

The People of God

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. We're going to continue this new year just talking about what church is. Recognising we, a lot of us have been to church for a long time, have a lot of different experiences with church, but really, do we really stop and think and force ourselves to go, well, why is it that we gather? What is it really all about?

And you look to the person next to you and go, well, actually, I, that thought there, that actually, in order for you to be a Christian, you need the person who sat next to you. You can't do it on your own. We have this idea that we can, that you can become a good Christian on your own if you have the disciplines and you do good deeds.

And the Bible doesn't say that. John Wesley was the one who was famous in saying that the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion. The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion. And last week, we were trying to start that conversation.

What does it mean? Why are you here? Why are we here together? Sat in this space on a Sunday morning. What's it all about? And I said last week, another quote was actually, sanctification is a community project.

Sanctification is this process that every believer goes on, which is you become more like Christ as you get closer and closer to meeting him. And you can't do it on your own. It is a community project. If you are to be a good Christian, you must follow the greatest commandment and the Great Commission.

[1:25] Right. That's pretty standard. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And to love your neighbor as yourself. That's the great commandment. And then to follow the Great Commission, which is to go and make disciples of all nations.

In order to do both of those things, you need people. You cannot do it without people. So that's what we've been talking about. And what does it actually mean for us to be with people? And actually, this is not a foreign concept. This isn't one that, let's say, is exclusive to Christians. Outside, we all know that we need people. Studies are done on what are some of people's greatest fears. And of course, fear of death is one of them. But if you go into that further, what about how they die?

And the greatest fear, studies will show that actually the greatest fear is when we die, that we are dying alone. That is the greatest fear that we as humans have. Or if you've watched the Netflix show, I think it's called Live to 100, talking about the centenarians around the world.

Which places in the world has people that live to 100 years old? And you look at all the different characteristics that they have to get to 100 years old. Of course, it's diet. Of course, it's exercise. But what's the key trait?

[2:31] Community. People. We need to have people around us. We were made in that way. We were made from community. In Genesis 1, when the Trinity, the Godhead, says to itself, saying, Let us make man in our image.

We were made from community, and we were made for community. Which, again, really is very contradictory and in conflict with the way of the world, which is, it is all about you.

Can you become an autonomous, independent, individualistic person where you pursue your own goals, where you are defined by yourself, where everything is about yourself?

If you focus on yourself, you will find true satisfaction. We are the most narcissistic generation there has been in mankind. And yet we find that the more we focus on ourselves, the less happy, the less content, the less satisfied we are with ourselves.

One of my favourite TED Talks was one I watched 10 years ago. I think it was around 10 to 12 years ago. And it's on the cure to addiction. It actually has 12 million views.

[3:35] And of course, maybe aside of the ethical values, what they did was they did research on lab rats who were addicted to heroin. And they tried to see what were the different ways to help get these rats out, to cure them of addiction.

And they tried different things. They tried distractions. They tried putting them into cages that they could have lots of different things to do and just to keep themselves entertained. Or just to go cold turkey. Pull the drug away from them.

What would they do then? And it's interesting. What it came to it was the solution to addiction wasn't to go cold turkey. It wasn't abstinence. But it was connection. Once they found that they could put these animals together with others, once they had found connection and community, they had a much higher chance of surviving.

Isn't that interesting? It is about how we be together. But last week I said, as Christians, it's not just about doing life together. It's not just about running clubs where we can have people who, some people like board games, so they'll sit on a Friday evening and play board games together. That isn't what Christians, that's not only what we do. We've got a group of us who are going to play football later. It's not just doing football. Actually, the world does societies and clubs pretty well as well.

[4:45] There's got to be more in terms of how we actually do it. Over Christmas we were talking about this concept of loneliness. The consequences of loneliness. Or the factors contributing to it. The effects of loneliness, especially through COVID, are as dire as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, linked to diabetes, cancer, heart disease.

When we talk about being Christians, what we're talking about is how can we be Christians together? How can we be part of the body together? The quote from N.T. Wright says this, The work of Jesus is not simply to save isolated individuals and so perpetuate their isolation, but to create a new people, a kingdom community that lives under his rule.

The Christian faith solves loneliness. Jesus solves loneliness by drawing us closer to each other and closer to him. And when we get closer together, two things happen. One, we feel a sense of belonging and intimacy.

And then the second is we feel a sense of annoyance and frustration. Because the closer we get to people, the married couples, Flo and Julian, just looking at each other straight away. Just going, oh, I need you, but I don't like you.

I love you, but living with you is hard. Right? So married couples are all just nodding in agreement to that. And then you think, okay, well, I chose to live with you.

[6:09] I was actually attracted to you. But the rest of you here, all these people here staring at each other, that's hard. So what's the secret to that?

How can, this is the thing. If you look at the person next to you, whether you know them or not, has it ever occurred to you that you can only be more like Christ if you're sat next to them? If you're with them.

That it is impossible for you to look more and more like Christ on your own. As you look across at each other now, you go, wow, in order for me to look like Christ, I must be with you here.

I must sit with you here. That's an interesting thought. And actually, so this year I'm trying to do something different. It's trying to involve some more voices so you don't get sick of mine.

But to really hear from the body, to hear kind of how we're responding to this. And actually, I was supposed to do it last week, but I kind of overran. And so he didn't get a chance to do it. So actually, today we're going to have Sam come up.

[7:03] And as he was listening to the message yesterday, and we're kind of going, this is, if you look at last week and this week, it's kind of like part one and part two. It's kind of the same theme. So I'm actually going to invite Sam up now just to share a few reflections of him.

And as you look at him, two things. First is, what is he saying and how is he responding to the message? One. And two is, oh, maybe I could do something like that too. So it's something that actually I would love for us to be able to hear from each other.

So give him a round of applause just to encourage him. Sam, you had some thoughts from the message last week and that kind of ties into this week. Would you mind just ministering to us and sharing with us what the Lord spoke to you about?

Sure. One thing I noticed about James is he really uses a lot of quotes and a lot from C.S. Lewis, right? So I sat there in the back thinking last week and something from C.S. Lewis's The Four Loves

came to me.

And that's when C.S. Lewis was writing about his friends. If you know the life of C.S. Lewis, he had some really amazing friends like J.R.R. Tolkien, the writer of The Lord of the Rings, who brings him to Christ.

[8:05] But in The Four Loves, he writes about two other friends of his, Ronald and Charles. And they're a tight-knit group of friends. And when Charles passed away, he thinks to himself and he writes, I think my relationship with Ronald is just going to be so much more deeper.

And he completely finds the opposite to be true. When his friend passes, there's a part of Ronald, a part of himself he realizes that dies along with this friend.

That hits home. My wife makes fun of me. Like, when you're with your friends, there's a completely different side of you that comes out. And that is a side of me.

That's a side that is brought out. And similarly, that must be true for all of us, that the community around us brings out who we are. And sometimes, who we need to really address.

The parts of ourselves that, you know what, that's not Christ-like. That's why I need you. Please speak the truth and love to me. So where does this lead us? For me, it brings me to Isaiah.

[9:12] Isaiah chapter 6. And this is where Isaiah is having a vision. And he sees the throne of God. Isaiah 6, 3. And it's describing the seraphim, the angels.

And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. Just now we're singing, holy, holy, right?

There is no one like you. Scripture here says that the angels are calling out to each other. And one called to another. They're at the throne.

They're worshipping God. But yet they're talking with one another. They're conversing with another. There's something about knowing the Lord that requires us not to just look at him one dimensionally in our own understanding, with our own lens, our own experiences.

But it's through someone else. And that's a challenge. Why do we come to church? Why do we get ourselves into what sometimes feel like a really uncomfortable situation?

[10:16] It's because I cannot know God unless I see him through the way you experience him. One more scripture comes to mind. Jesus is praying.

In Luke 10, he says, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. We send the kids upstairs. I send my kids upstairs.

And then there's also something beautiful about the way they are learning. They're worshipping.

That the way they're understanding God is something I should be taking in. It's not just to be puffed up with knowledge. But I guess our hope is that as we come in week in, week out, it might sound like this was the worst week.

I'm in the wilderness. I'm in the desert. And someone speaks and says, God's with you in the desert. It's not in vain. Those mercies, they're new every day. And you're like, I don't feel it.

[11:19] And someone says, nope, that's true. I'm with you. God's there. Jesus was tested. And we need to hear that truth. And on those best weeks, we come back in and we come in with joy.

And we share that joy with others, too. For me, that's the picture here. That we need to see the Lord as the angels do. Worshipping at the throne and also encouraging one another.

Thank you. And it is such a great quote when C.S. Lewis says that, right? When you meet someone. And that's why I love meeting people and then meeting their families and meeting their relatives.

Because you see something in them that's just different. You see a different side to them. And so, I mean, you'll see this with me. I had the privilege of having breakfast with Jay this morning. And every time I talk to him, there's this hunger and yearning to how do I become more like a follower of Christ?

How do I choose faith over fear? And what does that look like? And as I find myself counseling him, I'm reminded of the journeys that I've been on. And actually, even right now, the challenges that I face. And so he brings that out in me.

[12:22] If you hung out with me and Gabs, you would see the British Nigerian side come out in me. That's always been there. When you see me hang out with my friend Joe Lou over there, just the heart of discipleship comes out.

And you'll see that side of me more. If you see me hang out with Wes, you'll just see my stupidity kind of just rise up to the surface. And same when I hang out with Matthew. Just the bad jokes that just keep coming when I see Matthew. And so every time you hang out with me with someone different, you'll see a different side of me.

Isn't that just part of what we're supposed to do? And that's the danger. When you live in isolation spiritually, then you're just kind of listening to your own voice. And it becomes your own chamber. And actually, there is no growing.

And of course, the problem here is when you hang out with other people, you do hear other voices. And sometimes those voices you don't like hearing. Sometimes they're right. And sometimes they're wrong. But I would say that if sanctification truly is a community project, and I think it's God's chosen favored project on how he molds us.

Maybe his top, top one is suffering. He allows suffering to happen to us, to wake us up, to help us see clearly, to become sober-minded. But the second one has to be community. Just when he puts people around you, that's how you are molded.

[13:29] You become, I mean, there's a quote that I've often liked, which is, you are an average of the five people you spend the most time with. For some of you, that is a very terrifying concept. As you think about the five, let's just remove family from this.

Of course, family has a huge, huge effect on who we are. But let's just talk about your five friends that you hang out with now. Those five people, you are an average of them. That's terrifying.

Sometimes. For some of you. Have a think about that. So it just shows you how much we are in need and affected by community. I want to put some other leaders on the spot now. So if you're a leader in the gathering who leads a life group, I like to just have you prepare.

When I think about spiritual community, when I ask you what spiritual community is to you, what comes to mind? You guys who are committed to investing and being with people on a week-to-week basis, what comes to mind for you when you're thinking about why you do it? What are some of the benefits of it? Or what are some of the real pain points of it? Wes, why don't we start with you? When you think about spiritual community, what comes to mind for you?

[14:30] What are some of the things that you do? Challenging each other. When you know each other well enough and you go, hey, I know you and you're better than this.

You need to do this. You need to stop doing this. That's got to be something that is part of it. That's how we're going to grow together, right? That's how we're going to grow. Kelly, what about you? Growing together.

When you're challenging each other, then you're growing. And then hopefully after one year, actually you're a different person. And that's with people who you love. And that's also with people that you find hard. It's both.

And so we need those people around us to actually help us to actually grow in that way. Gaps, what about you? A place of safety and vulnerability. A place of safety and vulnerability.

Which is so hard to find. Because we're so afraid that when we share something about us, people will look at us different and go, wait, really? Oh, that's just, you're on your own. Right. But actually we find nearly always that's not the case.

[15:38] That actually when we are willing to step out and go, hey, I'm struggling with this. You're like, oh, I'm actually not alone. Again, that's the other C.S. Lewis quote. Quote, friendship is when you look at someone else and you go, what, you two? You're the same as me?

That's when friendship is born. And when we look at scripture, we talk about, okay, I keep talking about this. It's the name of the church. Let's choose to gather. Let's choose to be an ecclesia, an assembly, which is what that word means, where we just choose to gather, where we choose to use our time together, to spend time worshipping God together.

When you think about scripture, are there any passages that come out that kind of like, well, that's what it talks about. Maybe the top one that I hear a lot is Hebrews 10, where it says, don't stop meeting with one another.

Consider how to stir each other up in love and good works, encouraging each other as the day draws near. That's kind of the ones that come to mind, right? That's why we keep meeting together, keep gathering. But then as I was praying this week, what do we share from that passage?

I realized actually there's a whole ton of context there that maybe we would be good to really look into, to find out actually not only how we gather and what we do when we gather, but actually why we do it in the first place.

[16:46] And of course we have the mission statements that help us somewhat. But really, I realized Hebrews 10, we pick that little bit in the middle, 24 to 25, and talk about, hey, don't stop meeting each other.

But then actually we maybe neglect to think why. What's the point of this? Why did we need to do this? So today I'm going to invite us to stand for the word of the Lord as Jasper's going to minister to us with the word. And he's going to read to us from Hebrews chapter 10, verse 19 to 25.

Hebrews chapter 10, verse 19 to 25. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.

And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast to confession of our hope without wavering. For he who promises faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.

[17:55] Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

This is the word of the Lord. Praise be to God. Thank you, Jasper. Please take a seat. So that's it. Don't stop meeting with one another. Consider how to stir each other up in love and good works, and encourage each other as the day draws near.

Okay, that's what we're supposed to do. So we keep meeting. So we keep spending time together. And we've all been there where you're like, oh, I could do with just staying at home today, but I'm going to choose to drag myself out. And the moment you drag yourself out, you're like, oh, I'm so glad that I'm here.

Okay, this happens, again, not just in spiritual communities. It happens in my Saturday 7 a.m. basketball runs. I'm like, I don't want to get out of bed. But the moment I drag myself out, once I'm there, I'm like, actually, I really enjoy playing basketball with other people around rather than just me.

The concept is actually the same. But we look at this, and I almost see this as a starter pack for community. Okay, so if last week Acts 2, 42 to 47, is kind of like the blueprint of what a community should look like.

[18:59] It devotes itself to teaching fellowship, breaking bread, prayers. They're filled with reverence and awe. They are glad and generous in their hearts, and they're praising, and they have favor with all people. That's like, wow, that's the perfect church that didn't last more than two, three chapters.

But that's what we're aiming for. That's the blueprint. This, I would say, is the starter pack. It's the basic requirement of what it means to actually be a people who are actually gathering together. Because something else has happened, likely in at least half of the group here, is that you've spent some time in some kind of Christian community before, and then you have struggled because there has been problems, because there is a lack of commitment, or there is just a lack of interest, or priorities, or distractions, or actually conflict.

There are all these things that have happened that have caused you to, you know what? I'm just going to stop meeting people. I think I can do this Christian life on my own. And John Wesley would disagree with you because there is no such thing as a solitary religion.

Of course, there is solitude, and we need that. Jesus showed us that. But every time after solitude, he goes back to being with the people. Can you imagine those conversations that Jesus would have had with God when he was praying on his own?

[20:04] He's like, hey, God, it's time. It's been good with you. But I've got to go back to those idiots because I love those idiots. And I need to spend time with those people. It's the same kind of thing here.

So we have to keep doing that. But I would say, okay, so if we look, open up your Bibles if you've got that there. And of course, I was joking with Florence this week about just the fact that Bible apps are just not the way or the truth or the life, and they're just fake.

But I'll tell you the reason why. The reason why is when you look on your screen, and don't worry, I'm not going to judge you that much as I see you scrolling on your screen, Caleb, with your pink bag. Oh, he's got a Bible as well.

Don't worry. Caleb's got a Bible. When you look on, when you look, the reason why I'm hating is because when you look on your phone, you can see one passage, correct? You can see this. So Hebrews 10, you can just see this.

And that's all you see. But the beauty of Scripture, the beauty of paper, ladies and gentlemen, is you get to see the context. You get to see all of the chapter. You get to see why it's there.

[21:06] Because when you look on the, I'd be like, okay, therefore, brothers, verse 19, since we have confidence, wait, wait, wait, wait. And of course, it's a little bit cheesy, but hey, whenever you see the word therefore, you have to ask, what's it there for?

Okay? Because why else is he saying therefore? So then suddenly you've got to go, wait, I want to look at the bigger picture. This passage that I'm just about to print out and turn into a fridge magnet, I now have to look in the whole context and go, what's this actually about?

It's telling me to not stop meeting. But why? How? Because I've met groups before and eventually I've been tempted to stop because it's just too hard. Here's my suggestion to you.

If we understand the whole of chapter 10, we'll have a better idea of how we should meet. And so I'm just going to do a quick, very quick, even though we didn't read it, I'm going to do a very quick summary of verses 1 to 18 of Hebrews chapter 10, because this will give us the primary reason and the context and the impetus on the motivation on why we should meet.

Okay? So verse 1, it says this, the prime reason and context, it says, Okay, so here's the thing.

[22:18] Before Jesus came, we couldn't approach God by ourselves. For the longest time, the Israelites had this mosaic law, which is, hey, you need to do all these things and you need to follow all these things, but the problem is you will always keep failing, which is why we need sacrifices, because you guys have chosen the way of sin.

And the only way for you to enter into the presence of God, sadly, actually, let me stop there. Only one of you can enter the presence of God. Okay? And that's the high priest.

And oh, by the way, he can't enter any time, any day either. He can only enter one day a year, the day of atonement, Yom Kippur. That's the only time he can enter. And he has to do a whole ton of things and a whole ton of rituals and animals have to be sacrificed.

But the problem here is this, the animals being sacrificed, their blood almost offers like a temporary covering of our sin, but it's only temporary, is what it's saying.

So before Jesus, that is what we had. Those sacrifices that were in the law basically prescribed the sacrifice of Christ. All this time, these animals that were being sacrificed would simply just be a temporary, imperfect way to cover our sin.

[23:26] And so how do we know that? Because every year, you would have to make and do the same thing. Okay? It's like the health checks that we have or the things that we have to do with our bodies or even just our homes or our cars or whatever it is, we need to do constant checks, constant maintenance because it isn't once and for all.

Okay? So that's what it's saying here. We have to do this every year. And verse three, it says this, but in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year. So every time you gather, you realize that you still have guilt.

People are reminded of their sin. And in some ways, that's what we do here. Because if you operate in isolation, it's very easy to become your own God.

You will justify everything that you do. No one will pick you up on anything and you will just become your own God. Basically, you are the center of your own universe. When you choose to gather, even in the olden days, it would be, hey, man, I fall short.

Man, I am filled with sin. And that's what it's saying here. And verse four says, the animal sacrifices offered away, but it is impossible to completely cover our sin for it is impossible for the blood of the bulls and goats to take away sins.

[24:37] And I'll add permanently there. And then he moves in and he quotes Psalm 40 there in verses five to seven, which is basically saying, actually sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me in burnt offerings and sin offerings, you have taken no pleasure.

What he's saying here is, for too long, you guys have basically been focused on empty compliance and not true obedience. You think being a Christian is simply complying to God's laws and just ticking off the box and being a decent person and that's enough.

And Jesus comes and says, that was, did you realize that those rules were there? And rules are good. Rules are good to help us become the people that we want to be.

But sometimes on the outside, we're like, oh, Christianity, so many rules, so many things that I can't do. But as you start to grow and mature, just not even in your faith, just in life, you're like, actually, rules are actually good things to keep us.

I mean, anyone who's visited Vietnam and tried to cross a road, you'll be like, oh, actually, rules are good. When there's a traffic light and it has red on, it's good for you to stop, but then you'll get to go soon.

[25:48] But when we don't follow the rules, that's when chaos happens. But Jesus is saying, hey, you're focusing so much on the rules, but it's empty compliance. What I actually want, what I desire, is true obedience.

Every parent has been there where you ask your children to do something and they don't want to do it. And then you force them to do it and they do do it, but no one is happy. But when you see a willingness that comes out, a trust that comes out from the child, okay, I do know that this is good, dad.

I do understand why we cannot have McDonald's every day. Oh, it's for my good. It's for my health. And then you start to understand and that's what Jesus is really going for here.

Verse nine, it says this, then he added, behold, I have come to do your will. He does that way with the first in order to establish the second. And Jesus says, hey, I've come not to abolish the law, but I'm telling you that actually I've fulfilled it because actually you could never do it.

All those laws, all those ways to get to God, you failed every year and that's why we needed all these sacrifices every year. But now I've come and I'm going to do away with the first and there's going to be a new way to access God. And it won't be through your own work.

[26:59] It won't be through you being a good person. It will be through the only good person and that person is me. And then he carries on and he contrasts himself with the priests of the day or even with someone like me.

And he says, and every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

So what he's saying here is this, the priests that are looking after you, they're just toiling away every single year, standing, helping you to help basically provide sacrifices to cover your sins and then next year you're going to come back and do the same.

And as a pastor, I completely relate. I walk with people, I help them, I encourage them, lift them out of a place and I know that at some point next year or maybe even next month they will fall back into the same place and here we go again.

And I'm not just saying that about you, I'm saying that about me. Isn't that just human nature? Isn't that why we have New Year's resolutions every year? Why else would we need New Year's resolutions every year were it not for the fact that we keep breaking them by January 5th and then we start again.

[28:07] But what Jesus is saying here is hey, you've got priests who are standing, working all the time but guess what I'm doing? I did it once and now I'm sat down. It's done. Just mull over that for a second what he's saying here.

He's giving a mic drop. He's saying the people who are caring for you having to do this constantly but I've done it once and that's enough and now I'm just chilling. Sitting at the right hand of God and waiting.

Can you imagine the power, the assurance of what that actually means for those people who are like every year we have to do the same thing but you're telling me that right now someone's already done it once and that's it?

That's what he's saying. So verse 14 is the single offering that he's given for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. He's saying I have done it.

I have dropped the mic and that is it and we go there and that's where or verse 18 for where there is forgiveness of these there is no longer any offering for sin. So he's saying hey guys you all bar none as long as you believe as long as you repent you can have access to God through me.

[29:14] That's it. Therefore. Therefore. And that's why that therefore is there. Because what he's saying is actually if there's going to be a community that gathers together first must understand the

work of Jesus.

That's how it works. How many of times have we been in a group and names are popping into your head faces are popping into your mind right now people who you're like actually I don't know if they truly get the fact that Jesus loves them and died for them and has risen again.

They haven't truly understood and grasped the gospel. And then we start seeing some of these problems that are occurring. Pride. Ego. The things of the flesh. And you're like oh I think I see. This the starter pack the base requirement for any group is a true understanding of what the gospel is. A true understanding of what Jesus did. If you get that that will pave the way to the community that we're trying to go for.

Therefore so remember it is all about because if you don't remember that if you're going to a group right now and you're resting on the fact that it's your work and not his that's where the problem comes. So even for the leaders if you're walking into your group going oh that group just won't change there's nothing that I can do that can help that group change well then we've got it wrong because that means you've forgotten the first part of chapter 10.

[30:30] You think that it's your work you think you're the priest that has to stand daily, weekly, yearly to help these people get close to him but no there's only one and that person is sat down now because he's done it and it's his Holy Spirit that works so that should free you so when you are going from work to your life group you're like okay it might be frustrating it might be hard but the saving grace of Jesus has already covered whatever I'm going to do there.

He's sat down I just need to go and sit down next to him and watch him work that's how it changes you and if you're walking into a place and go okay can I be in this community that will help me become more like Jesus maybe the people around me and I just said we need people around me but it's not just the people that are going to do it it's Christ working through the people and so if you sit down and go hey I want to join this group and this group's going to change me and help me feel better and become a better Christian well then you're wrong again because that group cannot do it but Jesus can do it through that group so you walk into that group with a different mindset and go okay I'm here to become more like Jesus through my interactions with you and he's going to help me can you see it just changes the way you even approach what that group looks like on a Thursday evening when you understand Christ's sacrifice is once and for all and so we're finally now in the therefore and he gives basically two since we's two since we's and then three three let us okay so that's where we're going to go through so he says therefore brothers since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus what he's saying he's just talked about the mosaic law he said hey you know that for the longest time it's been one person one day a year and only that person can go in and if that person hasn't done their job properly they actually will die and you have to drag their body out okay that's how terrifying the presence of God was and he's saying that's done now therefore since we have confidence brothers that we know that Jesus has done everything and he's now just sat down chilling and everything is assured we we can then access into that holy place ourselves that curtain is torn we can actually walk in ourselves rather the person who was behind that curtain is now walking towards us that's what the therefore is there for that's what the since we is there for verse 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh and also since we have a great priest over the house of God a pastor that is way better than any pastor that you'll ever encounter this pastor who sympathizes with every single weakness and has been tempted in every single way and yet was without sin he's the person who did it all who paid all the debt

I can't pay for your debt I'm afraid ladies and gentlemen because I have debt myself okay I am not the one that can do it for you I am not the one that's going to help you become more like Jesus only Jesus will help you become more like him only Jesus will help you get access to the father and he's saying since we have access to this place now and actually you have a great priest over you therefore therefore we can move on to what it actually looks like in a new community so this is where we jump into the three let us's and remember it's let us it tells us one thing that access to God is personal but the command is plural okay we can access God individually each of us go to God ourselves but then it says let us the command is plural we must do this together and what does it say the first one let us draw near with a true heart actually other versions will say let us draw near to God this is the first thing when you gather him this is why it's our first mission statement that we would we're a simple gathering in a complex time and we are getting close to Jesus walking in the ways of Jesus that we would know him and enjoy him forever that's the Westminster catechism that

we would know him and enjoy him and glorify him forever draw near to God how many of you are here for God thank you for putting your hand up let's go Chris let's go through that door there we go off you go so here's the problem

I'm not saying that you I mean you're just Chinese so you don't want to raise your hands and get picked on but if we ask ourselves why do we come to church sometimes it's for a girl whoa whoa whoa sometimes it's for friends sometimes it's because you've signed up to play in the football team later and you don't want to be asked why you weren't at church so you're at church today hey John C we come to church for different reasons is what I'm saying and I've said this we are literally the most convenient building in the whole of Hong Kong we're above the most busy McDonald's in the whole world this is a good place to come but it says let us draw near to God here's the problem when you come to church for any other reason other than God you will be you will be underwhelmed you will be frustrated you will be disappointed absolutely if it's not today then it will be next week if it's not next week it will be next year can we be in a place where we as a community we can look at each other and go hey you're actually never going to satisfy me you're actually never going to be the person that I need you to be but that's okay because God's going to work through that to help me become more like him through your imperfections and likewise mine to yours in fact that's what that's what every married couple needs to say to each other

Emily needs to say to Jay Jay you will never satisfy me completely in every way she has no problems nodding to that in fact she's been saying that since the beginning of their relationship Jay needs to kindly and lovingly gently say something similar without getting into trouble it never works but every married couple needs to say that every dating couple needs to say that every friendship needs to go like hey you can't be my everything you can't be my all I'm coming to church because I'm here to draw near to one personality and that person is God the access is personal but the command is plural and that's why when the disciples they're looking at Jesus praying and he's like well he prays different he can pray for hours in the middle of the night and not fall asleep and so they go to him and go hey Jesus can you teach us how to pray like you and he says okay fine let me show you the template let me show you the blueprint and how does he start what are the first two words our father what he's saying here is that it can't be my father it can't be you do it on your own it has to be together with other people

[37 : 04] I'll tell you my prayer life my prayer life has improved drastically since September why because there was a group of people who committed to the fellowship with us where we pray together every single day weekday just from September all the way to June is what we're going to do and there's a group that wakes up at 7.30 in the morning we jump on a call and we pray and if we're lucky Wes will even put his clothes on if we're not lucky it's terrible and then we spend the rest of the day recovering from what we saw there's a 7.30 group there's an 8.30 group and then there's a 10pm group and I've been praying three times a day with these people and I have loved it because I'll be honest if I didn't have those people I won't be praying in those spots but we need people around us to be able to pray we need people around us to put the structures in place for us that form us that's what we need we need to do it together and so what do you need let us draw near what with a true heart pure motives this is the second thing and I keep talking about this syncretism that we have is that we go to God why?

we go to God because we want blessings we want health we want the job that we want we want the lifestyle that we want but when we come to God with a true heart we're just saying none of the other things in this performance culture in this culture that is filled with imposters and hypocrisy God I'm coming to you only for you I'm not even just coming to you so I can have peace I'm not coming to you so I can feel fulfilled and be happy I'm coming to you because I want you that's the difference coming with a true heart just like a child when they see the parent running towards them all they want is nothing else but just the parent do we have that kind of true heart as we draw near to God together?

Keller says this we do not come to the holy place because we are strong and good we come because we are weak and needy and we come not alone but with our brothers and sisters holding one another's hands speaking words of encouragement helping each other up to the steep path to the throne of grace so we need a few things here actually it says in this passage first thing that we need is when we draw near to God one we need a true heart which is honesty and sincerity God I only want you even if that means I don't get what I want I only want you that's the true heart he's talking about second is the full assurance of faith who has doubts here in their faith?

you can put your hand up I won't pick on you here who has doubts? I'm putting my hand up because I have doubts what he's saying here is when you get together that is basically the antidote to doubts the full assurance of faith that you have that you cannot have on your own you can have when you're with other people when you bring your doubts together to the people and there are people in the body who are much smarter than we are who can help answer the questions that we have who actually sometimes we know some things to be true we're just so struggling with our own internal turmoil that we actually just need someone who knows us and loves us and cares for us just to speak into that and say hey you know what God is you know what God has done the sacrifice that he's paid you know you don't have to be worried you know you can choose faith over fear hasn't he been with you all along?

why do you think that he's actually going to fail you now? we need those people around us to give us that confidence in him and again it's not confidence that full assurance of faith is not something that you can muster up yourself you need him to give it to you it's his Holy Spirit giving it to you and it's the people around you that remind you of it so true heart that's the sincerity and then it's the full assurance which is the certainty and the humility to go hey it's not me the reason I'm confident is not because I think I can pull through do you know when we say this when we have exams that we're trying to pray for each other we say you got this can we be a people that say hey you don't got this but God's got you that's the difference because when we say you got this then actually we're putting it back to ourselves we're back to that priest that's standing year on year out doing the thing that we're doing but if we say no you've not got this but God's got you and he's sat down now which means it's done doesn't that fill you with faith don't you need people around you to remind you of that and then it says heart sprinkled and body's washed what he's saying here there is a baptism on the outside and on the inside that means your inside is now clean we know we all the heart above all things is deceitful we make choices that even we don't want even Paul says that in Romans 7 he says there's things that

[41:25] I want to do that I know I shouldn't do and there's things I shouldn't do that I don't want to do I have that internal battle in me that's what Paul is saying so find comfort if you have that internal wrestling so did Paul so do I but what we see here is when we come together then our hearts are sprinkled clean with an evil conscience and our bodies are now washed internally and externally both in the heart and both in our behavior our lives will change and we get together with those things in mind there is a new covenant not the one with laws but the one where a savior a priest is now sat saying just welcome just come in and come in together that's the first one let us draw near to God the second is let us hold fast the confession again that's really the same thing without wavering so often we waver on our own but when we have people around us we're like hey you know what you believe here it's okay to have those doubts but let's have those doubts together let's not go off the rails here we need each other we all have these daily temptations that we have daily thoughts that we have what's the biggest thought work is the most important thing if I don't have this job

I won't put food on the table and I won't be able to provide for myself isn't that one of the daily temptations that we have if I don't do this I won't get this and we need people around us just to keep us going hold formation together if you have a belief then you need to hold formation together to go through one of my strongest beliefs is that when you go to a theme park and you walk through the gift shop at the end that gift shop is not to buy things as a Chinese dad I firmly believe we do not buy anything in those gift shops so I tell my family hold formation let's walk through this valley of the shadow of death together hold hands Ruben grab your mother oh she's off she's gone and Christina's parents here so they'll know this every time she walks through a shop she's gone like five steps and you don't know where she is so I tell my kids hold on to your mother hold on to your sister we can only get through this gift shop together and so we do so my kids believe those shops are museums they're not shops they're museums we just go in and look don't touch and then we leave if you have a conviction you need to stick together is what I'm saying communal affirmation is what makes us strong why do we gather together we profess faith to each other we sing songs to each other why is that song the blessing such a powerful song especially during COVID times is because we were in isolation we were on our own and we finally got a place got a song where we could look at someone else and go

Jackie the Lord bless you and keep you may his face shine upon you do you remember those probably all of us at some point in the church context have been in this context where we sang that

song to each other and we were in tears right because we were just moved by the spirit going I love that person I'm just blessing that person there was power in the interaction between people there's a reason why that song became the anthem of the Christian world during COVID because in the midst of isolation you had a song where Christians could look at one another and bless each other with words that came straight from the heart of God can you see how much we need people we echo God's faithfulness to each other it's our collective voices that anchor our hearts in God that's why we meet together that's why we spend that time together when we are in isolation we start believing the lies when we are in isolation we know this if you haven't been to a church for a few weeks and a few months you know that you've drifted into a different place right we need people around us to be able to do it the church is also acting like a gymnasium for the soul

I personally do not go to the gym anymore contrary to how I look but I have I have trusted sources Gavs why are you looking at me like that just the pride I see in you just looking and Chris you too I've been told that people who go to the gym they do like to go together and why because you need each other because you need that motivation it's a little bit easier in Hong Kong because it's warm but in England when it's just cold dark day in November in Stoke and all you want to do is just cuddle up and just stay at home you need people to get you out of bed you need people to take you there with you that's why we have church it's a gymnasium for the soul finally third let us let us here we go consider how to stir up one another to love and good works do you know what that word means consider it means I look at Micah and go okay and I do this how can I help him grow what does he need what do him and Cindy need what do his kids need

I'm going what is it that actually they need to be able to grow that's what it's saying here would you consider how to stir up one another in love and good works I look at Ken Wes and Francis this morning at breakfast I'm looking at them I'm like how much love I have for these three men I'm going what's it going to take to help them to grow look at the person next to you or just look across the room and look at just engage in awkward eye contact with someone and go when was the last time I looked at you and said oh how can I help you grow that's what it's saying here consider that means calculate think about how can I honestly the fellowship that we're running I think my first inspiration was looking at Nathan and going man this guy needs help and then going what can I do to help him how can I love him how can I pour into him so he has enough to pour out I'm only joking I do love you and I think the world of you but I'm like how do I what do I need to do and what's it going to cost me oh it's going to cost me three calls a day and reading the bible together every day with a group of people and trying to call them higher and hold them to that spot okay sure

[47:24] I'm down I'm in why because I love him and I'm going to consider how to stir him up in love and good works that's the thing that's what we're trying to do that's stir up do you know what that means it means provoke how do I how do I get under your skin and actually get you to the point you know what it's actually saying here we live in a place where there are filled with people who basically are apathetic or fearful and how do I get under your skin and stir you up and provoke you to the point where you can have this passion for God and that's what the church does when you get the stones together the living rocks that we are that Peter calls us when you when we rub against each other and cause the fire to come out that's what we're trying to do let us consider how to stir up one another in love and good works that means in order for us to have spiritual vigor and to be on fire we need those around us I need to look at Matthew and go okay you're in my group Matthew how can I help you stir you up so you will love Ja more and love the people that work more and then to stir you up to do good works more that is my job but it's not just my job it's actually Emily's job for her group for the people that she's got around her it's every single one of us going how can I help each other and that's why the life groups are there okay okay we've spent enough time now we've talked about the things that you're going through how can we help encourage one another and challenge one another when was the last time we did that the primary engine for growth is communal provocation where we provoke one another stir up one another in love and good works and it's going to cost us and a group

I know a group went with Sam's group yesterday to St. Barnabas and what is that that is just saying hey we're not going to be able to do this on our own but if there's a group of people going I'll go too that's what it really looks like how do we do that Martin Lloyd-Jones says this Christians are like the stones of a temple each one touches the other resting upon it and are helping to hold the building together we are meant to provoke to irritate to stimulate one another into love and a solitary Christian is a contradiction in terms a solitary Christian is a contradiction in terms you can last week

I said you can show up at church for a whole year and no one needs to know who you are because Chinese people look the same so you can literally just blend in leave and that'll be it and no one will notice you and you can be gone for a whole year and no one will remember you correct that is very possible we know we can do that there's another danger is where you do attend and you do spend time with people and you do hang out with people and you find people who are just as cool as you who play Magic the Gathering just like you do and then you spend time together but you still don't consider how to stir each other up in love and good works when you come to church you should be going if you're on fire for Jesus you're like who can I provoke today who can I poke today so that they will be stirred up in love and good works who can I do that to today out of love for myself who can I grab to do things with me today that's the mindset we should be having that's what we should be doing here and it says something interesting here which is the final verse not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some why did they stop meeting there were some people who were filled with the Holy Spirit maybe even met the apostles and Jesus himself but why did they stop meeting well I don't know maybe their lives got busy maybe they suddenly had to engage in some kind of study or maybe it's for work reasons maybe it's just they started to lose interest maybe it's for all the same reasons why we stopped going to church and we stopped gathering and we stopped considering how to stir each other up in love and good works there's a quote that says beware of the barrenness of a busy life beware of the barrenness of a busy life we in Hong Kong are guilty of being busy but we are at risk of just living barren lives where we are busy for no reason at all and maybe that's the reason why they start meeting can you turn this community to be your big rock we know we all have big rocks in our lives whether you're like yeah this happens even with the most well-intentioned of us what do you care about the most family and friends and God what do you spend most of your time on work and individual pleasures and pursuits it's all of us but if this is truly is a big rock then how do I plan my whole life around it how do I tell my boss hey I'm going to work so hard for you for the rest of the week but on my Thursday evenings are untouchable I'm really sorry hey I love my job and I will do so much for the good of the company but it can't touch this do we have the courage to say those kinds of things to the people around us I think that's what it means when he says don't conform to the patterns of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so you don't have fear so you are actually loving in the way you share why you have the hope that you have and why you live the way that you do why because the high priest is now sat down and he has done it and there is an urgency and all the more as you see the day drawing near in this society where we are just surrounded by cultural decay where we're just surrounded by brokenness and despair where people are looking at the church and going well what about you what are you doing okay you're a gymnasium for the soul but you're all just gym junkies in the gym yourselves you're not helping us in any way you're not coming out to love us and show us how to live that early church in Acts 2 they had favour amongst all people even those outside would look and go wow not a Christian myself but I love what those Christians are doing isn't that incredible to have that what if we were not only a gymnasium for the soul but we were also an ark of hope where we say hey this world isn't in a good place but come on to the ark experience hope and perseverance like nothing you can experience here in this world what if we were able to invite people who we know are struggling with so many different things just like we are and go hey the church is not just a museum of saints but it's a hospital for sinners join us anyone can join no saint without a past no sinner without a future is a quote

I love that you can come you will have met people who say oh yeah the church thing is good but I don't think it's for me you don't know the stuff I've done well that's perfect you are perfectly uniquely qualified just like the rest of us to come to church because you are a sinner with a past but you are also a saint with a future can we be that kind of people who gather these people around we are not just a social club we are an outpost for an unshakable kingdom where we point people to this place where there is someone who died for all of this you don't need to have the fear, guilt and shame anymore that debt has been paid and he comes and says my burden is light my yoke is easy my way is better imagine imagine as we work out here in the gymnasium for the soul we will then end up being this ark where we can push out and we can show hope to the rest of the world can we reframe our priorities can this Sunday service be a pit stop for you to be refilled re-energized Christina and I finally got around to watching the Brad Pitt movie F1 recently I'm not an F1 fan I just don't really find interest in just watching people drive in circles but wow that movie just the adrenaline and just watching them work as a team that every driver every person needs a space where they come they need to rely on a whole team to be their eyes and to be their brain and then

right down to how they get the wheels changed can this Sunday service morning slot be a pit stop for you not just the only pit stop but maybe there's one on a Thursday evening or a Wednesday evening or a Tuesday evening honestly it's not even just about a weekly thing I know Hong Kong life is busy anyone who anyone who wants to come and have a debate about that who's busier feel free I've got three kids we can have a go so I know what busyness is and if it's not a weekly thing then fine it's a bi-weekly thing if it's not that if it's a monthly thing whatever it is that makes you just a little bit uncomfortable where you are forcing yourself to just prioritize just that little bit more [55:48] I'm in and I'll help you that's what I said to the fellowship how about you call yourselves higher and I'll just join you there whatever you think you can do let's do it together can we do that now we're going to finish actually we've run out of time so maybe we actually won't respond with a song but we will respond with this and I hope this works there is a QR code here because I realize there's something I can't say all this stuff about being as a community together without truly knowing I look around and of course I see enough people that I do know but I also see a lot of people that I do not know so call this a census if you will if you're completely uncomfortable and you're literally just visiting one time and then you're never going to be here again then it's okay please feel free not to do it but if you are actually part of this church community this is how we're going to respond I hope I think it's only going to take us a few minutes because we actually want to know who we actually have so if you can scan that QR code we all love the satisfaction of scanning a QR code so even if you're not interested just pretend and you can just have the satisfaction of pressing the link because we want to know you and this is just a simple simple form all the Asians who are ASTAR students there is no right or wrong answer just fill it out because we just want to know we might have to do this for a few weeks because of course some people might not be here this week but can you fill out that form

I don't think it will take a long time at least that's what I was hoping it wouldn't do there's one just one little thing that I want to share with you that's just funny is I asked Pastor Gabe can you also have an option there for someone to upload a picture because we'll just get a whole name of a list of names and we'll be like okay who's that I don't know who that is and then we'll just leave it there but I'll stress here if you really don't want to show us your face then go to another church no only joking only joking if you okay if I know your face Julian you don't need to you don't need to show your face I don't need more pictures of you you can choose one that you like climbing the Himalayas or a cool one if you wanted to or if you just do a selfie now and you're not bothered we won't share this it won't post it won't be on any kind of social media account at all it'll literally just be for Christina and I and our team just are going to go wait okay that person's interested but I actually have no idea what that person looks like is that person a short Chinese person with black hair and oh it is okay now we're in trouble so we just we just need something to help us okay so actually that's how we're going to respond and maybe I'll ask you to do this prayerfully if you've been sat here in this church service for a while and you're not quite as extroverted as Caleb who has just kind of crashed our community and just invaded it into every space and every gathering and every sporting event to his credit if you're not that that's fine not all of us need to be Caleb but if you're just like okay I think it's now time I actually actually also there are some of you who have actually been around for a while and you asked us already for all this information you're like hey you should know already that I've been waiting for a group my apologies to you that it's taking us a long time obviously just finding the right people to put in the right groups is no small task and so thank you for your patience thank you for just spending time highlight that there tell me James I actually spoke to you four months ago and you still haven't done anything for me that's okay and just please let us know because actually I feel as though it's now time for us to do a proper sense just around just to see who we have is that okay and be prayerful if you've been wondering and wrestling then I hope this is the time where you commit I know there are those of us here who are also so involved so involved in the wider church at KFC May I'm looking at you and I know that you're here for different reasons as well and you're not here to rush into a group or anything you're part of the wider church of KFC we'd like to know that too we just like to see who is actually coming to worship with us and that's actually going to be the way that we end this gathering time today

I know this will take us a little while but maybe what I'll do is I'll end with a word of prayer and then please if you're filling out the form just do complete it I realise if we if we send out the link or somehow we often forget and so we just wanted to use that time to do it today so we actually know

and know that we're praying know that we're praying for you know that we're praying for people and going okay who we're considering how to stir you up in love and good works we're gonna look at what are the combinations of people that will work there's something about to be said about having homogenous groups where there are people who are just like you like just the same things that you do and that's the space where you can feel the most safe and seen and heard and understood and we need those spaces too but Henry Nowen also says community is where you are faced with the people that you really don't enjoy spending time with and as I ask that I am sure right now especially those of you smiling at me you're thinking of someone in your group you're like what I could do without seeing that person every week and I'll be saying to you perfect that is the person that God has placed in your life to conform you to the image of the son use that person love that person to be more like Christ and final thing as I encourage us about life groups and getting involved

I am not gonna be here saying hey our life groups are just great places of spiritual nurture and consistency and discipline and care and just that's where we strive to be what it looks like on a day to day on a week to week it varies just like every group there's some groups that are super close and there's some groups that are still growing and struggling so I don't want to paint a picture here of join the life groups they're gonna be the best place you live sometimes it will and sometimes it won't but I know for sure I have full assurance actually that Christ is using those groups any group to conform us to be like him and that's what I give thanks the most for can I finish with prayer and you promise to finish the form alright okay Jesus thank you for your sacrifice thank you that you have paved the way that you are seated and that you invite us to come and sit with you in the heavenly places so we who were dead in our trespasses and sins who followed the course of this world we get to be made alive together because of your kindness and your great love would you make us into the temple the dwelling place where you reside would you give us what we need to be able to abide in you would you break down every dividing wall of hostility and through you and what you did on the cross we all have access now to the father the access is personal but the command is plural help us to live out the great commandment and the great commission together bind us together in harmony to be the same spirit same heart same faith same love same mind show us Lord how to be more like you how to be your body we draw near to you the head the source the beginning and the end in your name we pray amen once you are finished class is dismissed see you next week you