blow to any kind of serious formation into Christ-like love because it's in relationships that we are formed and forged.

[27 : 58] I'll ask you again, how well do you people? How well do you people? Ephesians 4 talks about unity. Paul's saying, hey, just be together.

How does he say? He says, bear with one another. Be humble. Be gentle. Be patient. That's how you get unity. But do we do that?

You don't learn to be gentle and humble and lowly without having people around you. Another book that I just finished before that was a book by Dane Orland called Gentle and Lowly.

It's a fantastic book, just so beautifully written. And one thing that I came away just being challenged by that is, am I gentle and lowly? That's a huge question.

You should ask that to yourself. Am I gentle and lowly? His premise is, in all of the Gospels, Jesus only describes his heart once, and that is in Matthew 11, and it says, I am gentle and lowly in heart.

[28 : 56] And so I ask myself that question. Am I gentle and lowly? Then I realize I can't answer that question by myself. I have to ask others to answer that question for me.

And in my world, I, okay, I was just about to say Nathan, but I'm not that gentle to Nathan, but to the most of you who I am gentle and kind with, if I ask you that question, my hope is that you'll say, oh, James, you're pretty good.

You're like a, like a nine out of ten, maybe. That's good. Julian's looking at me going, no, you're not, brother. Juju. I've let you off for a lot of weeks. So then I realized there's only really one person, actually maybe three people I should ask that question to.

Christina, Ruben, and Alicia. And I couldn't quite bear asking my kids. So it took me a few weeks to really kind of build up the courage to ask Christina. I said, hey, if you had to rank me out of ten, how gentle and lowly I was, what would you say?

And she stopped for a bit. She's like, hmm, you're probably five. I was like, oof. She's like, naturally you're a five.

[30 : 02] Like, you're not very gentle, you're not very lowly. But then she said the next line, which was, but I see that you're trying, so I'll probably rate your intentions ten out of ten. I was like, yo. The discipline of peopling requires us to be gentle, lowly, humble.

And we can only learn those things when we are around people. And Dorothy Day says this, if we are to love God, we must learn to love people. If we are, and then I want to add to it, if we are to learn to love people, we must know people.

If we want to know people, we must spend time with people. But if we're all honest with ourselves, in Hong Kong, we don't have much time. And so we say we want community, we say we want to be known, but we can't actually handle the time it takes to do it.

It's kind of like you want the truth, but you can't handle the truth. If you want community, but you can't handle community because community is hard. It requires discipline. And I'm going to lump in a couple of disciplines here just on that.

One of them is hospitality. Psalm 23, my brother last week talked about how he prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies. He anoints our heads with oil and our cups overflow.

[31 : 15] Romans 12 here says that we should seek to show hospitality. hospitality. This was something that we were relatively good at in England. Why? Because we had a house and we had a dining table that could fit more than five people.

But now we don't. Let me ask you, what are the biggest challenges when it comes to you being hospitable? Here in Hong Kong, you think about your own life.

I think about Julian Florence, who actually, that's your heart, you want to be hospitable. One of the challenges that you guys face when you try to be hospitable. Go on. We're in May 4th. You're in May 4th. That is so true.

I should introduce you to May 4th. Then you got some people there. May 4th, because people don't want to go to the dark side. Yeah. Because the dark side is dark. You're in May 4th.

That's one reason. Why else is hospitality hard? Agnes. Is Agnes here? I think Agnes is hiding in the back. Her and Vincent are probably the most hospitable people that I've met here in Hong Kong.

[32 : 22] They are just always having people over. If you haven't been invited over, please invite yourself over. Vincent's spiritual gift is called barbecue. Oh, and the tomahawk is good.

What makes you be hospitable and what's hard for you? here. Yeah. That is so good.

Honestly, if you go and you watch them, they are nonstop. Well, actually, Vincent's just stood at the barbecue. Agnes is nonstop just going around. We all tell her, hey, can you sit down and spend time with us?

But she enjoys that service, that hospitality. How often do we go out of our way to be hospitable? And I'll challenge you. If you live in a small place, that means you can only invite two people, but it means you can still invite two people.

There's something about Starbucks, which is good, and I've met some of you in Starbucks and they're great times because I love matcha lattes. There's something about just going to a restaurant that's nice as well where, hey, you're served and you just kind of have to pretend to fight for the bill at the end.

[33 : 44] But something about going home that is just so different that I would encourage you to try. And actually, I was unpacking this with Josh earlier this week and I was like, actually, why do people struggle with that?

I guess it's because sometimes we don't want people to see the home that we live in. Sometimes we're afraid of what they will see, what we're trying to show. Sometimes we're just afraid of the mess that we live in, in which case we should just tidy up.

But there's something about all of this. There's something about just being hospitable that actually requires you to open up your house and go, hey, come. Come hang out. Come have dinner. Let me cook you this very average meal that does not compare to the Hong Kong restaurants outside.

But let me get to know you here around the table. I think we've lost the art of being at the table. If I look at Jesus, he spent so much time eating. What does he do after doing the biggest act in the history of the universe, saving mankind and resurrecting again?

What does he do? He goes and has breakfast. He goes by the beach and he starts cooking fish.

What does he do just before he has to do this act is the last supper he eats. What does he do when he, what does he tell the tax collector Matthew, hey, I'm going to be together.

[34 : 50] What does he tell Zacchaeus, hey, I'm going to come to your house. What does he do when he walks in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus? He ends up at a place where they break bread and eat together.

If you look at the scriptures, you'll see Jesus is always eating. 5,000, 4,000. He's eating. There's something about hospitality that we can't lose sight of.

There's a pastor in England called Tim Chester and he says this, meals are a microcosm of social reality. They basically symbolize who we are and who we welcome in.

Let us be a people who welcome. Let us be a people who actually have a welcoming heart and say, hey, I want to be with you. I want to spend time with you. I want to open up my home to you. But it's hard. It requires a discipline. Shane Clayball and the author says everyone wants a revolution but no one wants to do the dishes because it's hard. But if we put in the hard work, if we put in the effort of opening up our homes and being hospitable, then we'll see relationships that are forged that will bring about change in people's lives.

[36:06] Henry Nouwen says this, that actually hospitality isn't what changes people. It just creates a space for them to change. If we want people to change, if we want to change, we need to create spaces to do that.

Can we do that here? And this is why we're so blessed with this place that we can make to feel like a home on a weekday evening when the life groups are here. But there is nothing like going to someone's house and having them just sit around, sit around a couch and a sofa with just tea and coffee table.

It's just different. I encourage you, whether you're in a very small place and you can only invite one or two people, whether you're in a huge place and you can invite 20, 30 people, you just let us know the date and we'll be there.

Hospitality is important. Even communion. 1 Corinthians 11 is the famous passage, you know, the night that he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and said this and we're going to have communion later too.

What was the context of that? Hospitality. Welcome. Why? Because Paul walked into a church in Corinth and he saw the rich people were eating over here and the poor people were eating over here and there wasn't hospitality, there wasn't a time where they were all sharing things together and so that's when he jumped into the spiel about communion.

[37:16] Can we be willing to actually have this hospitable place? And I'll tell you that sometimes here, and many of you may have experienced this, it makes me sad that people don't feel welcomed here.

I had friends coming from the UK and they said, oh, the service was great, but we didn't really feel welcomed. And I was like, that sucks. But here's my other stance that maybe is a little bit stubborn. I don't really want to create a welcome team to welcome people. I don't want you to only be welcome when you put on the yellow t-shirt and says, hi, welcome to church. My question is, can we be welcoming just in general?

If you are a known member of this community, can you look at someone who you've never seen and go, hey, hey, good to see you. Tell me about you. I don't know about you. And yeah, there'll be embarrassing times where you say, hey, is it your first time?

You don't know I've been here for four months. That's okay. I can't believe I haven't seen you. I mean, those Chinese people really do look all the same. But let's not be afraid of those conversations.

[38:22] Let's be willing to be hospitable because it actually goes beyond just eating. It's the spirit of hospitality. Maybe on that note, I'll share a little bit. My next plug is about the cedar meal.

Okay. I actually asked Bonnie to put this into the group. The cedar meal on Good Friday, we're going to have a service here, a Good Friday service where it will be interactive and there'll be different stations to reflect and come to the cross together.

Straight after that, we're proposing that we have a cedar meal. Now, we can't have everyone, which is why we've got to sign up. But we also know it's hard for you to do it and you forget because so many things are happening during a service.

So I've actually asked Bonnie, if you're in our God's Gathering WhatsApp group, I've asked them to send that into the WhatsApp group now. If you want to join us for that time, can you either, I'll even give you permission to, why don't you just fill out the form now?

I don't think it's a bit hard form. But if you want to do it later and you want to keep focusing here, can you put a pin in it? Can you pin the message? There is no link here so we don't really need to have that. But the other thing is, if you're in the WhatsApp group, you'll see it.

[39:22] Okay. If you are not in the WhatsApp group and you really want to be in the WhatsApp group, then come and talk to me. Come and find me and get into the WhatsApp group. Of course, if you're a stranger, then I won't let you in the WhatsApp group. But if you've been here for a long time and I recognize your face, then I'll be like, okay, well, come and join us.

Okay, so please do sign up to that. I think that is a really good opportunity to have there. One of the visions that I had for this church is that we would be a family that is expecting guests. We would be a family who commit to knowing each other and the discipline that that requires, but that we are also welcoming and expecting guests.

And my hope is that every single person that walks through this door will at least feel welcomed. We don't need to have a long walk of conversation because they might be introverts who would just like, just get away from me. I just want to get my Jesus on. That's fine, but at least we can be welcoming to them because it isn't them and us.

Romans 15, 7 says this, why do we welcome others? Because Christ welcomed us. I'm not asking us to be basically performing hospitable acts. I'm asking us to be hospitable, to be welcoming.

So that's one of the disciplines. Another one is service. Service is actually, if you just look at different spiritual discipline lists, service is probably the one that will come up the most. And what is that one? That is just basically putting someone else's interests above our own.

[40:41] Psalm 100 says this, serve the Lord with gladness. Agnes just said, and I just helped you have a picture of how she serves. Who's been to a barbecue with the lies?

Who's witnessed the zipping around constantly moving? Yes. The gladness that she has, the joy that she has in serving. If we are to be devoted followers of Christ, if we are to be disciplined disciples, we must serve other people.

Let me ask you another question. When was the last time you did something for someone else?

Who isn't your spouse or your child? When was the last time you went out of your way and said, I'm going to serve you.

I'm going to call, let me drive you and go out of my way to take you home. I was the beneficiary of that as a youth. As a youth that, I went to a youth group on a Friday night.

Then afterwards, because we're in England, there's no MTR. It would be dangerous if I traveled around. My pastor would drive 45 minutes to take me home and another 20 minutes to take another person home and then drive home himself.

[41:54] Ended up pretty much being a two-hour drive on a Friday evening. He was serving me and he was serving me with gladness. When was the last time you went out of your way to do something different for other people?

We're in a culture, we're in a city that doesn't do that because we have people to wash our dishes, we have people to do our laundry. One thing that really just blew my mind coming from the UK was that I didn't even need to put petrol into the car by myself.

There's someone there. You just sit in the car. In the rest of the world, that does not happen. We are a service-oriented, consumer-oriented culture.

Has that seeped into the church? Has that seeped into the way we live? That you've come in here with your arms crossed going, entertain me, lead me in a few songs. Open up the word for me because it's too hard for me to do it.

Brackets, I'm too lazy to do it myself. And then I'm done. Oh, that was a good time. That wasn't a good time. I don't know. Worship was a 6 out of 10 because Julian was on the keyboard and he wasn't great.

[43:00] I want to go. The only way you're going to be filled is if you give. The only way you're going to feel the Spirit fill you, that you will come here feeling just blessed is if you are willing to give.

And so here's the other plug. Honestly, there's no church that I've been to that has never announced this, which is we need AV people. We need sound people. Like if you go to any church, that announcement will probably come up at some point within the year.

Why? Because we need someone to click the slides. Because we need someone to serve others so that people can know the lyrics. People can sing along to these songs without being distracted.

So actually, if you're like, okay, okay, I should do something. And I know this happened a couple of weeks ago. Then please, then sign up. Sign up to click the slides. You don't need any spiritual gift for that, I can confirm.

You do not need a spiritual gift to do slides. You can just do it because you guys are all clicking on computers anyway. You know how to do it. Be of service to other people.

[43:59] Kidswell. Kidswell. That room over there, I mean, not this one, the one back there, it's carnage, it's chaos because they're little humans who lack self-control because their prefrontal cortex isn't developed yet.

But we need people to love them, to serve them, to disciple them and serve with gladness. Are we willing to do those kinds of things? Mother Teresa says this, not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love.

Can we be a people, actually something else that we need to do is the bin bag. There are a lot of people here eating food afterwards. That bin bag probably needs refreshing every 10, 15 minutes. Challenge yourself.

Okay, today I'm going to do one round at least. Let us be people who are willing to serve. You know what? One of the best things that gets my mind kind of focused on worship on a Sunday morning is when I come here at 9 or 10 and I watch the life groups take turns to set up the chairs.

That is worship. I have never, Melissa is not as focused in my sermons as she is as when she's lining up the chairs. She's, she's got OCD, but she's, and I am so blessed.

[45 : 15] And I watch her and her group just set up the chairs and I'm like, that is it. And I can sense it. I can see the worship come through. There was another quote that I came across which was services, basically worship in work clothes.

When I see each group coming in and setting up the chairs and they look at the picture from the last week because we seem to forget. It's the same every week, guys. But it's, but watching people show up to worship, it was particularly entertaining last week when it was the big guys group and just these huge guys who all look like security guards and they were just like moving the stools around going, oh, where do we put this?

Where do we put this? This is so light. This chair is so light. Let's carry 10 together. Oh, the worship that I experienced, that I saw through their service.

St. Francis says this, for it is in giving that we receive. Maybe you're sat here going, oh, I don't know if I receive much in church. Maybe I don't feel filled when I come to church.

Before I give you any more accusations, maybe my question would be, oh, well, have you given anything? If you don't feel as though you've received anything today it's because your arm, your fists are just clenched up and you've not actually served.

[46 : 31] In which case, yeah, you're probably not going to receive anything today. But if you give, if you pour yourself out, that is the true blessing. We are part of a much bigger church that has a whole side team that basically sets up the chairs and tidies everything up.

And that's one thing that I'm going to keep fighting forever. That we are allowed, we will have the honor to set up our own chairs because it's a blessing. My goodness, that we will be allowed to take our own bin bag out.

That we can serve each other and serve God in that way. Can we be people of service? In Matthew 20, there's this mom, caring mom, tiger mom, who goes to Jesus and says, hey, Jesus, you're about to do something and you're about to go into heaven.

Quick request, just a small thing. When my sons are up there, can they be your right and left hand? Can they just be at the top with you? Because my sons, you know, my sons are so gifted. They're just so good.

They deserve to be there. They will change the world with you together. And then what does Jesus say? What does Jesus say? Turn with me. Matthew 20. Matthew 20. Matthew 20.

[47 : 39] Matthew 20. Matthew 20. Matthew 20. Matthew 20. Matthew 20. A mother's request.

I love it. Verse 20. Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons and kneeling before him, she asked him something and he said to her, what do you want? She said to him, say that these two sons of mine are to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom.

Jesus answered, you do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? They said to him, we're able, we're good. Right hand, left hand, we're strong. And he said to them, you will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and my left hand is not mine to grant, but it's for those for whom it has been prepared by my father.

And when the 10 heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and he said, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you.

This is where he does not conform to the pattern of this world. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be your slave. Even as the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[48:45] And he drops the hammer. He says, hey, even I didn't come to be served. I'm the VIP of this. I'm the creator of this thing. I'm the OG. And yeah, I'm here to serve. I'm here to wash feet in John 13.

I am here to serve. The Gentiles, they will lord it over you. That's the way of our world. When you rise up in department, when you get older and older and people around you and your colleagues leave and die, then you get more and more powerful.

You lord it over other people. But the way I do it, Jesus says, is upside down. The first will be last and the last will be first. Would you be like that?

One of the other shocks to me when I came to Hong Kong was, sorry doctors here, but when I go into a hospital, the doctors just aren't very nice. I'm just like, what did I do?

Why are you so rude? Why don't you smile? These guys smile. Only to each other, but they do smile. And one time, I was annoyed.

[49:52] Alicia had fractured her arm and I was like, by the fourth start, I was like, hey, I'm really sorry. Are you having a really bad day? Like, I don't even need a hello.

I just need a human. Of course, I understand the context. Doctors are overworked and they're extremely busy and so they have to be obnoxious to get through, to get through.

But I was saying, ah, but I think it's when you're a student, that's how you get kicked as a medical student because your superiors are not very kind to you. And by the time that you get to that point, that's just kind of the default.

I think Jesus proposes a different way. Jesus says, as you increase in influence, as you increase in power and authority and in affluence, you get to serve even more.

And I'm inspired by this regularly, even on the other side in Kung Fu Church, people who are in the highest echelons of society handing out flyers, handing out just welcome notes in church services.

[50:56] And I'm just like, ah, that is the heart of the servant. And again, I'm not asking for acts of service. I don't need you to go to the bin and go, hey James, taking out the trash, being a great servant, the humblest, here we go.

We're not asking for acts of service. We're asking for servant hearts. And there's a difference because if you are committing to just doing acts of service, I'll tell you what it means. And Tim Keller talks a little bit about this.

He says, when we are committing to just acts of service, we're basically saying, I'm in control. I will choose what I serve in. And so today I choose to take out the trash. Today I choose to help Danny with the chairs.

That's you, that's you basically saying, I will do some acts of service. But the heart of a servant is different. The heart of a servant is I'll do whatever is required. It doesn't matter. It's you surrendering your control and saying, I'm not going to choose what acts of service I'm going to do.

I just want to be a servant. Why? Because the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve. I don't think we as a church do well enough in training people in that.

[52:07] I don't think seminaries do well enough in training pastors. The hour of service. Elizabeth Elliot says this, and this is where I'll close.

Our willingness to be inconvenienced is the measure of our love. When was the last time we were inconvenienced? When was the last time we deliberately inconvenienced ourselves as an act of love to help other people?

That, brothers and sisters, is the discipline of people. When we say, I love you, or I want to love you, you're really hard to love, but I really want to love you, and I'm going to go out of my way to do this for you.

I'm willing to be inconvenienced for you. I'm willing to serve you. I'm willing to be hospitable. I'm willing to welcome you in. I'm willing to give myself so that you will be filled. I don't do anything out of selfish ambition.

I consider your interests above mine. I have this mind. Why? Because of Christ Jesus. Though he himself was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself.

[53:09] Taking the form of a servant. Being born in the likeness of men. You know how traumatic that would be for the prince of heaven to be born in the likeness of men. To have our limitations.

To need to go to the bathroom. The great equalizer. And yet he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death, on a cross.

He laid his life down for us. He was willing to sacrifice, inconvenience himself for us. So why not? Why not do the same for others? Why not be those people of discipline?

Next time you finish work, next time you come into church and you're like, oh, I'm tired. I've been busy. I pray that the Lord would give you the gift of discipline by loving people, by serving people, by welcoming people, by going out of your way for people, simply because of what he did for us. That itself is enough to compel us to pour out ourselves. The Apostle Paul says this, even if I am poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

[54:26] Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me. Let us be people who are willing to pour ourselves out because we serve, we follow, we love, we worship a Savior who poured himself out for us.

Can I lead us in a time of prayer? Lord, we seek to be people who pour ourselves out because you poured out for us.

And so we want to spend the final few moments now just reflecting on that and praying the same prayer that we would be of the same spirit and mind here as all those who have gathered.

That we declare that there is nothing that we hold on to. But we are willing just to give everything that you've given us to be stewards of those things.

to be people willing to serve, to be people willing to people. So Holy Spirit, right now, if there is something that you want us to do, would you show us?

[55:47] we'll finish where we started. Romans 12 says, love one another.

Outdo one another in showing honor. I'll be honest, you can't hold this bread and then not look to your brother and sister and go, how can I serve you?

How can I love you? He said, do this in remembrance of me because remember what I did for you and now go do the same. The beauty is that we don't have to do incredibly great big things.

Mother Teresa says, just the small things. And maybe for you today, it's just one thing. The night he died, when he was betrayed, he took this bread and he says, this is my body, which is for you, broken for you.

Let us do this in remembrance of him now. And as it says in Hebrews, he is the great high priest paid for our sins once and for all.

[57:03] That we can be in communion with him and with one another now. And this cup is a symbol of the new covenant that we have. Let us learn to love one another and outdo one another in love through this.

So Lord, we leave here now and ask that we would be disciplined people of service, of hospitality. that you would live through us, that we would be willing vessels.

Thank you for allowing us to be together. Thank you for allowing us to have people around us. Lead the way as we seek to love. In your name we pray.

Amen. Amen.