

No Favouritism

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Date: 28 September 2025

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[0:00] Why are we here? Why? This week, that's what the Lord's been stirring in my heart. It's! What is my, as theologians would call, what is my ecclesiology? What is church really all about?

Why are we here? And I don't know about you, but those mission statements I find are so for me. We have some lovely people handing out Bibles because we believe in the Word of God and only the paper version, Danny. So please, if they offer it to you, please feel free to grab one.

There we go. Thank you, Rocky. If I may, I look at the world, I've been looking at the world this last week or two. It's not a new thing. And I see brokenness and then it breaks my heart. I'm like, what is the church supposed to do?

Is the church doing what it's supposed to do when everything else around us seems to be more and more divisive, more and more polarized, falling apart? What are we supposed to do? Are we doing our job as the body of Christ? I'll share a quote with you that my brother shared with me in his, some of his reading as he's been studying. A theologian pastor called Dallas Willard, who's maybe, maybe John Mark Comer before John Mark Comer. And he was asked the question, what's, what's the problem with the church in the West these days? And he said, well, the church in the West, the problem is it's stopped making disciples of Jesus. We're so bogged down by building properties, by running programs. We've stopped making people who look like Jesus.

If that mission statement reminds you of anything, it's that the whole purpose of us being here is to glorify God and to know him and enjoy him. And by doing so, we become more like him.

[1:51] And as I sit here and as I look around, all of us here, myself included, I put a mirror in front of me going, do I look like Jesus? Does me being here, week in, week out, make me look more like Jesus? That's the only question you should be asking yourself to. Not whether the worship is good, not whether the sermon is good, not whether the community is good, or whether the football team this afternoon is going to win. Those are important questions. But the most important thing is, am I looking more and more like Jesus? And then he said, every church needs to ask two questions of itself. And that's it. Two questions. The first question is this, what is your plan for discipleship?

And then the second question is, is that plan working? All that to say, it's really only about are we walking with one another in a way that points each other to Jesus? And by doing so, we start to look more and more like Jesus, whether we have lots of hair or no hair at all, we look more and more like Jesus. That's the goal. And I, and I asked myself that question, am I discipling you? I don't know. I look at you, Trevor, am I discipling you? And we can be kind and say, well, I think I am through maybe just the pulpit here. And I'm opening up the word of God to you and I'm pointing you to him. I think so. Or maybe I'm discipling you by, okay, Jackie, I've maybe sat down with you once or twice and had a coffee and had a breakfast. Then I'm like, oh, I think I can stretch it and say, I am discipling you. But then I can also say, I don't think I'm discipling you the way Jesus disciplined his people. And it really got me to think, well, what is our plan for discipleship? What is our plan for making each other look more like Jesus? And so as I was praying through that, one of the things that I, I felt the Lord kind of challenged me was actually, you might need to come up with something, some structure that would form you, that would form your community. So you can actually have things in place to actually make disciples of Jesus.

It can't just be, oh, let's just see how it goes. There's got to be more. The structures that are around us are the ones that form us. I was like, what is it that we need to do? So I started talking to a few different people who I'm walking with. Actually, hey, I know you're hungry for God. What if we started something together? I always hold on to what Tim Keller says, which is every church needs to be an organism, one that has life. We've all maybe been part of churches that, oh, that doesn't look like there's this life there. It needs to be filled with life. It needs to be an organism, but it also needs to be an organization. It also needs to get self-organized. Otherwise it's just a mess.

And so then I said, okay, well, what if we started to put something together that we can actually intentionally walk with people so I can actually spend more time with you so you can open up the word of God with me and so that we can then grow together so we can look more like Jesus together?

What is our plan for discipleship? And is that plan working? And I want to hear to be here sharing with you today. I think we're going to start some sort of plan. We gather here and this Sunday is called the gathering, but there's something else that we're going to start. And I asked a few people just to say, what do you think? What should we do here? And actually, thankfully it wasn't just five people that were interested. It wasn't just 12. It was 20 something people who were like, okay, count me in, whatever this is. Because the other thing I'll say is this, Hong Kong is probably one of the hardest places to make disciples. Why? Because we are surrounded by poverty. Yes, real poverty that we cannot ignore, but we also have a poverty which is the poverty of time. And so I look around at some of the, especially those who are working professionals who are like, I want to. I want to be disciplined. I want to be more like Jesus, but I don't, I'm just working six days a week. I start at nine and I finish at nine and I'm calling home and I can't, I don't have time for this. And I say, I get it.

[5:32] But if you can tell me one more thing in your life that is more important than becoming a disciple of Jesus, we won't try. We won't do it. And for those who are really following and trying, they're like, no, there is nothing more important. I say, well then let's, let's try. How about you call yourself a situation you're dealing with? You call yourself higher and me as your pastor, I'll just hold you up there. I'll just try my best to hold you up there. So I'm not trying to put things on top of you to burden you, but actually you decide what do you think living all out for Jesus looks like for you without needing to quit your job, without needing to move into the village. How can you do that in the city whilst working your job? And I'll be honest with you, I was having breakfast with my mentor this morning and he was like, and I was telling him about, he's like, Oh, I don't know if I've seen young working professionals really live all out for God and be willing to sacrifice all the things that are in the world. I think they want to, but they can't. So what you're trying is very, very hard. I said, Oh, I think it is very, very hard. And actually he said, I don't think I've ever seen it done well before. I was like, that actually relieved me because it means, okay, well, let's just try. No one else has succeeded, but if this is all that matters, then we'll try it.

And so what does it look, what does this look like? And I'm going somewhere with this, I promise. So I got these people together and then the vision is actually, we'll try one round and then we'll get this. Of course there's another round already waiting. So we're like, okay, we'll try it one round and then we'll do it again afterwards. And the hope is that we'll do it again and again, again. And everyone in this room, ideally my dream is that everyone in this room signs onto something like this caught the fellowship where actually for nine months, what we're going to do is a small group of people committing to read the word together every day. Okay. Actually the Chinese side is doing something already, actually much longer, much more hardcore. We're just, we're just going to try something small here, which is, can we read the word together every day?

And can you actually just open up your reader and then write a reflection into a WhatsApp group and then respond to each other. And the second thing we're going to do is why don't we pray together every day? What does that look like? Well, barring us all showing up here, maybe at 6am every day and becoming monks. What if it looked like we all just jumped on a WhatsApp call for five minutes, pick your time, get into groups of three or four. Let's just try it. Let's just do it. Will it succeed?

I don't know. I will let you know, but I'm like, I think I would like to die trying. I would like to figure out what this is in a city like this. How can we become disciples of Jesus? So we're going to try it. Now, one thing I want to say right here, this is not an exclusive thing. Everyone here at some point will be asked the same question. If you're worshipping here at the gathering is, would you like to be a part of the fellowship? And my hope is that eventually we'll work. We can't, we can't do it all right now altogether. So I'm doing a pilot project and thank the Lord for the people who are willing to be guinea pigs just, just to experiment with me. Go, actually, what does work?

Because we might come back two months later. Oh, that was crazy. We, we, we, we, we went ourselves out doing that. I actually sincerely think that actually that won't happen because when you hunger and thirst for the Lord, I think he is just faithful and whatever little margins we think we have, I think he will expand them. And so here's my just first intro and just to ask you to watch this space

and go, actually, if you're hungry for the Lord, if you're, if you're trying to figure out what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in this city, I want you to know our church, we are trying, we have a plan for discipleship and we're going to keep asking question number two, which is, is that plan working? And honestly, this side of heaven, I don't think we'll have the final answer, but we're going to keep trying. And so I invite you, would you consider, would you pray actually, why am I here? Am I becoming more and more like Jesus? And maybe one day we get to do this more intentionally together. Because as we look at scripture time and time again, God uses people, not programs, not big events, but he uses people like you and I, we've been going through the book of Acts and you just see Acts 7, Acts 8, Acts 9, he's just going to people and converting them and then he's using them to then spread the news even more. And time and time again, he's using people, but it's not actually the people that are doing the work, it's who? It's the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 53] If you look at this book of Acts, it's, it's, it says the Acts of the apostles. And I've said this before, if we just to kind of expand it a little bit, no, it's the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles. It's the Holy Spirit. He's the one who's doing stuff. The question I have for us is actually, what do you think the Holy Spirit does? I'm posing this out here so you can avoid eye contact if you want. I may or may not pick you. What do you think the Holy Spirit actually does?

Any brave soul with any kind of suggestion or answer? J1, can I start with you? What do you think the Holy Spirit does? Convicts and corrects.

Correct. John 16a, he's come into the world to convict the world of sin and righteousness. He's coming to show us what's right and what's wrong. Correct. What else does the Holy Spirit do as you look into scripture? What are the things that he does? Agnes, what do you, what, what do you think the Holy Spirit does? Teaches us to understand his word. Do you get confused when you read this book?

I do. I do, especially in the Old Testament. And I'll sit and I'll go, Holy Spirit, I'm going to need you today. I'm going to need you today to help explain what this just means. So absolutely, it teaches us more. What else? Dr. Brown. He's not actually a doctor, by the way. He's, he hates me for doing this, but he's actually a Mr. Brown. But anyway, he talks like a doctor, don't we think?

All right. It allows us to be set back to our factory setting the way that human beings were meant to be created.

[11 : 33] It allows us to fulfill that purpose. Allows us to fulfill that purpose. And if I was just to quote a famous doctor that spoke a few weeks ago, that that purpose is to be that place where heaven meets earth, correct? Where Christians are made in the image of God. And from that moment, we become the heavens vessels almost into earth.

And that's what we're supposed to do. But we, we, we stray, we fall away from it. And if I keep going along that line, the Holy Spirit is here to make Jesus real to us and make Jesus real in us. The Holy Spirit is here to point. Jesus, in his last words from John 14 to 17, he's talking about, Hey, I know I'm going, but don't worry. There's someone better. There's someone better who's coming. Who's going to show you me. He's going to shine a light onto that. So it's all the Holy Spirit's work. The question for us is why does, why, why do we find it so hard to really follow the Holy Spirit? Stephen, before he was stoned to death, he said, you stiff neck people resisting the Holy Spirit. Why people are just prideful. You look at the world and, and you see the polarization that's happening here, everywhere around the world. And I always say, if you want to lose faith in humanity, just go to YouTube and read the comment sections. And you're like, wow, Lord Jesus, come back now, please. The pride that is in us, the sin that is in us stops the Holy Spirit from working. Yet when the Holy Spirit is working, what does he do? He brings us together. There's a unity. We're just, when Philippians 2, when he says, actually don't consider yourselves less significant than those around you, let each of you look to the interests of others and not to yourself. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. How do you do that? Because the Holy Spirit lives inside us. Jesus, as he leaves, literally his final prayer in John 17, he says, let them be one, let them be together, because only when they're together will they believe in me.

The Spirit, when he comes, he makes Jesus real to us and in us, and he unites us. This passage here is fascinating because the church back then, as we're looking in the book of Acts, their biggest problem was discrimination, was racism. The Jews against the Gentiles. That was the biggest conflict that they had. And this, I think, is probably a watershed moment for the church. It's been building up.

Acts 7, the deacon Stephen. Acts 8, Philip starts to head off, goes into Samaria, and then he meets the Ethiopian. Acts 9, Paul, the Pharisee, gets converted. And Acts 10, you can almost see all of this come, this collision course of what's happening with God trying to move this kingdom from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And it's a fascinating story. I'm going to read the word of God to us today. I wasn't organized enough to find someone to read it for us. The other thing is I wouldn't wish this on anyone because it's actually a long passage. So as I invite you to stand, I just want you to remember one thing as you soak in the word of God, and you're like, why are we still standing here? Just to encourage you that actually back in the old days, you would stand for the whole time whilst I would sit and preach. So just to give you comfort when we're standing for a little bit longer. So just actually, just count yourself grateful that it's only for five minutes. Can I empower us to stand for the word of the Lord? Father, we submit ourselves to your word.

[14:56] We're hungry, Lord. Would you speak to us? That song that we sang just at the end there, seek my face. And Lord, yes, we say, here we are. We seek your face and we seek your words. And so we read from the book of Acts chapters 10. At Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave arms generously to the people and prayed continually to God. About the ninth hour of the day, he saw clearly in a vision, an angel of God come in and say to him, Cornelius. And he stared at him in terror and said, what is it, Lord? And he said to him, your prayers and your arms have been ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter.

He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him. And having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray, and he became hungry and wanted something to eat. But while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance.

And saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, rise, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, by no means, Lord, for I've never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice came to him again a second time, what God has made clean, do not call common. This happened three times, and the thing was taken up once to heaven. Now, while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the spirit to him said to him, behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them. And Peter went down to the men and said, I am the one you're looking for. What is the reason for your coming?

And they said, Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man who was well-spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say. So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day, they entered Caesarea.

[17:22] Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up and saying, stand up, I too am a man. And as he talked with them, he went in and found many persons gathered.

And he said to them, you yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of any other nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I asked then, why you sent for me? This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. Thank you. Thank you very much for bearing with me.

This is a grab your popcorn kind of moment, because this doesn't happen. And I'll explain a little bit more why this doesn't happen as we go through this story. But let's start with the two characters that we have. Okay, we have Cornelius, a centurion, a centurion of the Italian cohort. He was in

charge of 100 people at least. Okay, that's where the name comes from. And so he was a powerful man in charge of the place that he was in. But interestingly, he was also a devout man. So he was actually a convert to Judaism and he worshipped the God of the Jews. And a devout man who feared God, this is verse two, I'm just going to keep going. So you can follow along. With all his household, gave alms generously. So he was a generous giver to those who were in need. And he prayed continually to God. About the ninth hour of the day, he saw clearly in a vision, an angel of God come in and say to him, Cornelius. So he actually follows the Jewish traditions and he prays at different points in the day. So he's spending this time with God. Can I just say just at this moment, this Roman soldier in charge of 100 people, probably one of those most powerful people around at that time, he's just following the traditions of the Jews. He's praying continually to him. How countercultural would that have been? If you understood the ancient world, if you understood the culture that they existed in, you would recognize that actually he did not need to do that. Later, you see his CV, verse 22, it says, Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man who was well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation. A Roman soldier put in charge and authority over the Jews. Yet all the people that he was in charge of actually spoke well of him. Can we think of one leader that has everyone speaking well of him or her? This is different already. And what's really interesting is he's spending that time praying to God and then God answers him and says, Cornelius, Cornelius, I love it. God calls us by name and it happened with Saul. He just comes in and he says, Cornelius. And you see, actually, this whole time, I know we're going to focus on Peter and Cornelius, but you can just see the Holy Spirit just doing everything. He's the one who's doing all this, all this pulling together and it's fascinating. So then he says, Cornelius, and then he says, what is it, Lord? Which is exactly what you'd say. Though he did say, it does say here, and he stared at him in terror, which we must not forget. But God is that big. Everyone who sees God is either blinded or is completely lying on the floor or would die. And so here's things are changing. [20 : 34] Something's happening here. And he tells him, your prayers and your arms have ascended as a memorial before God. What does that mean? Someone who doesn't truly, truly know who God is yet, doesn't have this intimate relationship yet. God hears every word. God hears every prayer that comes from Cornelius and comes from us. And God chooses to answer. This watershed moment for just where the kingdom of heaven is going to go. And then he tells him about this guy called Peter. And he says, you have to send him. Bring this man. Meanwhile, so that's one scene, boom. And then the film stops and then moves into another scene. And you see Peter on his rooftop praying. Of course, Cornelius praying is a bit of a surprise because his people wouldn't be doing this. But Peter praying is pretty normal. What's really funny how I love how the scripture just brings this out is that Peter is also a human. Have you prayed before and then suddenly realized that you're just hungry? You're like, actually, I'm hungry. And so it actually just says it here. And Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And then he became hungry. Ham cha. He's like, I'm hungry. I should go and eat something. And so he has someone prepare some food for him. And in that moment, whilst he's still praying and waiting for the food, boom, he's in a trance and God shows him a vision. And the vision that we just read there, the sheep that descends being let down by his four corners upon the earth, all in it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice, rise, Peter, kill and eat.

Again, you need to understand if Cornelius lived in a place and he was completely countercultural, Peter here is just shocked. And later it says, verse 17, he's actually inwardly perplexed. And he's so confused. God has to do this three times. He says, kill and eat. Why? Because Peter, as a Jew, would grow up. There's so many things you can't eat. So wait, God, wait, you're telling me to kill and eat. Wait, that's against everything I've ever known about approaching you, the most holy God.

Honestly, I cut Peter a lot of slack here because I would be confused. Imagine you've never ever touched a piece of tar seal before. And then you're like God saying, hey, you can now eat tar seal. He doesn't even know what he's missing. And so he's confused. This tells me something interesting as the Holy Spirit's pulling the strings. That actually, whether it's Cornelius who had this incredible CV, just like Paul, by the way, there's still something that he was lacking. He was still lacking this encounter with the Holy Spirit. And God was choosing this moment to introduce himself.

[23 : 13] And then you see Peter, the rock upon whom Jesus will build the church, still was lacking in something. He still needed to learn something. It reminds me that actually spiritual growth itself is as much unlearning as it is learning. How many times have I heard maybe here or even back home

in England? Yeah, I grew up in a Christian school. I grew up in a Catholic school. I went to church for a while. And then I was like, oh, I can't wait to hear and see your spiritual growth. But I know it's going to involve lots of unlearning. There's going to be so many things before you grow is you're going to have to let go of. Richard Rohr says this, much of spiritual growth is subtracting what you already thought you knew, unlearning what you were sure of and letting go of the ego's need to be right.

Transformation is more about unlearning than learning. Dallas Willard says, unlearning the old ways of the world and having our habits, instincts, and assumptions conform to the reality of the kingdom of God. I sit here and I look at these two men. I was like, oh, there's so much they had to unlearn.

There's so much we have to unlearn when it comes to approaching the most high God. Look at Nicodemus in John 3. He sees something's up with this Jesus guy. All his colleagues and all his friends are like, oh, we need to get rid of him. He's like, well, I'm not going to outright oppose you right now. But in the middle of the night, I'm going to go find out a little bit more.

And what does Jesus tell him? Unlearn everything you know. Wipe that slate completely clean. You have to be born again. Can you imagine for Nicodemus, who's committed his whole life to memorizing this book? And then wait, you're telling me to be born again, young man? Jesus, remember, was still just 30 years old. Do you know who you're talking to? I've been memorizing this book before you were in nappies. And now you're telling me I need to be born again? I need to unlearn everything? I don't know where we all sit with our own experience of the faith.

But I do think many of us have a lot of unlearning to do. Had a lot of, actually, where did that come from? Where does that concept of this heavenly father that I have come from? What do I think the gospel actually even means?

[25 : 25] Keep trying to become this good person, trying to become this good Christian, but only now to find out there's no such thing as a good Christian. It's just someone who recognizes they are bad and that they need a savior. So much unlearning that we have to do that we see Peter and Cornelius needing to do here. So what happens then? Both these guys get a vision. Then they start going. So Cornelius sends his guys to go and collect Peter. Knock on the door, Peter's praying. And then they go and they explain, hey, our boss came to bring you. And Peter's like, I know, I've already been told. And so he goes. They travel two days to get to Cornelius's house. And then there's this fascinating scene. Okay, so we're fast forwarding now. So you can see, don't worry, I won't be here forever. And on the following day, they entered Caesarea, verse 24. Cornelius was expecting them and had caught together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. Stop there for a second. So Cornelius gets this vision. He's like, go and find this Peter. And so he sends his guys, finds Peter.

And in those, well, it takes two days to get there to Peter. It takes another two days to bring him back. So that's four days. And so during those four days, what's he doing? He's inviting his friends. Most powerful person in this town was inviting his friends and his family. Hey, come, there's going to be someone who's coming. You imagine the most powerful person you know. I don't know what that might be. Just someone who is the top of society, who's inviting you to come to his house because he's about to introduce you to someone.

That's the context that's here. And they're waiting. There's no find my iPhone. There's no tracking. They're just waiting there. They're just gathering because Cornelius said, hey, he's going to come soon. My guys are bringing him. And so imagine here, I've gathered all of you. I mean, I don't have this many friends and family, but thank you for being just for now. Imagine I invite you to come here. Hey, I've got a guy who's coming and you need to meet him. And you're here because you respect my authority. You're here because I'm the who's who. And so you just want to be connected with me and you want to, you want to, you're curious as to why I am the way I am. All right. And then Peter finally comes in. The moment Peter walks in with his guys, what does Cornelius do? Just falls down in front of his friends and family. Have we, have you ever seen the most powerful person that you know, humble himself in such a dramatic way? Well-intentioned, misdirected. But the message that that would have sent to the yi ma gu jie, to the uncles and aunties who have no idea about this God, suddenly Cornelius falls to his feet. As I was journaling this week, that was the thing in John three that I saw that actually the only key into the kingdom of heaven, the secret code, the only recipe that works is humility. When you fall down at your feet, when you realize who he is in Cornelius didn't even know he didn't have the full picture yet for now, he only sees in part. And so

he thinks this Peter guy is it.

And so he falls at his feet. I think that for friends and family that were around, they must have just been completely shocked. I guess the question for us is, as you're in your workplace, as you're in your school and you have friends and family who don't know Jesus, how do they see you responding to Jesus? Do you have the same, just humility and reverence and awe for this God? Or actually, do you just treat him pretty casually? Oh yeah, yeah, Jesus. I need Jesus because he helps me get through my exams. I need Jesus because I've got this really annoying guy at work and I need Jesus to remind me to be kind to him and to be patient to him. Is that all? Is Jesus just your tool in your pocket that you use whenever you need something to get out of something or to deal with an issue? Or do you realize he's actually the Lord of your life? And that if he was to step into the room, you would fall down and you would humble yourself regardless of whoever else was around you. I think the world needs Christians, those who not only say that they believe in Jesus, but actually follow him and actually submit to him and go, take everything. Cornelius, bless him, does it with Peter. So he's a little bit misdirected. So Peter tells him, hey, chill, call it, stand up. I too am a man. I'm not the one you should be bowing down before. And then he says, hey guys, do you realize what's happening here? Peter says this. And honestly, Peter doesn't fully, fully get it either. Okay. So he said, do you realize I have never stepped foot in the house of someone like you? My religion doesn't allow it because you guys are evil.

My people were set apart. So this has never happened before. But because I got a vision, because I was hungry, and then I, and then I got this prayer and this vision and God told me that I have to come here. That's why I'm here. That's the only reason why I'm here.

[30 : 25] I'm learning or unlearning just the same as you. That's what he's saying here. And then Cornelius retells the story. This account happened. He just keeps retelling the story, Luke. So it just shows how important it is. And so finally, in verse 34, which I hadn't read before, before now. So Peter opened his mouth and said, truly, I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. He's like, I think I truly get it. I thought it was just the Jews.

I thought it was just us that were the chosen people, that we would have salvation. But I'm beginning to see the Holy Spirit showing me that actually there's racism in me. The discrimination in me. I've actually not been a proponent of unity here. I realize I've been missing the point, but finally I get it. It doesn't matter if it's just Jews. It's anyone who chooses to call upon the name of Jesus. That will be enough. So he's learning this and then he goes into sharing the gospel again, which I won't go through right now.

Here's the interesting thing is Peter understands this in this moment because he's in the house of this foreigner, not really knowing why he's there. And he learns, okay, I can't be racist anymore. I need to let go. I need to unlearn what I've been conditioned to follow all of my life. It's funny because actually 14 years later, we know that he's still struggling with this because Paul writes in Galatians 2, actually he goes and finally meets, after his conversion is Acts 9, Paul actually heads off. And he doesn't really meet these guys until much later, Peter and the whole crew. When he meets them, he sees, what's Peter doing? He's just been taught this lesson to not be racist and not to be discriminate. And yet he's actually only eating with his own people. And so Paul comes in and goes, wait, don't do that. And actually Paul basically just grasses on him in Galatians 2. Peter never talks about this, but actually Paul's just like, actually I caught those guys doing that and I actually had to confront them because the Holy Spirit is moving, not just amongst the Jews, but towards the ends of the earth, to every ethnicity, to every people. So Peter is on this learning journey that doesn't stop right here. He's not converted in one moment, which encourages me and encourages you hopefully, because it's not just an overnight thing where we suddenly become holy people, but there's this journey of learning, of unlearning, of reminding ourselves of the heart of God and what the Spirit of God is actually doing. So he finally gets it and he's praying. And it's funny, while Peter was still saying these things, so he's not finished the sermon, I'm in verse 44 now, while Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word and the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. It was mind-blowing that this was happening.

He hadn't even finished his sermon. And the Holy Spirit comes, boom, and people start speaking in tongues and actually prophesying. Not just anyone, people that for the whole of his life, he thought these are not holy people, God will never be with these people because he's only chosen us, the

Jews. And he sees them suddenly and he's like, what on earth is happening? This is mind-blowing for him. And then he says, well, can anyone withhold them? It says, verse 47, can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? If they've just had the greater baptism, baptism in the sense that the Holy Spirit is now inside them, why can't, why not? Before, to be a Jew, before, if you were to join the way, you'd have to do so many things, go through so many rituals to follow their way. And yet he was like, you know what, if you already have the Holy Spirit, let us baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and let's just get moving. Who am I to stop what the Holy Spirit is doing, is what he's saying here.

And so then he baptizes them. I'm concluding now, but actually I want to stop here and rewind a little bit because I don't think we, I didn't think I truly got the full picture of what is happening here.

[34 : 26] A man who grew up his whole life not being able to enter into someone like Cornelius' home, and he actually says it. I shouldn't be here, but God called me here, so here I am.

Why were the Jews so separate from the Gentiles? To understand that, you have to go further back and look at just ancient society and look at the context with where the Jews were operating. If you look at the Roman world, I mean, I don't know, if you've watched Russell Crowe's Gladiators, that gives you a mild picture of what it might be like. The ancient world was not a friendly place.

We think the world is dark right now. It's been a lot darker. It's been a lot, a lot darker everywhere around the world. Child sacrifice, pretty normal. Rape, pretty normal.

Violence, pretty normal. Abuse, all kinds of abuse, pretty normal. People wouldn't bat an eyelid to the things that we look at and are horrified by, but in the ancient world, so many of the things would be completely normal. And it's in that place where God calls the Jews and says, can you be different?

I'm going to choose you and I'm going to set you apart. You're going to be holy and you're going to follow my laws. So this is the context. You see the shock of Peter seeing the Holy Spirit fall on the Gentiles. Moses would have fallen off his chair because Moses spent the whole of his life trying to convince the Israelites, you have to follow these laws. Why? Because the only way the Spirit of God will be on us is if we are clean, people. There is no way. We are so far. I saw the burning bush.

Trust me. You do not want to be near it. If we got close to God, we would die.

[36 : 12] So please follow these laws. And that's where the Levitical laws come from. Stay clean. Stay set apart because the society outside of you, God will not be able to enter in. That is unclean.

You go all the way back to the Garden of Eden. The moment they chose sin, the moment they chose to go their own way, they were separated from God. And from that moment, the Spirit of God actually doesn't rest on that many people in that many scenarios. Can anyone think of any places where the Spirit of God actually rested on someone in the Old Testament?

Samson. Samson. Samson. For sure, Samson. In those moments where he just was strong.

There's a fascinating one called Bezalel in, I think it's Exodus 31. This is just before the golden calf incident. And he says, my spirit is going to fall on this guy and he's going to create beautiful designs. For all you artists out there, that's just really cool to see. He says, my spirit is going to fall upon this person and he's going to just design the most beautiful things for my sanctuary. That's one of the places. There's another place where actually Moses is having this interaction with God. I think it's in Numbers 11 where actually God says, okay, we're going to appoint some elders. I'm going to take some of the Spirit that's on you and I'm going to distribute it to the 70 elders. And then Moses said to sing, if only everyone got the Spirit of God, wouldn't that be cool? Then we'd all be able to hear from God. So he's dreaming out loud, but he's never seen it before. The Holy Spirit didn't really rest on that many people because we weren't set apart. We weren't clean. And so that's why the laws were put in place to try and get us there. In Isaiah 6, when Isaiah sees God on his throne, what does he say? Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips. I can't get anywhere near this God. So for the longest, longest time, the Holy Spirit would not be able to land on people and dwell within people. Why? Because there is so much sin. There is so much flesh.

There is so much selfishness there. And so those laws were put in place. And sometimes we approach Christianity and go, there's so many laws. There's so many rules about what I can be, how to be a good person. Well, do you know why those are all there in the first place? It's because God was trying to say, these rules will help me have a relationship with you. That's why. Don't just focus on the rules and think I'm a bad person. These rules are here so that they would allow for human flourishing. And when humans flourish, they are the most connected with me. And so if you follow these, you shall be clean. And then of course, even the priests, every year before they enter

the holiest of holy places, they would have to go through all these rituals to get to a place where they would be clean.

[38 : 55] And of course, they would have to slaughter a lamb and use the blood to cover and to clean them. So you can see all through the Bible, there are not many cases where the Holy Spirit actually falls on people until many years later, the prophet Joel says, there will be a moment where the spirit will fall on all people. There will be a moment. And when was that moment when there was finally someone, you see in Psalm 20, 24, David talks about this. He says, who shall ascend upon the hill of the Lord? Who? Does anyone remember? Those who have clean hands and a pure heart. Wonderful Chris Tomlin song. Only those who approach the throne with clean hands and a pure heart will be able to be in the presence of God. And finally, finally, there was one with clean hands. Finally, there was one with a pure heart. Jesus of Nazareth, where the Holy Spirit falls upon him and says, this is my son with whom I am well pleased. He's the only one whom my spirit can dwell in because he is sinless. And through him and by him, the rest of people, the people will be able to have my spirit dwell inside them. What is true of him shall be true of all these other people because of what he's about to do. He's about to lay down his life, spill his blood. And that blood is the thing that will clean all these people so that my Holy Spirit can dwell.

The majority of this book, the time that this book covers, the Holy Spirit does not dwell on people because it simply cannot, because we have chosen our own way, because we are unclean. And yet now, at the name of Jesus, is all it needs, whether Jew or Gentile, the Holy Spirit can fall on.

If Moses, I've said this before, if Moses walked into this room, he'd be stunned, speechless with the 200 burning bushes that are here because the Holy Spirit dwells inside you.

Peter would come in here. Wow. I thought I saw it all at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit went, came on all Jews. Acts 10, it's not even just the Jews, it's everyone. Who's a Jew here?

No one. Yet the Holy Spirit dwells on us. Why? Because the Spirit of Jesus now lives inside us.

[41 : 26] We're sat here today because of this moment here in Acts 10. So what does the Holy Spirit do? It levels everything. He levels everything. He unites everything. How? Jesus.

Flow at the beginning of our service just read from Ephesians 2. So you stole my thunder because I was going to finish there. But I guess how powerful is that? That the Holy Spirit is just showing us that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. That what Jesus did when he came and preached peace to those who were near and to those who were far, the Jews and the Gentiles, he's saying, hey, just remember you, Jew, Christian, you were separated from God. You were strangers to the covenant. You were without hope and without God in the world. Yet Jesus came to you and preached peace to you. And by the blood of Christ, we are all united. He came and he broke down the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile, between black and white, between left and right, between blue and yellow. He broke down all of it.

And now through the cross, we all have access to him, to the father through him. And now we, because of the cornerstone, we are being built into the dwelling place of God. The Holy Spirit of God now dwells here because of what Jesus did. I think we completely take that for granted.

Even the amount of people in the Bible, in the Old Testament, who wouldn't have been able to be in the presence of God, have the Spirit of God. And yet we sit here with the presence of God living inside us. I think we take it for granted. I think I take it for granted. I don't approach it with the same, with the appropriate level of fear and reverence and awe that I should.

Peter starts his journey and finally understands that when the Spirit comes, it brings humility, unity. It brings unity. I'll finish here and just ask, which of those stories resonates with you the most? Is it Cornelius? You have all the right intentions. You've done all the right things.

[43 : 49] Everyone likes you and approves of you. And yet you're still actually lacking the one thing that you need, which is the Holy Spirit and the relationship with him. Or are you Peter? You are filled with just passion and power. And God is using you mightily, yet there are still so many things that you need to unlearn. There is still pride in you. There is still discrimination in you. The gospel is for all.

The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Would we humble ourselves and allow him to unite us? I don't know what the answer is. I don't know what the answer is, how this body here can help the brokenness that's outside. But I think by his Spirit, if we stay together, keep our eyes on Jesus, he will use us to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth.

Each individual here as a burning bush because the Holy Spirit lives inside you and me. I'm going to stop here now. I'm going to spend just a little time just to invite you to just hear from God yourself.

That's the whole point. The Holy Spirit can work through me, but he can just speak to you directly. Do you want to listen? Have you noticed that all the people who hear from him so far are the ones who are praying and talking to him and listening out for him?

God's so gentle that he doesn't just crash into your world and force you. Sometimes he does, actually. Acts 9, Saul was doing his own thing.

But for the rest of us, spend that moment just to go speak, for your servant is listening.

[45:39] Let's just spend a moment of silence now as we ask him what he wants to say. Amen.

The song we're going to sing to respond, and we sang it earlier already, but it's from the psalm that, yes, I do quote probably the most.

Psalm 27. One thing have I asked of the Lord that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of his tent. He will lift me high upon a rock, and now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy. I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud. Be gracious to me and answer me. You have said, seek my face.

My heart says to you, your face, Lord, do I seek.

Hide not your face from me. I'm actually going to ask the team to sing this song over us, and I want you to remain seated and just continue to hear, and continue to ask God to speak to me.

[47:08] I'm seeking your face. Be gracious to me and answer me. Do not hide your face from me. I am here to seek you. And as they sing over us, we just continue to reflect on those truths.

Lord, we wait for you. With fear and trembling, we come to you. In reverence and in awe, we worship you.

You are so much bigger than we make you out to be. So much more loving. So much more holy.

We all fall short. Of representing you to the world. Forgive us when we take part in the division.

We take part in the inflammatory comments. Forgive us when we take part. And the discrimination. When we keep to ourselves.

[48:43] When we resist your spirit. Help us not be a stiff-necked people. Help us be a people of open hands and open hearts.

To welcome others. As we have been welcomed by you. If there is any superiority in us.

In any way. Just like Cornelius. We fall down and we humble ourselves.

There is only one who is good. There is only one who is holy. One who is worthy. Jesus, you and you alone.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. We wait for you. As we go from here, would you have your spirit go with us?

[49:54] Guide us. Lead us. You who are filled with grace and truth.

We trust you. We love you. We worship you. We follow you. And it's in your name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.