

Kingdom Building

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[0:00] Good morning. Good morning, everyone. Mighty Oaks, you guys are going to hang out with us for another 10-15 minutes or so because some of you are going to be doing a reading for us and then you can go off into the room.

And as we were worshipping, I was just so encouraged as I was just looking around. I don't know if it's obvious to you, but it's fairly clear to me that the Holy Spirit has been moving. The Holy Spirit has been working. And that's the biggest encouragement for me, that it's not just me or a small group of people. This sounds like I'm in a shower. That are doing as much as we can, but actually it's so clear to see that actually God has been working throughout all the different people. I think maybe the most encouraging conversation I had this last week on a prayer call I had was hearing Alex Ligo. I think something's stirring at work. The Holy Spirit's asking me to do something there. And then, of course, I shared last week that actually Kelly reminded us a few weeks ago, just actually just meeting people and actually stopping at nothing to share the good news with them. And not being afraid to give someone a Bible if they're actually asking for these kind of questions. It's encouraging for me because that's the only way the gospel moves, not just from one person doing all the talking, all the working, but for everyone to take up the calling that each of you have been asked by the Lord to do.

[1:23] That's been the most exciting thing for me. So even down to something like Christmas, actually, maybe just a small plug again for that. December 21st. If you're like, OK, I don't quite know what God's calling me to do at work. I don't know what God is calling me to do in my friendship groups.

Well, at least bring them to Christmas. There will be a Christmas service that's happening on December 21st. Let me tell you a little bit more about the thing afterwards. The thing afterwards is we just want to create this.

OK, so Christina and I, we grew up in England in a place called Birmingham. It's not the most beautiful place. It's probably one of the least beautiful places in the world. But it's one of our favorite things during Christmas is this thing called the Christmas market.

And it's really fun. And you go around and you just drink mulled wine and eat kind of chocolate fondue and all those kinds of things. So we were like, what would it take for us to create something a little bit similar, but maybe here just to have a bit of fun?

Luana, you're laughing. Did you do that in Birmingham? Did you go to the Christmas market? It's pretty fun. Of course, it's freezing there. We can kind of simulate that by putting the air con on here. But the idea is to be able to have something where we can maybe, OK, we have friends.

[2:27] We can't have lunch with everyone. But what if we just had a few stalls on this floor and on the fifth floor where we can maybe just have some fun? So we need help because we cannot do this on our own.

Please, if you are good and gifted at something like face painting, please come and offer to run that stall with us. Otherwise, I'll be the one painting faces. Yes. OK, so please.

And of course, if you're like, I really can't do it. I really don't know. But I have money. Then can you pay for that stall? OK, so just get involved. I think that's going to be the most fun thing. If there's going to be live music, people are going to sing and play.

And so please, December 21st, that's the one. And maybe just on that note, did you realize that today is the last Sunday we're going to be in this room for service? Yes. Yeah. Give thanks to God who provided that.

I actually give thanks to the whole team, the deacons who have just been working hard behind the scenes. And actually, Gabe, for helping us with all the tech and Christina and Bonnie, helping us

with just getting everything that we need to get down there.

[3:28] Which is another thing. Gabe, do we need help after service today to move certain things down? There's a few things to bring. There's a few things to bring. So if you are strong and if you are physically capable, or Julian, if you know someone who is, can you or if you're actually just simply nosy and you want to can just offer to grab something and then you can come downstairs to the fifth floor with us and we can help set up that.

OK, so that's happening. So next Sunday, do not come here. If you do come here, we'll take that as your sign that you are willing to offer to help with kids Sunday school.

OK, because the kids are going to be here. So that is the only reason why you should be here is either you are teaching kids or you own children or just they are your responsibility. And that's the only reason why you should be here on the next Sunday.

OK, we actually should take a picture because it makes me think maybe two years ago when we before we moved in here, there was a group of us who at the beginning of the gathering in Jordan, we took a picture on our last Sunday.

So we should come. Someone remind me, Julian, can you remind me to take a picture in the end? I don't know how we're going to do it, but we should take one picture just for memory's sake. Last week, I asked, why are you here? And each week we try and put those statements up.

[4:41] Look, you may remember them. They may work for you. They may not. But for me, every time I just I just I force myself to just stop and go, OK, this isn't just a routine thing that I do mindlessly.

There is a reason why I gather. There is a reason why I gather with other people because I recognize that I cannot do it on my own or rather it's much better to do it with people.

It's when we are with people. It's when we are encouraged. We all have different callings. Some of us work in the hospital. Some of us work in the law field. Some of us aren't working yet.

Whatever it is, there are different areas that you have been placed in. And in those areas, the Lord is calling you to do something. Now, there is one calling for all of us.

The main calling. The main calling is to know him and enjoy him and glorify him forever and ever and ever. But how that looks in your field is going to be different. We're going to be going through Acts chapter 18.

[5:38] And maybe another thing is we're going to have a little stop after this Sunday because next Sunday, as we move down to the fifth floor, as we enter into a season of Advent, we're going to go into a season. OK, well, why did Jesus come?

Why did Jesus come to be with us? So we're going to take a pause. We've reached Acts 18 and then we're going to revisit that back again in January. But the question always is, why has God placed me where I am right now?

Around the people that he's placed in front of me. What am I supposed to be doing? What am I supposed to be sharing with them? Now, some people, some people are called to go to Congo. Some people are called to live in Zambia like my brother did. Some people are called to simply go back to work with a renewed mindset. What if?

What if God placed you in the job or in the course that you're in right now? What if it wasn't really about the course or the job? Something I shared last week, right?

[6:34] Where we've integrated the world's values and the world's goals into our faith. And we're thinking, OK, everything about God is basically geared towards me living a good life, living a comfortable life, living a fruitful life when it's quite the opposite.

When it really should be, wait. If everything is for God, then all these other things that I've got going on around me should be geared towards him. And so the question that I want you to keep asking is, why has God placed you where you are?

And why has he put people around you? I hope you gather here because you like some people here, at least two or three. That'll be preferable where you come to the service and you go, oh, I actually enjoy seeing you.

I enjoy hanging out with Jackie. I enjoy their company. When I was with Young Life, my boss would often do this one thing, a little bit cringy, a little bit cheesy.

He'd get us all standing in a circle and he'd get us all holding hand in hand. But one hand you'd be placing on top of the other and the other one you'd be kind of underneath. So the whole goal is to remind us as a kind of image is that when we are gathered together, there is something to give and

there is something to receive.

[7:43] That's why you're here. I hope that's why you're here. And today we're going to look at Acts 18. This is the kind of the finale of Paul's second missionary journey. And what we see here is he cannot do it alone.

It is all about the people around him. If you look at this whole passage, there are so many of the names that are beyond just Paul. And I want us to be able to kind of unpack a little bit. Two things really.

One thing is the spiritual friendship that's needed. And the other thing that spiritual mentorship that's needed. The spiritual friendship and the spiritual mentorship that's needed. And so we're going to open up the word.

And today we have the privilege of having a few young'uns come to read the word of God to us. So as always, can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord? Maybe I will pray first before we read. And we're going to have Sam kick us off. And then we're going to have Reuben in the middle. And then we're going to have Lucy bring us home. It's a, let me tell you how many verses there are just so you can brace yourself.

[8:41] There are 28 verses in Acts chapter 18. Okay. God, we stand because we are filled with reverence and awe for your word.

The word that gives life. And even if we don't feel it, we want to feel this way. We want to hunger for your word. We want to be in utter admiration for what you have to say to us.

Utter dependence on what these words will do for us. The power that they have. So we stand and we allow your word to minister to us now. From the book of Acts chapter 18.

Thanks. After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila. A native of Pontus recently came from Italy with his wife Priscilla.

Because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them. And because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked. For they were tent makers by trade.

[9:43] And he reasoned in the synagogue after Sabbath and tried to persuade the Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word.

Testifying to the Jews and that Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and revealed him, he shook out his garments and said to them, Your blood be on your own heads.

I am innocent. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titus Justus. A worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue.

Siprus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord. Together with his entire household and many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized.

And the Lord said to Paul, One night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent. For I am with you and no one will attack you to harm you.

[10:51] For I have many in this city who are my people. And he stayed a year and six months teaching the word of God among them. Thank you, sir. That's 12.

Yes. But when Galileo was prime council of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribe.

And he said to the Jews, And when he drove them from the tribunal and they seized, and they all seized Sothnes, the ruler of the synagogue, they beat him in front of the tribunal.

And he said to the Jews, He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. But on taking leave of them, he said, I will return to you if God wills.

[12:51] And he set sail for Ephesus. When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church.

And then he went down to Antioch. After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Vrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Thank you, Reuben and Lucy. Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to emphasis.

He was an eloquent man, competent in his scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus.

Though he knew only the Baptist of John, he began to speak boldly in the synagogue.

[14:08] But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God.

More accurately, when he was wise to cross at Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him.

And when he arrived, he greatly helped those who, though grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures and that the Christ Jesus.

Thank you. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. Thank you, kids. Can we give them a round of applause? Actually, you guys can head over there. I think Johnny should be here by now. If not, Gabe's going to.

Why don't you guys go in first? Thank you. Huh? Yeah, yeah. Maybe give him a call. See where he is. Yeah. Thank you. Oh. Can you imagine? Can you imagine showing up to the synagogue on a Sabbath and then standing for hours as people read the Old Testament?

[15:29] That would have been a little bit like how it would have been back then. I don't know about you, but actually that's what really causes, inspired me to kind of get my muscles going in terms of really hanging on every word, really trying to discipline my mind, take captive of every thought to really allow the word of God to really permeate into my heart.

As we look at this, though, you see it's not just Paul. There are a whole group of people. So he was in Athens, remember? He was in Athens and he was talking to people who were incredibly smart, challenging them, and actually them challenging him back, and them engaging in just discussion about who Jesus is.

And he kept clinging on to the same thing. Jesus and the resurrection. This has helped me as I've gone and spoken to different people. We can talk about different things. We can talk about did the fish really eat Jonah?

We can talk about science versus faith. We can talk about why there is suffering in this world. But if we really need to boil it down, there's only really one miracle that we hold on to, and that is the fact that someone died and then they rose again.

And if you believe that miracle, then the rest, honestly, is fairly straightforward and fairly easy. The goal is we cannot do it alone. Even Jesus sent people out two by two.

[16:40] Because sometimes when you go out on your own, it's hard. So all of us, as we're wrestling with what the calling is, then you're like, oh, okay, I must go. But then there's another thing, which is, oh, but why is it so hard?

It's all fun when it's here, when we're talking amongst people who actually share the same belief as us. But you and I both know the moment we walk into our workplace, walk into our fields and our friends, wrong place, over this way, the other room.

We're in that room. It's okay, no one saw you. And this is as subtle as it could possibly be. Yep, don't worry. Don't worry. It's all right. Still, no one can see. You made it.

There's this image of Paul that he's just this fierce man that isn't afraid of anyone, right?

You have this feeling. He goes from place to place to place, and he's just going to engage with everyone. But it's really interesting. As you look at the book of Acts and you look at this account, one thing that you almost must do is also look at the letters that are matched to it.

[17:43] So as he walks into Corinth, it's actually really good to open the book of 1 and 2 Corinthians and go, wow, this is how you actually felt. Imagine him. He's just been discussing with a group of people in Athens about this, and then he has to go.

And so verse 1, after this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. I just was just, I actually paused there as I read this on Monday morning. I was like, that would have been hard.

I mean, he got used to the ministry in Athens, and then he had to leave again. And he had to go to Corinth on his own. As you walk through a city on your own, you're like, oh, where's God leading me?

And can you see, this is where the Holy Spirit comes in, because he is not on his own, even though he is the only human there that's doing this. But actually, the Holy Spirit is with him. And in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, he talks, actually, when he showed up in Corinth, what was it?

It wasn't in strength. It wasn't in conviction. It was in fear and trembling. He's like, I don't even know what God's going to do here through me. But you guys in Corinth, you remember how I showed up.

[18:43] That actually, the only thing I was leaning on wasn't lofty speech and wisdom. Wasn't eloquent words. It was just the Spirit and the power of God. And so as we go into the different

spheres that we're called to, we remember that we're not going alone.

The Holy Spirit was with us. But then very quickly, God will also bring people. So verse 2, you see, and he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently came from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.

And he went to see them. So the first point I wanted to make is, you can see God's sovereignty when you step out. And one of the ways that you can see God's sovereignty, the word sovereignty simply means that God is in control, is that when you step out, he will often bring people alongside you.

You won't have to do it alone. That's one of the best ways that he shows you that he is in control.

The moment you step out and you realize you're not alone, then there are other people he has brought. So imagine Paul walking through the city of Corinth going, what do I do here?

And then he meets Aquila and Priscilla, this couple. This couple that were tent makers, actually. Paul himself was a tent maker. So you've got to know, Jewish culture, as soon as you're of age, they will train you in a trade so you can actually work, so you can actually survive.

[19:59] So it so happened that actually Paul also was a tent maker. So what does he do? He goes and finds Priscilla and Aquila, and then they hang out, and he went to see them. Verse 3, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for they were tent makers by trade.

Verse 4, and he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. Okay, so for those of you who work and say, well, I'm not a full-time minister and I'm not a pastor, and so actually it's not really my job to be kind of sharing the gospel.

James, it's your job. This is where it falls apart for you. Okay, because Paul goes to work, and he only goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath. So the other days he's actually working as a tent maker, and what were they doing?

They were basically cutting and sewing together woven cloth, goat's hair, and basically making tents for it. And those tents, what would they be used for? Actually, they'd be used to house Roman soldiers. So the rest of the weekdays, he's actually working.

Isn't that interesting? That we're not supposed to just do our Christian thing on the Sabbath, but we're actually supposed to do it wherever you're supposed to have work.

[21:08] Tim Keller says this in his book, Every Good Endeavor. Our work is never just secular. It is a stage where God arranges holy encounters. Paul's tent making became the foundation for Corinth's church.

We never have to really do it alone. The moment we step out, God brings people alongside us. And then it's not just Priscilla and Aquila. Later, verse 5, when Silas and Timothy arrived, so suddenly he starts to assemble his avengers.

Suddenly he starts to get people around him where they can go into the synagogues and go into the agoras, which are the marketplaces, to engage people in the message of Jesus. When you go, there will be spiritual friendship that is provided.

When you go, you will see that there are other people that the Lord has called to you. And then, so later on, verse 7, And he left there and he went to the house of a man named Titus Justice.

Let's just call him TJ, a worshiper of God. And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue. So TJ lives next to the synagogue. So he meets Priscilla and Aquila. He has Silas and Timothy joining him.

[22:10] And then he meets TJ, who hangs out at his house. But then his house next door is the synagogue. And the ruler of the synagogue is Crispus. So suddenly you have Priscilla, Aquila, Silas, Timothy, TJ, and Crispus all hanging out together.

And then they go into the synagogue. And that's where many, many Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. So you can see there's just an army of people that are starting to come together.

I remember when, I remember when Christine and I, we first took the leap of faith to go into ministry. So she left the work in the hospital. I left teaching in a school and we went. And, of course, when you go, and we were just, this was when we were late 20s.

When we were late 20s, where actually most people are thinking, this is when you forge out your career. This is when you start climbing in your career. And so we decided to give that all up. Had little baby Ruben at the time, who's obviously not so baby now.

And then we just went. And then we found something that was really interesting when we went out into ministry, which sounds great. It sounds spirit-led, and it all was. But my goodness, was it a lonely place. When you step out away from the usual track, and then suddenly you look around and your friends, they're all doing the usual track.

[23:19] And you're like, oh, actually, what am I supposed to do here? Am I really the only one here that cares about this? And now, of course, you've got to wrestle with that kind of sense of pride.

You're like, oh, well, you guys don't love Jesus. I love Jesus. And the Bible addresses that plenty. When it says, don't have that kind of mindset. You keep your eyes focused on me and you go. The problem is, often when you go, or when you do that, when you don't conform to the pattern of this world, it often is a lonely place.

I wish Paul in Romans 12 would just add that little line in. Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, brackets. It's going to be a really lonely place, but it's okay. But you'll be renewed by the transforming of your mind, and you'll know the good and perfect will of God.

That's what I wish he had said. But really, it is a lonely place. And I remember standing in some conferences that we were serving and going, wow, we're literally the only people here from our generation. Everyone's left.

Everyone's doing their own thing. And then I look across the hall, and I see this friend. Well, he wasn't a friend at that point. He was just someone else who had also given up his career to enter into ministry.

[24:22] Someone who actually worked for the Ministry of Defense in the UK. Smart guy. Very nerdy. That's usually the type of people that I avoid, stay away from. And I look across at him, and I'm like, I think I have to be friends with him.

Because if not, I'll have no one. And he's an introvert. He's like a nerdy introvert. So I walk up to him, and I go, well, I think we're going to have to be friends. And he was like, well, okay. He was never going to come to me.

But this ended up being a friendship that ended up blossoming for a good few years. And he ended up becoming the godfather of our kids. His personality, completely different. Temperament, completely different. Gifting, completely different.

He's studying a PhD in theology right now. And I ask him, well, how's it going? And then he starts telling me about what he's studying. And I'm like, actually, bro, I wasn't interested in what you're actually studying. But good on you.

Oh, but the friendship. Oh, but the friendship that is so needed. Because when you go into ministry, and I'm saying not quit your jobs and go into becoming a pastor. I'm just saying when you go back into your office, and when you share the gospel, it is a lonely, hard place.

[25:29] I think that's kind of why, one of the reasons why we have to come here. So we can do a little bit of a recharge. So we can kind of go, oh, this is actually really important. And I'm actually not on my own. There's TJ. There's Crispus. There's Silas.

There's Timothy. There's all these people who are together. Here's my question. And I'm going to turn it on you just to kind of get heart rates kind of pumping a little bit. Why is that so hard to have spiritual friendship in Hong Kong?

Actually, this is probably the biggest thing. Christina talks a lot about this, as her and I always talk. Why is loneliness just the biggest problem in the church, or in the city, or in the world, in fact? Why is it so hard for us to have deep and meaningful friendships, spiritual friendships?

Maybe you think about your context. Why is it so hard? I haven't picked on Gabs for a while, so I want to pick on you first. Why is it so hard? I don't know why I just did that.

That was a no-look pass. Why is it so hard? Because there's a fear of being vulnerable. There's a fear of being vulnerable.

[26:34] Can someone define the word vulnerable to me? Being accepted. Is that right? I think there's this fear. We want to be accepted.

We all do. We want to feel this sense of belonging. But the problem is, we all worry that if people knew who we really were, then they wouldn't accept us. And that's why our favorite book is that one page where it says, no, no.

Yeah. Where it's that scene where he says, no, actually, now you know me. Do you still love me? And then, is it the horse? Who says, oh, now I know you more.

I love you even more. And so we're so afraid of vulnerability. If I'm being very honest, that word kind of makes me cringe a little bit. Because when you say, oh, I'm just about to be really vulnerable now.

I just, I don't know. I just never trust someone who says that that's what they're going to do. But the truth is, why don't we wear our hearts on our sleeves? Why don't we say what we really think? Why don't we actually share?

[27:32] When someone's saying, how are you doing? Why don't you just stop it there and make it awkward and say, it's not been great. Why don't we do that? Because it's hard. Because we're worried when we say that, then people won't accept us.

That's got to be one of the biggest things. Just the fear of vulnerability. And the problem, the result of that is actually then, the outcome is that we end up with these kind of really superficial, I wouldn't even call them friendships.

I'd just call them acquaintances. The amount of times, we've been in Hong Kong for nearly seven years, which is a fairly long time. That said, I meet friends who actually have known each other for 20, 30 years, and I find out how they barely know each other.

Right? Because they meet each other once a month. They do the thing. They do the Bible study. And yet, they don't ask challenging questions to one another. They don't actually push each other and go, well, can you be vulnerable?

And there's only really one way to have a culture, to have a conversation, or a community that's vulnerable. It starts with you. You have to be the first person that does it. Now, there is an appropriate level of vulnerability.

[28:37] What we don't want is that you go and you tell everyone everything about your whole life story, about everything that you're going through. But I don't think we're in danger of that. So, we'll get there. We can talk about that when we get there.

But let's just start with sharing with people who we really are. What we are really going through. What we are really struggling with. Vulnerability is definitely one of the ones.

I'm going to go over this side. What's another problem? And why do we struggle so much with spiritual friendship, deep, meaningful ones? What do we have? Time.

It's so true. I found the people that I'm, okay, this friend that I have in the UK, there's not much to do in the UK, by the way. So, if you're about to head to university there, good luck.

Study hard, study well. But really, there's not much to do. So, when you have friends, you'll see them a lot. Because there's no one else. You just, yeah, you hang out with them.

[29:36] And actually, in most parts of the world, that is true. So, my closest friends, what, we'll see maybe once a week. Even in different cities, we'll see each other at least once a month. But in Hong Kong, your closest friends, the people that I think, oh, I'm really close to.

Unless you really try, if you just let it go and just kind of naturally go, you'll probably see each other, what, two, three times a year. And that's already good, right? Well, then, no wonder we don't have these spiritual friendships.

And we realize we have to actually intentionally work to have them. Because I think so many of us are asking, God, would you just bring people around me? But the question is, oh, can you bring people around me?

Oh, you know what? I would love to have a life group. I would love to have a group of people that really know me, that we get to really hang out with, and that they understand me and we just do life together. But is it possible if that life group shows up at my house on Tuesdays between 8 to 9.30? Because I've actually got things before and after. And I can't really leave my house to go to it. So, yeah, if they could come to me, that would be great. And it's even better if they're actually in the exact same life stage as me and in the same field of work as me and actually have the same interests.

[30:45] Maybe they like pickleball too. And then, and only then, if we have the same interests, hobbies, work life, schedules, and hopefully live in the same block, then I'm all in.

I am down. Until I have work to do. Until I need to finish the Netflix show that I really just need to finish first.

Can you see? We want it, but I don't know if we, and we see the value in it, but I just don't think we're willing to pay the cost for it. And that's the challenge here.

How are you going to find spiritual friendship? It must mean that we have to go out of our way in some ways. And to kind of shed that kind of fear of vulnerability. Because we have this idea that people in the church are all perfect, all put together.

Keller has this quote, The church is not a museum of saints. It is a hospital for sinners. But so often we look, you may have just walked in here as an introvert, because you're Asian, so maybe 80% chance you're an introvert.

[31:48] You walk in here struggling with your, whatever you're struggling with, which is a real thing. You walk in here and your first assumption is everyone else around you knows each other super well and everyone is perfect. apart from you.

Don't we have that? And you walk, can I just tell you that everyone is feeling the same way? Even me. Let's just get that out of our minds.

That actually when people walk in here, actually there's always this mindset that you are the minority. But if we can just understand that actually we all do need each other and it requires that person to make that awkward conversation just go a little bit deeper.

So when you say, how are you doing? And you say, oh, I'm fine. Tell me what's fine. What's been good? Honestly, it's not that hard, but it requires good conversational. It requires good conversational curiosity.

It requires us to kind of ask that next question. And if you're wondering what that next question is, usually it can just be three words. Tell me more. Tell me more. One of the most famous quotes from C.S. Lewis is about friendship.

[32:52] It's when you see the other person, then you go, what? You too. Here's the quote. Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, what? You too? I thought I was the only one.

But in order to get to that point in the conversation, you must be at least willing to ask questions, spend time, be vulnerable. I wonder whether we can do that.

I wonder whether we can be a community that is willing to do that and saying, you're worth it. I so remember maybe two years into my time in Hong Kong, I had a friend who lives in Ma Wan. And of course, if you have to catch a ferry there, then you've really got to wonder, is that really a friend? And I remember him coming out to Central and meeting me. I said, oh, well, what brings you out here from this faraway land? I said, I'm here for you.

I was like, whoa, you did that? To be honest, I'm not sure if I would do it for you. But all right, if you're there, then I'm there. But I was touched because I was like, oh, I think that's what it is.

[33:51] Are people willing to go out of our ways to actually spend time, to talk about friendship, to be together? And you see Paul here, as he takes his step out, he ends up finding people. Actually, I want to stop talking here because I actually want to bring two friends up to have a little conversation with.

Because as we took that step to Hong Kong, one of the things was, Lord, would you bring people around us that we could learn from? That there would be an iron sharpening of iron. That we would be encouraged by other people because at the end of the day, we all need people.

We all need people to inspire and encourage. And there's two people that we, so we came to Hong Kong nearly seven years ago, seven years next month. And we came and it so happened there were two people.

One was already in the church who had just landed just maybe a few months or a year or so before that, Gabe. And then, of course, once I'd got to Hong Kong, started working for Young Life, and then I made one of my first hires, which is JoJo, for Young Life.

And then it's cute because they didn't know each other. And actually, they met here in church doing very different things. But two people who, quite honestly, could not be more different, but also love the Lord in the same fierce kind of way.

[35:01] And you guys have heard Gabe talk in his, I mean, he's Pastor Gabe to you guys now, the one who has memorized Ephesians and just recites 1 Peter just in his sleep. But actually, what I want to do is peel back the curtain a little bit and then show you who he actually really is.

And you'll find he's actually interesting, slightly weird, but also a man who truly loves the Lord. And, of course, they ended up being together. So I wanted just to bring them up to have a quick conversation. Can we give them a round of applause?

Thank you. We're going to grab the two mics. So I'm going to sit down here next to Mo, because it's not really about me, but I'm just going to fire questions.

And then you guys are going to answer them. Is that OK? Gabe and JoJo. Nice to see you both.

JoJo, what did you, what attracted you to Gabe?

This is a very loaded question. I think one of the very first things that attracted me about him was that he wanted to be a missionary as well.

[36:05] And he's kind of just willing to go anywhere in the world to do missions work. But when I had met him, he was also in seminary and he had a huge heart for translation.

Now, he had a huge heart for translation. He was in seminary, but that wasn't his full-time job.

Gabe, what were you actually doing when you first came to Hong Kong? Yeah, so I came to Hong Kong.

It was because I interned in Hong Kong before at a company called Jane Street, and they hired me full-time. So I was working as a stock trader doing algorithmic trading. So making computers, buy and sell stocks automatically to make money.

I have no idea what that is. Is that interesting? It's very nerdy. It's very nerdy. Yeah, you found the British Department of Defense guy, right? Yeah, that's it. Just attracted to nerds. They all need saving. But one of the great things about Gabe, if you don't mind, JoJo, just to kind of shower him with some praise, is actually whilst he's working, which is a demanding job, actually I tried to get lunches with Gabe just to hang out with him.

You could never. He was just always working. But outside of work, what else was he doing? What else did you observe? So he was working a full-time job, and then during those lunches, he actually didn't have lunch with people because he had to grab the lunch from the canteen and then bring it to his seat to continue the work.

[37:26] So it's already really taxing, full-time job. And then afterwards, he would do his seminary work on the weekends, after work as well. Small group leader. And then he was serving in almost everything.

So AV, he were also doing, he were on worship team, plays a lot of instruments, and serving with Young Life as well. So one of the things that actually was a no-brainer when Gabe was like, I think I finished seminary, I think I want to give up my job to go into being a pastor.

I was like, bro, I think you've already been pastoring anyway. I think you've already been working.

Do you know when people are already in full-time ministry, then it was an easy call to just say, yes, you've already been doing this.

And Gabe, for you, as you look around this room, there's lots of people who are highly qualified, high-functioning, working in highly stressful jobs. And he was like, well, I kind of want to serve, but what's your response to them?

As someone who has actually gone through it and done it, what would you say? For me, the reason why I did those things was I just thought, what's most important to me? I have one life to live.

[38:30] I have this time. What is the most important thing? And for me, it was to know God, to enjoy him, and to share that with others. There's no, I just feel in my heart, there's no more important mission than that, to glorify God, enjoy him, and to draw people to that.

And so I was thinking, in all the time I had, what, it's like, if something had to give, what would it be?

It's not my commitments to church. I just want to give everything to the Lord, as much as I can.

Maybe just staying with you, what do you think JoJo finds most attractive about you? The only reason I have the facial hair was because it was her suggestion.

That's true. JoJo, can you tell us something about Gabe that we will regret knowing? He's really weird.

Like, you don't think he's weird up here, because he's very passionate about the word. But behind closed doors, he's super weird. He'll make a song about anything. Like, Oh, it's time to sleep.

[39:39] And he'll start chanting it. Do anything. Like, he'll just make a song all the time, and then he's trying to get me to wake up. And then he's like, Chi-lai. You guys don't understand how difficult it is.

Start singing the Chinese anthem. Try anything in the book to... Can you sing it for us?

No. No, actually, no. I take that question. I don't know if you want. No, please. I can, but how much time do we have? Okay. JoJo, of course, we had the privilege of getting to know you. They both came from Canada, and around the same time as we did, to be honest.

And you came to work for Young Life. And as I was preaching about Athens last week in Acts 17, as I was talking about Paul just walking into a place and seeing that this is not a godly place. This is a field of different kinds of idols. And you actually spend most of your waking hours when you finally wake up is going into schools. Going into schools to share the gospel.

[40:46] And often in very hard places. So I think, do you empathize with kind of what Paul was going through as he'd walk into a new place on his own? Tell us a little about what goes through your mind when you walk and approach a school.

It was very difficult because I was really just assimilating to the culture from Canada. It was quite different. The culture is quite different.

We hold doors for each other. But at certain schools, it just felt really not friendly. It was very cold. People felt really cold. People felt really alone. Kind of, you know, every man for themselves. Not sharing notes or whatnot for their studying.

And it just really felt like everyone wanted to be known. But then they also had this really hard shell. And everyone seemed like they were competing against each other.

[41:42] Whereas they just wanted community on the inside. So it was hard to learn what was behind those spiky exterior shells.

And, yeah, to really have to put myself out there and get rejected a ton of times. Which is, yeah, a very large learning experience. Which is the same as Paul.

Every place he goes, some people like him. Some people hate him. Some people think he's a god. And some people want to kill him. So what keeps you going back each time? I think of Galatians 1.10 where it says, If you want the approval of man, then you can't be a servant of God.

And just thinking, like, who it is that I'm really trying to gain the approval of. Am I going, was I called on this mission by these people?

Or was I called by God? And trusting that it's him who transforms them. And it's not me who transforms them. Really honing into the Holy Spirit. And that was completely different.

[42:41] When you look at Priscilla and Aquila, you'll see that actually those two names are always together. They're never separate. They actually open up their home for church. And everything is done together.

And actually, you and Gabe, in some ways, you serve at GU together. You serve at church together. You serve at CIS together. Let me see which way around I want to do this.

Gabe, what's the best thing about being able to serve together with your spouse? It's just fun. It's fun that I could do it with my wife, the person I love most in this world.

And, yeah, talking about loneliness, right? You mentioned that. Like, I have a partner who's all in on this with me. Yeah. So you love, she's the person you love the most?

More than? I said, in this world, James. Oh, it is. Okay, okay. More than who? Should I be concerned? Oh, Taylor Swift?

[43:42] Oh. Pastor Gabe does have a Taylor Swift problem. Okay, so if anyone wants to stay behind and have a prayer intercession time for him, we can do that. Okay. And, Jojo, what's the hardest thing about working together as a couple?

Um, I think before marriage, I saw how different we were. Our personalities are quite different. And then we would bump heads often. And then this fear of, wow, we're going to just bump heads in ministry and it's just never going to work.

How are we going to even get married? But then really welcoming the spirit to do its work. And I saw that instead of us being different and that, the devil using that as a foothold to divide us, it was actually God giving us different strengths so that we can hone in on each other's strengths and learn from each other.

So I have become much more disciplined in some sort of ways of waking up early, obviously. Um, and then, um, yeah, he's just really great at memory, like memorizing scripture and also thinking more logically, theologically.

Um, and I would be able to share with him some ways where I'm able to relate to others more relationally or empathetically. And he's able to learn that too. So different things of just redeeming the differences that drive us apart, uh, was really difficult.

[45:03] But then I think God really did a deep work in that. Thank you. Thank you for the work that both of you do for the Lord. And just to model that love for all of us is just something is a true privilege to see.

Thank you. Can we give them a round of applause? Can I keep you this one? Um, if you have any interest in serving, uh, with Jojo and Young Life, of course, Aaron, uh, heads up Young Life here. Uh, then actually it's not just secondary schools. It's also teen moms. It's also university students. If there's anyone who wants to go and go out and experience what it feels to be lonely and terrified and rejected, um, then please ask them and they will gladly, gladly, gladly take you with them. Um, spiritual friendship is so key. Um, finding these people who are, who you, who, who both share in the love of the Lord together, but actually maybe do it in different ways. Uh, and that's just the beauty of friendship.

Um, there's a, there's an author, Jenny Allen, who says this in her book, find your people. If you want to find your Aquila and Priscilla, start by being one. The gospel multiplies through ordinary people who refuse to live ordinary lives.

[46:09] Uh, would we be people who are willing to go out of our way? And in doing so, we may find ourselves friends who are encouraging to us. We may find ourselves future spouses.

Who knows? No guarantees, but what a great way is when you start running towards the Lord and you find other people running next to you. That's definitely the, uh, the biggest highlight of my ministerial career or even before that, whilst I was teaching, is just seeing that there are other people out there who really love the Lord, who live for the Lord.

It's truly inspiring. So spiritual friendship is one, uh, spiritual mentorship is another, and we're running out of time. So we're going to jump now, uh, to Acts chapter 18, verse 24. As he was doing this, now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus.

He was an eloquent man, competent in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately things concerning Jesus. So, they're joined by a guy.

Wouldn't it be great that we would be described in such a way that we were eloquent, competent, and fervent? Eloquent, competent, and fervent. This person had a passion.

[47:17] They really wanted to serve the Lord. They really wanted to share the good news of Jesus. So he comes and he joins forces with them. But, but there is a problem.

Um, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

I think it's just hidden there, but it's just, can you just imagine that scene with me? So you've got Apollos who comes, who's, who's eloquent, who's fervent, who is just competent. It's a smart person who is able to share that actually Jesus is the Messiah.

This is a good person. And you're like, oh, this person's really good. But then imagine Priscilla and Aquila sitting there listening to him and then suddenly going, oh, actually, I don't know if he truly gets it. He's actually talking about Jesus as the Messiah, but actually he doesn't seem to be able to articulate why, what Jesus is saving us from.

And he doesn't seem to, and he's only in the, he only knew the baptism of John, which means it looks like he doesn't even know the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. And so this, the scene, you can see husband and wife probably just shoot a look at each other as he's speaking.

[48:31] And then they go, oh, we need to talk to him, but they don't stand up and bring him down right there. They pull him aside. Isn't that fun? Just to see the gentleness and the humility of what even rebuke looks like. And so after the sermon, they pulled him aside and they go, hey, actually, we need to tell you a little bit more.

You're, you're, you're so close. You're nearly there. But many years later, Spurgeon is going to say, actually, there's a huge danger about being almost right. Sometimes right and wrong are easy to discern, but when you're almost right, that's dangerous.

Let me tell you an example. Maybe a modern day example of this could be basically someone who is a nominal cultural Christian. Someone who, I picked on St. Paul's Co-Ed last week, so maybe I'll pick on DBS this week.

Maybe they, they, they grew up in DBS or DGS and they're just smart. They've been to every assembly, heard every Bible story, and they're pretty good. And they, and they were also debate champion.

So they are very good at talking about Jesus. They're very good at debating with people about apologetics, about science and faith, about why they're suffering in the world. But they don't actually fully get it.

[49 : 37] What does that mean? If you can point to Jesus being the one who saves, that Jesus is the answer, but you actually don't know what he's actually answering, then that still remains to be the problem.

The problem is, and we talked about this in Acts 15 when we were talking about, do you remember when we were talking about circumcision? When your faith is based on Jesus and something else, when you have to be a good Christian, in order to get to heaven, you must do this, this, this, and this.

You must be this kind of person when you slightly miss the point. And honestly, this is probably the biggest problem in our churches is where we think, okay, Jesus is the savior, but we must also save ourselves.

Jesus has done all the good work, but we will also guilt trip everyone else for not doing the work that we're doing. But when you are truly people who understand what grace is that we, what we have, we did not deserve.

And there's nothing we can really do to get to this holy God, if only this holy God would come to us, is the message of Christianity. The message of Christianity is Jesus, the holy God, did step foot into our neighborhood and did reach us in a way that we could never reach him.

[50 : 43] If you're honest with yourself, so often when we approach faith is, Jesus, I'm going to try and get to you. I'm going to try and pursue you with every ounce of might that I possibly can have. I'm going to try and take captive every thought.

I'm going to try and be as disciplined as I can. And to some way, in some ways, those are really good things. But when you start thinking that when you get to him, that is when you have arrived. That's not the gospel.

The gospel isn't us pursuing God. The gospel is God pursuing us and reaching us. So we climb, as the song goes, as we climb the mountains with our hands wide open because we can't get there by ourselves.

So I don't exactly know what Apollos was saying here, but clearly he had missed the point slightly. He had neglected the fact that actually Jesus came and he is the Messiah. He is right. But he came to save.

He came to die for our sins. But not only that, he came to give life and life to the full. And how does he give it to the full? By giving us the Holy Spirit. So it's this Holy Spirit who is living inside us.

[51 : 45] How else does this look in our context? So this guy, this girl, went to DBS, debate champion, loves God, kind of. Well, he thinks they do. And they will argue with people about, hey, come to church.

Come to church and then you will be a good Christian. Come to church and you will have salvation. Come to church and then you can still do all the other things and be successful because God is for your good. So you will get the promotion that you need.

You will get the family that you need. Just keep following God. It almost sounds right. It almost sounds right until you look at every chapter in the New Testament and you see the suffering and you see the sacrifice and you see the loss that comes from people who follow Christ.

You look at Hebrews 11, the people who are in the hall of fame of faith. And you see some are cut, sawn in two. Don't get what they were promised. But it's okay because they see something far better.

Finally, they see Jesus himself. They see the better country. You can see how easily we can slip into a message that is a watered down version of Christianity.

[52 : 46] And I think Priscilla and Aquila looked at that and were like, oh, I think you're just missing the point. Let us tell you about Jesus, that he's going to be the one that works.

When you invite Jesus into your life, he will also move the furniture around. So often we invite Jesus into our life and hope that that is our secret weapon.

He is our most powerful Pokemon that we can then use to tackle every challenge that we have. Until you realize that actually Jesus is wanting to come and move things around in your own life. The Holy Spirit is working, molding, preparing you for eternity. I think maybe that's what Apollos was missing. And you see the mentorship that this lovely couple gives to Apollos.

Pulls him aside, talks to him about it. And he ends up continually preaching powerfully as the chapter finishes. Showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. And now he knows how.

[53:43] Now he knows why that Jesus came to die. But then he rose again. And now his spirit lives inside us. How beautiful that would have been for him to finally discover that.

We all need mentors. You see, it's funny. Later in the church in Corinth, you hear about this. Apollos continues to grow as a preacher to the point where there are people who are like, well, I follow Paul and I follow Apollos.

And so he got to a point where his ministry was succeeding. But maybe not without this gentle, loving rebuke that comes from this couple who pull him aside. We all need spiritual mentorship. I look at my own life as I come to be where I am today. And without a slither of a doubt, it's because of the things that I've learned from other people. Learning from my dad what it meant to be a man of integrity.

Learning from a guy called Y when my dad passed, who was actually only just a few years older than me, just knowing how to ask questions, knowing how to be curious, knowing how to care for people. My pastor Bert, who was just so good at just relating to the nerds and relating to the jocks and becoming all things to all people in order to save some.

[54:55] He just made people feel comfortable when they were talking to him. And then I come to Hong Kong and I meet John Stowgrove and I just see how he encourages people and pours out into other people and raises them up.

And then I look at how Sam plays the piano. And I'm like, I want to try and learn from that. I look at my brother and I see how he is so diligent in retreating and spending solitude with God.

And I'm like, I want to learn that. I look at Gabe and I see how he just loves the word and just wants to be just filled with the word. I learn from that. We all have to learn from people.

We have something to give and we have something to receive. Wouldn't it be beautiful that we committed to that as a gathering? To look at the best in each other and go, I want to learn some of that.

Now it requires humility on both sides. Because actually Priscilla and Aquila could have just pulled him. It was probably at their house night in some times. But no, they take him aside and they guide him and lift him up. It requires a gifted speaker like Apollos to go, Okay, oh, thank you for teaching me.

[55:59] That helps me. Would we be those kinds of people? And I'll finish with this. Tucked in the middle of chapter 18 was verse 9.

And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent. For I am with you and no one will attack you to harm you. For I have many in this city who are my people.

This shows maybe how lonely and how fearful Paul was. The fact that God told him this. Don't be afraid. Do not be silent. Do not be silent, but keep speaking.

I have many people in this city that are going to help you. So as you go out, as you go out into this lonely field, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. But do not be afraid.

Not because you're going to be amazing and you're going to grow a ministry or you're going to bring people to Christ. Do not be afraid because he is with you. And it's the promise all the way that Jesus said, that I will be with you to the end of the age.

[56:58] You will be my witnesses to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth. And my Holy Spirit will be upon you. And he will be with you. Do not be silent is where I want to finish today.

Some of us are being silent in our current contexts. Some of us are like, oh, I don't know. It's better to just be polite. Better to just be subtle. Let me just quickly close my eyes to pray during lunch.

But let me just quickly pray for two seconds. Because otherwise it will make my friends feel awkward. Some of us, the next step is to simply just close our eyes just for a little bit longer.

Some of us, it is actually to share something. It is, do you realize what we're doing when we are silent? It's a different context, but I'll finish with this quote.

There's Martin Luther King. He's in prison and he's writing a letter to a group of actually well-intentioned clergy. And of course he's speaking about social justice.

[57:59] He's speaking about the segregation. But there's a group of pastors outside who are like, hey, patience. Let's bide our time. Let's wait. And Martin Luther King says this, the silence of the good people is more dangerous than the brutality of the bad people.

The silence of the good people is more dangerous than the brutality of the bad people. Now, before I take this out of context, know he's talking about social justice. Know he's talking about things that are happening in America at that time that were just so poisonous, so toxic, so dangerous.

But if we were to take that, the principle of that, of don't be silent. And if you think about the ultimate crisis, the ultimate injustice that we as Christians believe, which is what?

That we have been separated from our Lord. The biggest injustice is that we no longer are connected to him. And that Jesus came to correct that injustice.

If you look at it from that lens, and you see a broken world that surrounds you, as Alex was praying when finishing worship, oh, Julian, sorry. As you see the darkness that surrounds, and you sit there and you are silent.

[59:13] As you see your colleagues and you see your friends and family who are hurting and struggling in so many ways, clinging on to all these idols, can you see the injustice of us being silent?

Now, may the Spirit show us how to speak in a gracious, truthful, loving way. But speak, we must. Share, we must. How unjust would it be for us just to sit there and go, yeah, your life sucks.

But I have the good news, but I can't share it with you. It's only for those who are chosen. It's only for those who go to church. That's not the gospel.

Let us be people who are adamant that we will not be silent. And before you start a revolution and go out and scream and shout, may you, may I, follow the way of Jesus, where he is gentle and lowly in heart, where he invites people in with grace and mercy.

And he defeats death. He defeats the biggest enemy by simply opening himself up on the cross. Let us take comfort. Let us take inspiration. Let us follow him as we go.

[60:30] We've ran out of time here, and this is where we stop in the book of Acts for now. But if I may just ask you for another few moments of your time, before we head into this Christmas season properly, is there something the Holy Spirit wants you to say to the people around you?

There is no better season than the reason for the season. So bring that up. There is no better reason than to offer yourself up to look after the face painting stall on December 21st and invite your friends and colleagues to come and so they would allow you to paint on their faces.

I hope this fills you with courage. I hope this exhorts you, pours courage into your soul that there is a God, Jesus who came to this world, who died and now lives, and his spirit lives inside you.

And because of that, you must not be afraid because he is with you. Because of that, you must not be silent. You must share the good news in this season. Let us pray. Holy Spirit, we give you the final few words if there's anything you need to say to us.

Would you speak? Your servants are listening. Would you send? We are ready. We are ready. We are ready. We are ready. We are ready.

[62:03] We are ready. So we give you thanks, Jesus, that you have done the work already, that there is nothing to fear.

We do not seek the approval of man. We live for an audience of one. And we take up our cross. We accept our mission that our work is not secular.

That our presence in our communities is not an accident. But that there is something that you are doing. Before we even go, we repent of this thought that it is us that will do it.

It is not. It is you. But we thank you that we get to come along for the ride. Would you banish any fear of vulnerability, any idol of the world that takes our time and attention?

If we're being honest with ourselves, there is nothing more important than you. So as we go from here, would you empower every single person?

[63:28] And as we as a church leave the 14th floor to go to the next, we give you thanks that you would bring people around in this city who have resources, who have connections, who have abilities, but most of all, who have a passion and love for your name.

We do not take that for granted. We are not afraid because you've placed people in this city who love you, who are serving together with us through all the different ways. We give you thanks for those people.

They fill us with courage. And so it is with courage that we go down to the fifth floor to take our next step in our pursuit of you, knowing full well that you are the one who are pursuing us.

Surely, surely your goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives. And if this gathering is pleasing to you, would you continue to lead us?

We thank you, Lord. We thank you. In your name we pray. Amen.