

The Fellowship of Believers

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[0:00] Okay, thank you Alex for running through the mission statement.! Everyone's got a seat as more or less? Yes. I see you there, GU people.

I heard there's a basketball game later. GU the youth against the adults, the oldies. I love that our 20 plus year olds are now the oldies as well. I heard there's one team that's really, really energetic and has limitless energy.

I think his name is Johnny. If we can do man-on-man defense on him, that'd be great. I'm looking forward to that. Yeah, today's gonna be special. I'm Joe. I'm one of the members here at the gathering. We're gonna have a short and interesting message today about Acts 2 42 to 47.

For those who are visiting, you're welcome. The mission statement's kind of a reminder, not just for the newcomers, but for us who come regularly, why we gather. As with everything, as humans, it's so easy to forget why we gather.

We can come and we can just come religiously out of duty, Sunday after Sunday. So the reason we read this every single week is because we want to know our why. We need to know our why as human beings. We need to know our why as our church.

[1:03] And we've been going through Acts, the book of Acts. We've been looking at the origin of the church, the capital C church that happened 2000 years ago. We just celebrated the ascension. Jesus went back.

His mission on earth was completed and the Pentecost came down and Holy Spirit just lit people up. Literally people were on fire, the early church. And we read actually last week, the gospel. James talked about the kerygma, where Peter preached the first sermon in the first church gathering. Three thousand people were added to their numbers. And as the gospel was preached, it not only changed their minds, the gospel changes their hearts and it's changed their lives. And we're going to look at today, Acts 2, 42 to 47, these five verses of what this early community looked like. So there's about 120 people, maybe a little less than what we have here. Peter preached this incredible sermon.

Three thousand people added. Imagine three thousand people coming here next week. That's a scary thought. Lord have mercy. It'd be awesome if it happened. But imagine that. And how did this group of people live?

[2:03] They live so uniquely that it changed the world. And today we are an addition, accumulation of that first group of three thousand. So since that day, it's been adding one by one, by one, until you and I standing here today.

So we're part of something historic. We're part of something crazy. Way, way bigger than ourselves. This church was not started here. It was started 2000 years ago when Pentecost descended. And we're going to actually look at this snapshot.

So imagine if you guys, do you guys know Polaroid camera? For those of you who are older, you know the Polaroid camera. Roger, you know, you take a snapshot. Kind of that's what it looked like at the time. And so imagine as we read this chapter, we read these five verses.

It's a Polaroid snapshot of what that early community, the 3,120 people. So it's 120 plus 3,000. I'm Asian, so I know my math. So imagine it's 3,120 people.

What did it look like? And what did they say? So we're going to stand and read the word together as we do, as we have a habit of doing. So we stand in reverence and awe of the word of God. As I read this, just try and picture this community of 3,120 people living in this way.

[3:14] Acts 2 verses 42 to 47. And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every single soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 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, those who were being saved. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. Let me say a quick word of prayer.

Lord, I thank you for this morning. I thank you that as we read your scripture, as we read the snapshot of what the early church is, as we hear the drilling upstairs, we know that we are still works in progress here. And God, help us connect with us, with the origin, with that first early church.

And Lord, help us to understand and discern which things are descriptive, which things are prescriptive. And Lord, help us to be a people that live so on fire for you that people are drawn to you day by day.

[4:29] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So James actually, I think in July, for those who don't remember, he preached on this very passage of Acts 2, the fellowship of the believers.

And he had a thing of actually, are we devoted to the apostles' teaching, to prayers, to communion, to fellowship? These are the four spiritual pillars that the church did in practice. And we're not going to go through these four things.

Actually, we've been through recently, went through these in the spiritual practices of the importance of prayer, importance of scripture. But there's one term that I think is really important, is actually, are we devoted?

If people came into this gathering and said, hey, this group of people, they're really devoted to what they believe in. Are we devoted or are we distracted? Are we dabbling?

And I just thought, I was at a church once and a pastor read up this kind of modern day version of an early snapshot of the church. And I remember listening to it and thinking, wow, how far have we come from that first early church?

[5:23] How far have, what have we made church? I'm going to read it. This is, again, not targeted to anyone. Please don't take it. If you feel convicted, that might be from the Holy Spirit. It might not be stuff for me.

But again, I'm going to read it. It's meant to be a little funny, but it's also sadly true. So this is maybe a snapshot of what a dabbling church would look like today. They devoted themselves to coming together whenever it was convenient in their very busy schedules.

When it didn't clash with any of their golf in the mornings, John Z, or tennis, or junk boats. John's a professional golf player, so that's different. He isn't. And then some people would even come to early morning service prayer at 10.30 if they accidentally wake up early before the alarm.

And they come to church early. So they might as well stay for prayer. Some people slip into the service. Most people slip into the service during the first or second song of worship. They sit and they listen to someone speak intently for about 40 minutes.

And then they stand again for the final song. And immediately after the service, they would head out to the lifts and line up because they have lunch appointments. Some, as they leave, would even say bye to one another.

[6:29] But by the time they read the lift, it's usually awkwardly silent. And by that time, they probably forget everything that message was about. During the week, they would be devoted to prayer and scriptures whenever an inspirational Instagram reel would pop up on their feed.

Some would even like it and share it. And share it on WhatsApp into groups so that it looks like they're reading the scripture. But you can only share the five groups maximum. And then they will wait and do it again the next Sunday.

Or whenever it would work in their schedule again. And they called it church. That's a snapshot. It's funny, but also sad. And I remember hearing this the first time and thinking, goodness, Lord, what have we done to church?

What have we made church? Have we made it to this little activity that we do on a Sunday? So, Lord, help us as we today, we look into this early church, this snapshot of the early church.

We're not going to look and practice of everything they're doing and kind of imitate it. No, we're actually going to look at the three characteristics that we recognize in this passage. We recognize the posture of these people's hearts.

[7:31] There's a way that they were living that made them live the way they were living. And so, first one, we recognize that people were living in awe. They were living in awe and wonder. Second, they were living in this deep gratitude that led to generosity.

And third, they lived in this audacious and contagious joy that people were just drawn to them. And so, I've invited Gavs, my two dear brothers. These are the brothers that I never had growing up. I just always wanted a good brother.

And so, these two are really my brothers here. And Gavs, they're both leaders in their life group. They've just been living this hour in the last seven years that I've known them since I've been in Hong Kong.

And so, Gavs is going to touch on the first part, living in awe and wonder. What does that mean? And then Shum's going to come up and talk about gratitude and living in generosity that flows from gratitude.

So, Gavs, come on up. Give me a round of applause. Thank you, Gavs. Thank you, Joe. I always find those little digs that you have at James really entertaining.

[8:31] And I'm always trying to find his face, but I didn't know where he was when you were speaking. Where is he? Okay, he's hiding. He knew. He knew. Well, yeah. Thank you, Joe.

Thank you, everyone. Really blessed to be up here. So, there's nothing special about what I'll be sharing. Truly. It's just a reflection from the scripture and also how I've seen it play out in my own life.

Something, if you had a conversation with me, you know I like to ask questions. So, throughout my sharing, I'm going to be asking you just questions of reflection. Just things to ponder and perhaps to see if God wants to reveal something to your heart today.

So, as we were reflecting on the early church and those characteristics, awe was something that marked them. It really, really marked who they were and how they functioned. You know, and for them, it wasn't just a feeling.

It was something that shaped who they were, how they saw themselves, how they saw each and every other person around them. It shaped how their community functioned, why they gathered, what that gathering looked like.

[9:32] And it shaped what they chose to do each day. So, the awe shaped all of these core three identities about them. So, let me begin by rereading that passage that I'll be focusing on.

So, it's specifically verse 43 and 44. So, I'll read it again. And awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. So, before we dive deeper, I'm going to ask you to reflect with me. All right. Have you ever stood before something that was so powerful and overwhelming that it humbled you?

Like, you knew it had power over you. You knew it was greater than yourself. You knew that you had no control over this thing. But at the same time, it thrilled you. There was this realization that you could experience something extraordinary through this.

Have you ever had that experience of awe? That experience of something so powerful? As I was reflecting on this, I actually had a conversation a few weeks ago with a friend who is a part of the Christian Surfers Ministry.

[10:42] And I remember they actually described being in the ocean like that. They described that being in the ocean was this experience of something so incredible and powerful. It's overwhelming. You know, sometimes it's terrifying.

Sometimes you're in the water and you're like, anything could happen in this moment. I could be washed away in an instant. But when they surrendered themselves to it, on their board, obviously, there was this thrill.

There was this exhilaration of just like, wow, I would never be given access to this experience if not for this powerful force. As I was thinking about the awe that the church experienced, I couldn't help but think about that conversation I had.

This terrifying, powerful thing that has power over us. But at the same time, it could give us access into this realization of a life and an experience that we could have had no access to otherwise.

So I'm going to have two key points I'm going to share today. Two key points about how awe defined this early church. The first one being how the devotion of the early church cultivated awe and fellowship, what the Bible calls koinonia.

[11:46] So I'm going to be throwing in some Greek words here and there. The first one is koinonia, which is fellowship. And this koinonia, this awe that they had, shifted the focus away from themselves onto God.

So how the awe that was cultivated shifted the focus away from themselves and onto God. So in Acts 2.43, the Greek word for awe is phobos. I'm throwing in another Greek word, I'm sorry. But it's P-H-O-B-O-S. O-B-O-S. Phobos. So while it's translated as fear or awe, it's actually this holy fear, this deep reverence, this respect and this recognition of majesty. Kind of like the ocean, this powerful thing that I have no control over, that I know is more powerful than me. But at the same time, there's a thrill to it. There's an excitement. There's this, wow, this is so powerful for me and that's a great thing.

The only thing I can do, recognizing this, is surrender to it. So that's what this word phobos means. It would be a burning reverence that would bring them into a joyful surrender, recognizing that this is where I need to go.

[12:48] This is how I need to respond to this. Because of this awe, the early church devotion, it produced really real and practical results. And we see this. You know, prayer was prioritized. Their family life was completely shifted, completely transformed.

Unity of the gathering of the ecclesia flourished. Materialism became second fiddle. It was no longer important. Generosity was overflowing. This awe recognized God as sovereign and mighty, you know, worthy of their full attention.

Nothing else was important at that point. It's like, I need to just look at you. And in that same awe that they cultivated, because they were so fixated on God and so fixated on what he was doing, what they desired became what he desired.

The things that he loved became what they loved. And what was important to God, it was the building of his church. It was his community. It was his people. So all that was cultivated, it transformed them to put this focus away from themselves and onto the things that God desired and he loved.

They also shared everything in common. The Greek word is koina. The in common is koina. Koinonia. And this comes from the same root word as koinonia, which is this deep, intimate fellowship.

[14:04] It wasn't just a casual Sunday friendship. It was shared life, like Joe was mentioning. It was mutual care. It was unity under Christ's headship. It was knowing a person's life and walking with them daily.

That's what this all led them to. It was like, because this is important to God, because I know that I just need to surrender to him, I'm seeing that my response needs to be caring and loving what he loves.

So first reflection point for you guys is, have I allowed my devotion to cultivate awe that shifts the focus from myself to God and what he loves?

Or am I still at the center? Have I allowed my devotion to God to shift my focus to what he loves? Or am I still at the center? The second point, which naturally flows from the first, is how the awe that the early church experienced, it empowered them to live vulnerably, boldly, together.

The awe that they experienced empowered them to live vulnerably, boldly, together. So the early church faced very real fears, which Josh will be talking a bit more about in a second. It was persecution, rejection, ridicule.

[15:17] James mentioned a few of these last week. These fears, these barriers were very real and could have stopped them in their tracks. That could have been a very valid reason for them to no longer prioritize this union, to prioritize this community.

Today, our fears look a bit different. Maybe there is still a fear of rejection. Maybe there still is a fear of persecution to some extent. Nothing like what the early church experienced. Maybe our fears are things like lacking social capacity.

Maybe our fears are things like, I don't have it within me in this week to give that, because I don't know what I'll have left if I give that. Our fears look a bit different.

But how did the early church respond to their fears? It was to let the awe that they were cultivating through their devotion lead them into surrender. Boldly to one another and to Christ.

Once again, it was as they placed this focus on God, they recognized this is what God cares about. And because he's shown himself to be so present and our provider, I'm going to joyfully surrender.

[16:23] I'm going to ride this wave. I'm going to say, God, what you're doing here, because I've seen you work powerfully, I'm going to submit to this. Because I know that whatever comes out of this is greater than whatever I could have done for myself.

So in Hebrews 10, 19, you know, we see in this letter that we are now given this bold access to the throne of God.

And this boldness that's been given to us through the sacrifice of Jesus, it puts all of these fears that our focus on ourselves could maybe put at the forefront of our minds.

It brings them to the back. Because our focus now is, God, who are you? What have you done?

And how can I respond to the things that you love? For me, this was really tangible in my communities.

I've had really, really amazing opportunities to have brothers around me as I've lived in Hong Kong who have walked with me and have been the people who point me back.

[17:19] The people who I've been able to experience this awe of God with. One of them being the Brownes, which is probably a turn you've heard about, which is when we live together, me, Joe, and Argus. And there's a lot of people who are part of that community in our church now.

But a more recent example is my midweek. And I think about my midweek because my midweek is a group of people who were all so different. We're all so, so different. And we went on a retreat recently.

And I remember one of the person who was hosting us, when he saw us all together, he kind of looked around at us. And he was like, it's so strange that you're all here together. Why are you friends?

And he literally was so confused as to why we were all in the same group. And I think about that community because we've been meeting weekly. We prioritize that time. And in that time, I truly see the way God is moving in each and every one of us.

And that encourages my soul. That encourages me to see God and be in awe of him for the way he is powerfully moving. There's another story that I wanted to tell, but I don't think I have time.

[18:22] So I'm going to skip past that. But to really sum up those two points, you know, it's the awe of God that cultivates this fellowship, this koinonia that shifts the spotlight from us to God.

And secondly, it's the awe that frees us from fear and empowers us to live vulnerably, boldly, and together. So one more final reflection question for you is, what fears are holding me back from living boldly, vulnerably, and together in community?

What fears are holding me back from living boldly and vulnerably together in community today? And how could Phobos, how could this holy fear of God, holy surrendered fear, shift this?

So I'm going to end on a quick quote. This is a quote from C.S. Lewis, and I think it's just a really beautiful insight. So it says, By myself, I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity.

I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. So Lewis understands that it took a community to fully know another person. So it took other people to know a single person well.

[19:33] So he recognized that. And he said, If it takes a community to know one human, how much more do we need community to know Jesus fully? How much more do we need community to understand him fully, to understand his facets, to understand his characteristics, and to be in awe of him, how to develop that awe that we have in him?

So as we cultivate this community and this awe in community today, the Holy Spirit works in us to overcome the fears and the barriers, to live boldly and vulnerably, and to become a church that reflects his heart, and to draw others into that.

And that's what we're seeing in the early church. You know, we see that as the Spirit moved, it created a community of awe, unity, and generosity that turned heads and changed lives. So at this point, I'm going to invite up Josh, who's going to be speaking a bit more about the generosity and the radical generosity that was lived out in that community.

Thank you. APPLAUSE So, good morning.

I'm going to be talking about through verses 45 and 46, but I wanted to start with verse 46. And this is really tagging along some of what Gabriel was saying.

[20:53] So as we read verse 46, it says, I wanted to first start talking about this attending the temple bit, because a bit of a context of this time was these temples were most likely Jewish temples.

And not long ago, it was the Jews that actually wanted Jesus on the cross. So there was a religious persecution that these early Christians had attending the temple.

And it goes to this holy fear, but also this fearlessness and boldness that Gabriel was talking about. So they were giving up, really, their security, their safety, by even going to the temple daily.

And they met in homes. And this talks about the fellowship and the unity that Gabriel was talking about, about the early church, their need to be in unity. And even meeting at homes, there was also a persecution, and that was the Roman Empire.

So there was actually, they were very hard pressed. And so meeting in homes was something that could have been risky for this early church. And this actually, you know, we were just reflecting on this yesterday, Gabriel.

[22:04] Like five years ago, we had COVID. And, you know, for those of you that also had COVID, but were attending church before COVID, the one thing that a lot of us had to adapt to was that we had to start doing church in homes.

And we were just reminded by this kind of image of just meeting in homes, breaking bread together, worshipping, praying. And, you know, we even saw people being baptized in homes.

And, I mean, this kind of reality is something that could still exist today. And even in China, right, we hear about churches meeting in homes.

But one thing that was, you know, I think that we also had when we had COVID was social distancing. And when we gather in homes, there was a risk around that as well.

There was something that we had to give up in terms of, you know, would someone come up and find out that we had 20 people gathered worshipping together? And so there were two things here that I think really resonate with what Gabriel was sharing, which is this fearlessness and the boldness that the church had and the need to be together and have that fellowship.

[23:09] And it continues to say that they received their food with glad and generous hearts, which brings us to the second theme that we wanted to talk about, which was generosity. And this is where we'll talk about verse 45, which I think a lot of people will look at this and think, wow, this was a beautiful picture of generosity for the first church.

It reads here that, and they were with, and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. I mean, that's an incredible picture of generosity. No one was in need that all things in common. There's a lot of teaching in the Bible, especially Jesus in the gospels, talking about how we can steward our wealth, how we, you know, how we should be giving to the poor.

And, you know, I wanted to talk about generosity and kind of zoom out beyond just the material sharing that the early church had. If we really look back at Acts 2, they were not just sharing their wealth.

As I was saying earlier, they were sharing their homes, right? They were opening up their homes, which could risk their own families. They were sharing actually even their own security because they were going into temples waiting.

[24:25] Waiting, you know, I could imagine waiting to go into Jewish temples to share the gospel. And that was something that, you know, they lived their life in a very generous way, not just in how they gave in material wealth, but how they actually gave their life.

And this was something that, you know, really spoke to me as we were reflecting that, why did they have this radical generosity with their lives? I mean, it's not normal. It's not normal to give up all of those things.

And I think, you know, the author here gives us a clue in verse 46. And I'm going to paraphrase here. It says they received with glad and generous hearts.

I think there's something here that I think, you know, when we look at this first church and how they gave, we can't ignore the fact that they received it with a lot of gladness.

I don't know if anyone here has, they know their love language, like the five love languages. But for me, my love language is gifting. And this is something that, you know, I think for those who actually resonate with the love language of gifting, you know, when you receive something that you really like, right, the first thing you feel is this deep sense of gratitude.

[25:40] And then naturally, the next thing, you know, love languages are not just receiving, but also giving, right? So you think about then, what can I give this person back, right?

So there is this kind of natural element when we think about generosity, there has to, it has to come from this heart of gratitude. And so what did the first church receive, right?

We've been talking about Pentecost, the significance of it. And what they received was they received the good news. It was the good news that Jesus died for their sins and he conquered death, paving a way for them to eternity.

And they were gifted and anointed by the Holy Spirit. I mean, when you receive something like that, I think James talked about if Moses were to see that to happen, he would be mind blown, right?

It's that awe that Gabriel talked about. And what actually comes after that awe is a deep sense of heart changing gratitude. I think the church in the Acts, you know, here recognized that deep sense of gratitude of what they had just received.

[26:46] And that leads to the radical generosity. That leads to the fact that they had everything to give because they just received everything that they wanted. This was prophesied for generations before them.

And they realized it had just happened and they had just received that. So if we read back at Acts 2, we see that the first church was teaching. They were performing signs and wonders.

They were living with generosity and serving one another in their homes. It really kind of made me think about what Paul wrote in Romans 12 when he talked about the church as one body, serving different functions with the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us, talking about the gifts of prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, and mercy.

And if you look back, that is what this first church were exercising. They were exercising the gifts that God and the Holy Spirit gave them. And I think that's something that for me, you know, we were reflecting about what is descriptive, what is prescriptive about Acts 2.

And today I just wanted to share around my thought around this. I think what is prescriptive is absolutely what Gabriel was talking about around the heart of this first church. They had awe.

[28:04] They were deeply grateful for what they just received as the good news, and they gave generously. And that is part of the heart of this first church that I think Joe will end up talking about on joy, because this is perhaps probably the most infectious part about the early church, was that they were giving praise to God in verse 47.

And back to 46, they were glad. And so this is, so I'm going to pass the time on to Joe to talk about this joy in the first church. Thank you, Josh.

Thank you, Shum. I remember meeting Josh when he was still at Hong Kong U seven years ago, and he has grown so much, but he's also not grown at all. But physically, just horizontally maybe. But those who don't know Josh, I think of one word, ohana. Ohana. Has anyone seen Lilo and Stitch this week? He just came out?

Yeah, there's a group of you. Josh is very composed and well put together, but if you ever got to go to his home, his room is filled with Lilo and Stitch. And I exaggerate.

[29:15] Maybe. No Lilo. It's just Stitch. He's a huge fan. Yes. So that's just a fun fact. Fun fact about him. Yes. But ohana, what does ohana mean? Family.

Family and family means no one gets left behind and all forgotten. Don't get left behind and all forgotten. Family stays together.

We heard about the vertical movement and the transformation that goes into our hearts and our minds and our lives. The Holy Spirit came down. The Pentecost happened. Gabs talked about the awe and wonder.

Josh talked about this deep gratitude. Today, actually, we're just really linking this axis. If you can just imagine the vertical to the horizontal. What happened vertically has to happen horizontally. It cannot just stay vertical.

I think of people who are sometimes like, oh, I have such a good relationship with God. We have such good quiet time with him. I have great quiet time with him every day. But I don't belong to a church. I don't belong to a life group. And I'm like, that's cool.

[30:15] That's interesting. That's really cool. But when I think of someone, probably the person who had the best relationship with God, one-on-one, had all the time in the year. It's not Jesus, obviously, because he's God.

But Adam, Adam in the Garden of Eden, he was with God, walking with God all the time in the world. Just this perfect relationship with him. And what did God say? It is not good for you to be alone.

It is not good for you to be alone. You and then thus created Eve, thus created humanity. There's something about loving God that has to translate the horizontal axis of loving people. And that's why we have people.

That's why we're in this Sunday gathering right now. And so the heart postures of being in awe, the heart posture of being in deep gratitude, it leads to generosity.

And as Josh said, glad and sincere hearts, which another word I like to think of is joy. It's contagious joy, audacious joy. When I think of joy, what do you guys think about? I'm going to pick on Liam.

[31 : 18] Liam, when I say the word joy, what comes to mind? I think joy is finding your people, spending time with those that you love. Joy is finding your people, spending time with those you love.

And yeah, finding your community and especially your family. Finding family and community.

Ohana. Good. Jackie, what does joy mean to you? Knowing that God has your back.

God has your back. He's all been over all your situations. God has your back and he's with you in all the relationships and situations. It's not just effort.

Interesting. Interesting. Neither of you said, you fan, what a joy to you. One more. I'd say a light heart. A light heart. It's a light heart knowing that you're loved and belong to the kingdom.

It's interesting. All three of them, sorry I asked all guys, but no one said happiness. Is there a difference between happiness and joy? Yes.

[32 : 21] Joy is not dependent on happiness. And actually all three of you mentioned something about it. So joy is something you've received. Something that happens internally that comes out externally. And you mentioned community. You mentioned family.

You mentioned light heartedness. That's right. Sorry, you fan. Good guy. This guy listens to our sermons all the way from the US all year round. You knew exactly the sermon I was talking about when James preached on Acts 2.42.

So listen to that. It's from July. Do you know which date? I think you're messing with me. It's in July. Acts 2.42. Look for it. Devoted or dabbling. But yes, light hearted. Joy is something that you have. It's contagious. When I think of joy, when I think of someone living with glad and sincere hearts, when I think of someone that attracts and draws people, I think of one person in particular. And that person is my wife.

And I'm not saying this because I have to, but I am saying this because I kind of have to. But she didn't even know I'm sharing. I didn't even know she's here. There was this glimpse that happened a few days ago, and it just caught my attention.

[33 : 21] And I thought, this relates. So basically, some of you know, we've been staying in a home nearby. We're house-sitting for a family. This is a lovely home we could never afford. And we've been staying there month by month.

Any month, we have to leave, and that's okay. And Alex and I said, let's just, as long as we're here, we're going to treat it like our home. We're going to love on the people around us. We're going to love our neighbors. We're going to love our doorman and everyone in the building.

And there was one day I was coming home from work to take a nap. As I do. I work very hard for Hope International. Thank you for everyone who supports. As I was going home to take a nap at a siesta, and I walked in, I just see this huge happy birthday sign.

And our home was filled with people that I didn't know. It was filled with domestic workers from my building, from the Philippines, who have never seen or met before. And I just left.

I was like, okay, Alex is doing her thing. I'm going to step out. And later on, I find out that she was just hosting a birthday party for a helper in our building. And invited all the other helpers in the building to come.

[34 : 22] And we live in the same building, Stanford. And this is just Alex. Trust me, we didn't even talk about it that night. We've still not talked about it. This is months ago. I didn't even say whose helper was it.

I didn't even ask because it's just such a common occurrence in the way that Alex lived. And a few days ago, we walked past helpers. And they'll know Eden by name. They'll know Alex by name.

They have no idea who I am. They'll say hi. And she'll be like, ma'am, when are you hiring? I would love to be part of your family. I would love to work for you. And no exaggeration.

This has happened dozens of times. We don't even have a helper, by the way. Yeah. But I just think of my wife just living the way she does, investing in the community that we have for now, month by month.

And people are drawn to her. There's a generosity in her heart. There's a joy in her heart. And for those who've seen her lead worship, it comes out. It's not just on a Sunday when she leads. But it's every single day, for those who know her. Glad and sensitive.

[35 : 18] Are we living a life, guys, that demands an explanation? Are we living a life that people are drawn to us and say, hey, I want to be a part of this family. I want to be a part of what you're doing. Why do you live the way you do?

Psalms 16, it says, in the presence of God, there is fullness of joy. Where does joy come from? It comes from the Holy Spirit. It comes from above. It cannot be mustered up. We can muster ourselves to make ourselves happy.

And that's very dependent on our circumstances, on our weather, on the day. Joy is something that you receive and it just outflows. And it's not forced. It's free. And I can tell you guys, in this world, there's a lot of people who are not free.

There are people who are stuck, who are weighed down by the stresses, anxieties of this world. And when they see someone that is free, they're drawn to. They run towards it. When there's someone who is joyful, you think, you see and imagine someone who is generous.

We're living in a world where people are gathering things up for themselves. But when they see someone just handing out freely, and I see a lot of people in this room who live in that way, people are drawn to that. They ask you, why do you live in such a way?

[36 : 24] So number one, joy is contagious. Joy is received from the Holy Spirit. Number two, Josh touched on this a little bit on generosity. When we look at this passage, it's easy to be like, oh man, these guys shared everything they had.

They sold possessions and gave to one another. When we think of generosity in Hong Kong, we think of money. But the most valuable currency in Hong Kong is not money. It's not the Hong Kong dollar or the U.S. dollar.

It's time. It's time. And there's a phrase here that I see in both this passage in 44 and 46 is, day by day, they gathered. And at the end it says, people were added to them day by day.

There's something about day by day. Cuba and I agree, we talk about consistency. How do we have a group that's consistent? I wish we didn't have to travel all the time. Are we meeting out of a consistency or is this a convenience fellowship that I read earlier?

We join when we don't have anything to do. We join when we're not tired from it. We join when we feel like it. It's not convenience fellowship. Hebrews 10, 25, it has a famous verse.

[37 : 28] Continues to gather, brothers and sisters, as some are in the habit of not doing so. Sometimes I wish the author of Hebrews would tell us what are the reasons that people are not gathering.

Because I can probably assure you that they're probably similar to the reasons that we have now. People are forgetting their why we gather. People are busy. People are tired.

People need their alone time. And I wonder if that's happening again today. Generosity is not about money. It's about giving our hearts. God wants our whole lives.

And time is a part of that. It doesn't happen overnight. Fellowship doesn't happen overnight. Those who are in life groups, it's great. You come on a Sunday. You come on a Thursday life group. But those who are part of life groups. Sunny, Uday, you guys know that actually the relationships happen outside of the life group.

It's on the third day that you meet for breakfast, for lunch, that happens. I think of Godfrey telling me, he goes with Uday to the gym. Going to the gym doesn't automatically make it a fellowship, by the way.

[38 : 26] But then they share. Apparently after they work out, they talk about what's weighing on their hearts. They share with some confession time at the gym. And then they end up praying. In my mind, that's fellowship.

That's fellowship on steroids. When I think of Uday. Not Godfrey. Not Godfrey. Sorry. But that's fellowship, guys. It takes time.

It's not just the Sunday. It's not Thursday. It's the extra days. Sundays is great when we gather here. And we get to hear from the scriptures. Gabriel and James preaches from the word. Thursday

is where we come and we apply the word.

Sunday is where we come and we gather and we lift up his name vertically. But Thursday is when we come and we live out horizontally. And we see God move horizontally where people share. People can cry and pray and encourage one another.

They're both complementary. We have to have both. It's a day-by-day commitment. It doesn't happen overnight. We live as a family. We turn up for a family. Finally, joy amidst challenges.

[39:24] There's something about joy that is contagious, that has got nothing to do with circumstances. As Josh and Gabriel already said, this church was not going through easy times. They weren't getting promotion after promotion. They weren't getting, you know, just better houses and better jobs, better lives.

No, they were being kicked out of their jobs, of their homes, of their cities. Yet there was this joy because they knew so well that they were part of something bigger. They knew so well that they've been downloaded this fire in their hearts to live out.

And they just, it didn't matter what was happening in the world. It didn't matter if it was COVID. They were so focused on God and on each other. And I think of a, finally, a last story is a season of COVID of this term Gabriel talked about, broasis.

It happened because I guess termed it as three bros living together. Let's call ourselves the broasis and be cool. And then the girls said, oh no, but what about the females? And they were like, no, it's bro and sis.

So we lived in this community for two years and it was one of the most challenging times that we've ever had. Seriously. It was really challenging. But I can tell you, I look back and it's the most joyful season.

[40:32] One of the most joyful seasons of my lives. And a lot of you are part of it. Queenie, you were there. Grace, Danny, Jay, Emily, Uday. Like people were joining and adding to our numbers daily. And that was a season, Liam, was there?

It was a season where church stopped as we knew it. We couldn't gather on a Sundays. And so we just did, as Joyce said a few weeks ago, we just said yes to the next thing. We said, yes, let's open our home up.

Yes, let's bring people in who don't have a small group to come and eat with us. Yes, let's study the scriptures and eat and have communion and pray. And then the yes has got a bit harder. It's like, yes, let's take in this lady who didn't have a home to stay in.

Let's take in these guys who just came out of rehab and prison who had nowhere to go. Let's take in these students who had nowhere to go after class. And so we had this group of five or six of them.

And they grew up with 30, 40 people. We're hitting over the COVID restrictions. I don't remember who paid for the meals. Like it didn't matter. We were just gathering. We were just together.

[41:28] But it was hard. It was a hard season. But there was deep joy. There was a lot of conflict with these brothers. Even this week, I was apologizing again for something, asking forgiveness. But we've just grown through that. We continue to grow through conflict.

And it was a season where there was just deep generosity of time, generosity of money, and generosity of our lives. And again, it's not that this season was perfect. It was far from it, but it was purposeful.

And I think of someone, people, someone told me, we would just walk into our living room at any time. By the way, we didn't lock our living room. John, you remember, you just walk in. It's open. And honestly, if you wanted to break into our house, the first person you'll meet is Gabs. So good luck. It was always open. We'd lock our doors and our bedrooms. But we just don't know who was in our living room when we wake up.

And I remember people walking in and they look up on a Thursday and there's barristers, there's actresses, there's people who were at homes, there's addicts and former inmates sitting together, breaking bread equal.

[42:29] No one, there was no difference. It was just so all things in common. It was so united.

And I think they came from this posture of awe, of what God has given us, this posture of gratitude.

That even in COVID, we have this joy because we're together. We have family. And one thing that worries me is COVID's gone. We can travel again. There's no more quarantine. I fear, one of my worries is that we can easily go back to becoming a dabbling church.

When we couldn't fly, we couldn't go anywhere, we just naturally looked for community because we realized COVID revealed that I go to church on a Sunday, but I don't have a community. I'm alone. There's a lot of spiritual orphans in the cities. There's a lot of people who don't have family, real family, where they can share about anything to each other. And I worry that as we get busier, we will lose that.

And so I encourage you, let us be a devoted church. Let us not be a dabbling church. Joy amidst all the circumstances, amidst all the challenges. And finally, I think of this picture of charcoal as we, the three of us got together and started, how do we share this message and remind that we're part of something bigger than ourselves, that we have fire in us.

[43:38] James talked about a few weeks ago. We have the burning bush in our hearts. The fire of God, the Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is within us. Some of us might feel like a charcoal. And charcoal, when you're left alone, it slowly fizzles out, even if you're warm for a little bit.

But what if we could just come together with the little fires that we have in our hearts and set up this beautiful bonfire that lights up the city, that lights up our neighborhood and our communities? We're living in a world that is cold. It's dark. People are drawn and looking for warmth. They're looking for purpose. If we know the fire that we have and we allow it to live out horizontally, I pray that we can actually start changing our communities in a good way, like a wildfire, spread as people come and join.

Sound good? As the church, we pray that we can stay devoted. We can pray. We can stay committed and on fire. Let us pray. Father, we thank you.

We thank you that the church was added 3,000 by their number that day. And Lord, 3,000 just sounds like a number, but Lord, you know them each by name. You know each and every one of the stories.

[44:50] And you know each and every one that has been added since then to the people in this room. Lord, I might not know every single name in this room, but you do.

I won't know every single need in this room, but you do. But I pray that it doesn't stay just with you. I pray that there will be other people in this room who will know each other's names, who will then know each other's needs, who will be able to share life together, recognizing that all we have is yours, recognizing that everything that happens on the inside with you vertically will then be transformed horizontally to the people around us.

So Lord, help us to be devoted to you. Lord, we need your help. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thank you, Joe. Thank you, Josh.

And thank you, Gabs. Do you believe that? That we're stood or sat here today off the back of other people's devotion.

People who devoted themselves to the Lord. What do we do? We're not here gathering in Hong Kong as English-speaking Chinese.

[46:11] We're not for the fact that they were a group of people time after time after time, year after year after year, generation after generation, devoting themselves to passing this on. Do you recognize how sacred that is?

Why we're here? The question is what now? Those people were devoted because they were filled with the Spirit, exposed to the gospel, cut to the heart because of the good news of Jesus Christ in response to the bad news that is them, that is us.

And then they were just filled with reverence and all that. What? What? Me? That you died for me? You saved me? Everything I have can now be yours, Lord.

It wasn't, oh, but I've still given. I'm still giving. I'm still doing the tithe. If you round up, it's 10%. It's not what we're giving. It's what we're still holding back.

And then they just say, just take it all. It's for everyone. When the Holy Spirit comes down vertically, it spreads horizontally. And they are just filled with gladness. And the people outside look and go, what is going on with this group of people?

[47:22] What is going on? And I could think of no better men than the three of them to share that because they've been on that journey. They shared with me yesterday. They were like, I'm just so passionate about what I'm about to share.

Oh, that's the commitment that we live out what we preach. In fact, we live it out better than we preach. And there's one final thing that the people did, and that is communion.

Imagine we're sat here with no threat to ourselves, with a lot of comfort. But the people that started this, they would go into a room. Maybe their family members wouldn't even know.

The Roman authorities wouldn't know. The Jewish leaders wouldn't know. And they would sit and they would say, we must do this. And what must they do as much as they can in remembrance of him? Break bread.

And the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 says this. He says, what I received, I now deliver to you. What I got, I now pass on to you. Which is the day that the Lord Jesus was betrayed.

[48:28] He took bread. And so that's what we're going to do today. We're going to pass the bread round first, guys. For 1,500 years, this was the form, the central part of worship.

And so we gather with that rich history and heritage in mind. That people would gather around a table and take communion together. So as the bread gets passed, we might as well pass the wine as well.

We can hold one thing in each hand. Let us spend this time now and really ask the Lord, what kind of gathering do we think we are attending here?

And what part of the gathering are we? And I'm not even really talking about the name of this church. I'm just talking about just the church since the beginning.

What role must I play? What did I receive and what must I pass on? Thank you.

[50:07] Thank you.

Thank you. And to bridge the gap that we couldn't bridge ourselves. The gap to being with you, Lord.

So we thank you, Lord, that this bread is a symbol of your sacrifice for us, Lord. Of everything you've done and the fact that it both changed history but also changes our future.

So, Father, even in this moment, would we see this element in our hand as just your true sacrifice for us, Lord, and be reminded of how it changes.

Even from this point, what we decide to do next, the conversations we decide to have, the places we decide to go, the way we think, Lord. May this element remind us everything you've done for us, Lord.

[51:33] So we thank you for this element. We thank you for your body broken for us. And we take it in your name. Amen. Let's take the bread. Amen. And as we take this cup, Lord, we just remember the blood that you poured for us, that you've made us white as snow.

And Lord, may it represent just the awe in our hearts of what you did for us, the wonderful grace that you've given us. And so, Lord, we take this cup in remembrance that you have made us clean, that you have provided us a way to eternity.

So, Lord, we thank you. And may we take this cup together. I said last week, let's not pursue mission and doing good things, and even community out the goodness of our own hearts.

That is not why we do it. That's not why you commit to a church. That's not why you do a live group. It's not because you are good. That's the point. There is no good in our hearts. Let us come, as Josh said, with the gratitude, with the gladness in our hearts.

And so, we finish now by pointing to, to singing to, to worshiping the only one who is good, the only one who is holy, the one who will be holy forever. Can I invite you to stand as we respond in song?

[53:26] Yes, Lord, you will always be holy. Lord, you are the reason we are here. You are the reason we said everything that we said today. So, I pray there's only one name to be lifted up. There's only one name to be glorified today.

It's you, Jesus. So, we lift your name up high, because that's when we feel the most freedom, the most joy, the most gratitude, and the most awe. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.