

The Household of God

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Preacher: James Tang

[0:00] Oh, Tim, can we have the Bibles passed out? Is that okay? Maybe as they're passing them out, as we were just singing and! I was like, wow, what a privilege it is to be here on a Sunday, to be able to speak from God's Word.

But just even thinking, we are such a mixed bag of people. In a sense, there are so many things going on in our lives that we can't even begin to share with the people around us.

Sometimes life is that hard. I look and I think those of us who have lost loved ones just very recently, there are those who are maybe getting close to losing loved ones.

There are those who are struggling to find work. There are those who had work but don't have it anymore. There are those who are struggling with work. And maybe as a shepherd here, I just wanted to say I may not know exactly what is going on in your life, but I do care.

And we must care. And whilst we do not know exact details, I just wanted to even say out, this is not a perfect congregation who are all on fire for the Lord without any of the world's problems.

[1:21] We are here as a broken people, saved by grace, being drawn to Him. And last week I talked about the Garden of Eden, the temple, this idea that just God's been trying to draw us back to Him.

Our hearts have been longing, yearning to be back with Him. And yet on this side of heaven, it's just hard. On this side of heaven, it often feels fleeting and temporary. So if you are going through any kind of struggles, we may not be able to help remove them.

But we would like to be there with you through them. And just, I pray that you'll be able to know that. Since January, we've been going through just a series of just talking about what even church is.

And we started this thing that Sam kicked us off, and then J1 did the next one. And then last week, Janice shared with us, and after service last Sunday, had a great conversation with Jasper, who was just like, I've got something to share.

Which is just super exciting for me. So I'm going to invite Jasper up to have a conversation with me, to talk about what he really felt from the last week. Can we give him a round of applause? Let's go, Jasper.

[2:36] Oh, actually, I thought you'd be a lot taller than me, and I'd have to do this. But actually, you're okay. Okay. Well, good to see you, Jasper. I know you've been part of this community for a while now. Tell us what it is that you felt the Lord really show you and remind you of in the message last week.

All right. So one of the biggest things that stuck out to me from last week's message was the idea that the temple of God is where we encounter his presence. So that made me rethink about what it actually means to just be in the presence of God.

And what stood out to me is that God's presence is never about like a physical location, but it's about seeing him clearly for who he really is.

And just like how James kind of just traced through the scripture, like through the Bible, the place where people meet God changes. And as first we have like Adam and Eve who walk freely in the Garden of Eden, but they sinned and they hid because they lost sight of who he really is.

And later on, people worship God in the tabernacle. Tabernacle. Tabernacle. Okay. Tabernacle and then in the temple. Then Jesus came and said, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.

[3:57] In doing so, he shows that he himself is the true temple. God made visible and accessible. And after Pentecost, God's presence is no longer like dwells in a building, but in his people.

And yeah, through the Holy Spirit. What really stuck with me is this pattern that we see over and over again, like James has mentioned, that every time humanity moves away, God will move closer

and like draws near to him.

Thank you. And that's such a powerful thing. It's a thing that every time we make a wrong step, that God's actually continuing to follow us. I mean, Psalm 23, that his goodness and mercy keeps following us.

How has that resonated with your life and how have you applied it for your own context? All right. So like what resonated with me the most was the question. If God keeps moving closer to us throughout the Bible, how should that change the way we live today?

So that's where like first Peter to really stood out to me. Peter calls us to be holy. And verse 10 says, once you were not a people, but now you're God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

[5:04] That reminded me that as Christians, we don't just believe in God, but we represent him. To be holy doesn't mean like being perfect. We can never be perfect. We can never reach to his standard.

But then like what I really love about this is God helps us through this. He helped us like to fulfill his standard. And it's only by being in God's presence that we can actually like change our heart and be more aligned and close to him.

How can we be more like someone where we don't even spend time with this person that we're trying to be? And early on, like in my faith journey, I try real hard to share the gospel.

Like I remember I used to spam my friends with like Christian reels. And then they got so annoyed and so like, yeah, just so like frustrated with me. But then like what changed now is I refocus on like, how do I live the Jesus way?

And then naturally, like they started to notice that there's something different about me. And they will start to be curious and just ask me questions. Like, why do you believe in this?

[6:10] Why do you believe in that? And then now like I'll answer your questions. And that actually draw people closer to God, essentially. Like they will start to be open to like these conversations.

Yeah. And you talk about the beginning of this faith journey. It's not been a long time. I remember meeting you a few years ago through Young Life and you attended some of the camps. And then, of course, you've been here worshipping with us and just watch your growth.

You're at ISF studying. And I know that you're also really good at fencing. What is it that you think God's called you to now? What have you been doing at ISF that's actually really exciting for us to hear about?

Right. So, yeah, like I go to ISF and it's quite like a secular school. So I felt quite isolated as far as like being the only Christian in my friend group.

So I felt God really call me to start something in my school. So that's why I started like a Christian society called Lighthouse in my school. And, yeah, it's like I started to invite kids in like who are also just so passionate for God.

[7:14] And honestly, I didn't think that it would be allowed because like our school is like a secular school. But then like God worked miraculously.

Like it just happened to be so that this is our first year of like actually starting a religious like society in our school. So I think this like connects directly back to First Spirit 2, where Peter tells us that we are living stones being built together into a spiritual house, not individually, but together.

So now like just this really spiritual community that I've built in my school. And at first, like it was quite awkward. Right. Like discussions felt very forced.

And the group chat was like pretty dead. And I never like really led anything like this before. So I was quite inexperienced. And I was like doubting myself. I was asking God, like, why me?

And on top of that, like I'm in my junior year. So like school was quite stressful with like academics and stuff. So there are oftentimes I just felt that I'm like away from God.

[8:20] And I felt like a hypocrite. Like, why am I leading this thing when I'm also struggling with my own faith? And, um, but then little by little, I started to see like fruits. So, yeah.

So it started off with like one day. Someone tagged me on a post that says, tag the person that brought you closer to God. And then next, um, the group chat started to blow up. Like people started to actually use the group chat.

And then, um, and then we also like, we went from meeting bi-weekly to now meeting weekly because we were complaining that it was enough. Yeah. So what surprised me most like through this is that the community I helped build to like encourage others actually encouraged me back in

return.

And, um, when James talked about living stones forming a spiritual house, like that, that verse, that scripture, it made me fall out of like lighthouse. Like even though it didn't feel like that at the beginning, but then over time I began to see it.

Like every person plays a role. So some create like content for our Instagram, like my sister and, um, other, like they organize meetings and some like barely speak, but then they write very detailed notes like for scriptures.

[9:31] So, um, oh yeah. There's also this one person who wrote like a 15 page essay on like the historical accuracy of like the resurrection. So, which is crazy.

And he's grade six too. So, like, yeah. Each stone matters and, um, each person supports the whole. So I hope what I've shared today reminds us of the importance of community as Christians. When we encourage others in their journey of faith, God often used that same community with built to strengthen us in return. Yeah. Amazing. Final question. How can we pray for you?

School. School. What about school? For school to be destroyed or what about? It's just like academics in general because like junior is quite stressful.

Yeah. Okay. Good. Oh, well, social media works then, eh? I might rejoin the Facebook and start posting again. Juju, could you come up and pray for a desperate second? Oh, yeah, sure.

[10:31] And then you can do the scripture. That's it. Yeah. God, we thank you for what you're doing in the church, that you redeemed it to yourself, that you are building it up.

Each of us is a unique part of your body. Thank you for Jasper's love for you, for how you've blessed him in ISF, in a place that feels like a desert. Sometimes, um, that you have brought life through him, through Christ, working in him, in this community.

Continue to send him encouragement, God, as he works in that place. Um, we all know, we all remember the days when we were going through exams and how that could be stressful and anxious.

Um, give him the peace that surpasses understanding. Just show the people around him that he's built different. He's built different because he knows you, because your spirit lives in him.

Do a mighty work in him, we pray, and through, and through this next generation. That's why we're here. We're here to build the next generation who are on fire for you, burning bushes who represent your presence.

[11:41] So just go before him, behind him, and with him now, we pray. We love you, God, and we commit this to you in your name. Amen. Thank you. No worries, man. A round of applause.

Today's scripture reading is from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, chapter 2, starting from verse 11. And as is our usual practice, can we all stand for the word of the Lord? Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 11.

One in Christ. Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Verse 13. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two.

[13:13] So making peace. So making peace. And he might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who are far off and peace to those who are near.

For through him, we both have access in one spirit to the father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit.

This is the word of the Lord. Praise be to God. Thanks, JJ. Please take a seat. Thank you. So we're wandering. We're wandering.

We're in exile. We've been longing for that place, that place that we can call home, where we can feel like we belong, where we have the presence of God. And we talked about the Garden of Eden being that first temple.

[14:17] That means delight. It means there's a place where we can feel like we are, there's a plenty, that we are flourishing. And yet we are not there because we keep wandering and we keep turning our backs and we keep going the opposite way.

And so where do we find this home? How do we get this place where we truly belong? Paul says here. You'll find it in the household of God. The answer, the antidote to us being in exile, wandering, is here as the household of God.

The question is, what does that actually look like for us? N.T. Wright writes this about that passage that Julian just read to us. The point of Ephesians 2 is that you are now part of the single family, the household of God.

You aren't just a visitor. You belong here. And the house is still being built. You aren't just a spectator watching while God does more building. You are one of those stones.

So I want to talk a little bit about what it means for us to even be a household of God. And that's why when I was worshiping and praying, I was like, wow, we really are a family. We really are a group of people that are gathering together across different ages, across just a million different differences.

[15:23] And yet we are here together. We are in February now. Pinch punch first day of the month. We are. Is that an English thing? Is that a British thing? Only Gabs laughed. Okay. There we go. So just after Christmas, just before the new year, and we have this space where we usually are just kind of recuperating from all the gatherings at Christmas and we're getting ready and preparing ourselves for all the gatherings that are coming up in Chinese New Year.

And you look at the family gatherings that you have, or I look at the family gatherings that I have. It is a mix of all kinds of different people. That's what a family is. That's what a household is.

As you look across the room here and you see all the people here, you're like, whoa, this is my family. These are people who I'm actually connected with because of the blood of Christ. And the passage there is written.

Some people decide, let's run away from the family. We don't, wrong family. Okay. Only joking. I'm sure Janice will be back. We hope. Verse 19 says this, well, verse 18, for through him, we both have access in one spirit to the father.

Father. So all of us here, regardless of our background, regardless of anything we've ever done in our lives, we all now have access to father in the same way because of what Jesus did. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

[16:43] I want to share today about what it means to be in a household of God. And as Uday prayed so powerfully at the beginning, actually, it's been what I've been learning. It's been what I've been learning about being a part of the household of God that I hope that I can pass on and share with you.

So I come from a place where actually I'm one page ahead of you, which was my whole biology teaching career when I was teaching. But I'm one page ahead of you. I am still learning this. And actually, I've been filled with a lot of conviction and a lot of excitement when it comes to what does it actually mean to be a part of the household of God.

And the first thing it says here is that we are no longer strangers and aliens. We are no longer in exile. We're no longer on our own. We're no longer wandering on our own, just craving for this place.

We can actually find that belonging and find that home and find those answers right here, right now. John Stott says this, no longer are we homeless and orphans. We have come home and found our family. The church is our new community, our new home.

What does that even mean? Well, the first thing is we are fellow citizens, which means actually there's a very legal aspect to this. Because of what Christ did, we are now adopted. We are legally belonging to God the Father.

[17:51] So there's a legal component. There's a public component. When others look at us, oh, you are now a child of God. You now belong to God. There's that legal part. There's a public, there's a global part, which is now you are fellow citizens.

You coming here on a Sunday, yes, there are time zone differences, but you joined the church of God all around the world, worshipping God together. Isn't that beautiful? Isn't that amazing? You find your belonging here when you worship God together with this whole household.

You are a fellow citizen. But it's more than just being a fellow citizen with the saints. It's also being a member of the household of God. So not only is it a legal, public, global element to it, there's actually just a very intimate, local element to it as well.

You are a member of this household. This place here. I've got my son sat here. He's part of the household of the tanks. We have many things that make us distinct as tanks.

We are vertically challenged, most of all. But Reuben is threatening to break that. I think he's one centimeter off. But if you count the hair, then it doesn't really count. But tanks have many things of ours.

[19:01] I pray that there will be many things of ours. And I can say this publicly here. One thing is we don't like to do what other people do. So I've shared with them in the past. If you want to convince me to do something or let you do something, never start with, hey, but everyone else is doing it.

Oh, if you say that, that's perfect, perfect springboard for me to say, well, in that case, we won't do it. We will be different. You know, as you see in scripture, you know, some trust in chariots and some trust in horses.

But as for us in our household, we will do what? We will trust in the name of the Lord. So there are some things that are distinct about being in the household of the tanks. We have McDonald's regularly.

That's part of our religion. It's part of our life principle. When it's a birthday, we always go to Lavash because we love steak. And that's the place that we go to. And it's just a tradition. It's what we have. But what is it for us to be a household here?

What does it actually look like for us to be one here? Look, we're talking about family. And as I said at the beginning, we all come from very different kinds of families.

[20:06] The playing field is not even here. We all have very different dynamics when it comes to how we relate to our fathers and our mothers and our siblings and our relatives. But there's something about household family, which is why Paul uses it here.

And I'm going to challenge us today to think a little bit more about what that actually means. There's been a favorite term that I've used. I think I borrowed from Andy Stanley a number of years ago. When you're trying to describe a family, what you're trying to say is a church, sorry, is we are a family expecting guests.

So if you ask us, what are we doing as a church? We are a family expecting guests. We are gathering together for Christmas or for Chinese New Year or just for every Sunday night is when your family gathers. We are a family expecting guests. That's what we are here.

This is what this is. In case you walked into something and you're like, oh, what is your church about? Then that is it. We are a family expecting guests. And I think I've said that before. I'm going to add a little bit to it now because if you talk about what it means to be a family or what kind of collection of people do we have to turn into a family, I must say we are a family of disciples.

That is what it's all about. Someone asked me, I went to a lunch and I got to meet some new people. And someone asked, what do I do? And I said, I said, pastor. Of course, they're usually shocked. Oh, pastor, really? And then after that, oh, well, where's your church?

[21:17] Oh, it's in Admiralty. And then it's a little bit. Oh, what's your church like? Or rather, what's your church about? Oh, he asked me that question. And honestly, in a moment I panicked because I was like, you've got to come out with the right answer right here.

You've got to, this will show what you think church is about, James. I had all this conversation in my head within this millisecond that he asked me. And I said, our church is about making disciples of Jesus.

That's it. We are a family expecting guests. We are a family of disciples inviting, expecting guests to come. That's what we're about.

What does it mean for us to be a disciple? Our life group on Monday talked about this. I want to pick on them first to start. Matthew, I'm looking right at you. So we're going to go for this. Matthew, can you define to us what a disciple is?

Just shaking his head. Josh is nearby so he can whisper and help you if you need to. Follower, learner.

[22:19] To have discipline. Okay. To have discipline in following a discipline. And that discipline is, as Jasper said, following the way of Jesus. That's why we have that first statement. We're here to commit to following the discipline of Jesus.

Josh, do you have anything to add? To Matthew's answer. That was perfect. I asked someone else in our group who's not here.

So I went, it's not fair for me to name and shame them right here. I was like, hey, have you ever been disciplined before? And he's like, James, forget being disciplined before. I don't even know what a disciple is. Right? Is that true of a lot of us?

And I've said this before and I'll continue to say, honestly, this is the topic that I will keep talking about. If my wife's topic is trees, this is my topic. Just what does it mean for us to be disciplined? Actually, it was a quote that my brother shared with me by Dallas Woodard that said this. Dallas Woodard is someone from the States who just had a lot of incredible insights to what it means to be a Christian in this modern age.

[23:18] He was John Mark Comer before John Mark Comer. And he was asked, what's the big problem with the church right now in the West? And he said, the problem is the church has stopped making disciples of Jesus. The church is running programs.

It is running properties. It is doing all these other things. But it has stopped making disciples of Jesus. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Someone who is disciplined and following in the discipline of Jesus.

In walking in his way. And he says, the church has stopped doing that. Isn't that terrifying? Isn't that terrifying? Jesus said, you make disciples and I will build the church.

And as pastors go, okay, then we'll build the church. No, no, Jesus says, I will build the church. You just have to make disciples and teach them all that I have commanded you. And so Dallas Woodard said there's two questions that every church, including this one, must ask itself.

The first question is, what is your plan for discipleship? And the second question is, is that plan working? All that to say, this is the only thing that matters. And I've said this before, and I'll continue to say this all the way to my grave.

[24:22] You being here, us being Christians, the only thing that we have to think about and reflect on is, am I becoming a disciple of Jesus? Am I following in his way? The Chinese context has the word for that would be sifu.

Is Jesus your sifu? If you are an apprentice at a garage learning how to be a car mechanic, what are you doing? You are following someone and doing what they do in order to become a disciple of them.

Those of you who are in the medical profession, you are trying to basically follow someone in their ways, in the way they practice medicine so that you will become a disciple. You coming to church, but not just church on a Sunday.

You spending time with fellow believers. Are you becoming a disciple of Jesus? That surely is the only thing that matters. Matthew and Josh here have given us a great definition of what it means to be a disciple.

And you guys heard this on Monday, so I'm going to repeat it again. But the best place for me to find out what a disciple is, is to go to the teacher and to the master and to the rabbi himself.

[25:27] And if you go to Jesus and you look at what he wrote, actually, there's only three times in the whole of the gospel. There's only three times where he defines what a disciple is.

And before I even talk about what it means for us to be a household, we first have to determine and define what a disciple is. Is that okay? So only three times does Jesus define what a disciple is, and I want to run you through it.

But as I run you through it, I want you to ask this question for yourself. Am I a disciple? Am I actually following him? That is the key here. And the first one is this. And if you've got your Bibles, we're going to go through, there's three different parts.

We're going to be in the book of John through the whole time. So if you have Bible verse locating anxiety as you look into your Bible, then you only have to be in one book.

So then you only have to know the order of numbers. Okay, so chapter 8. John chapter 8 is the first time we see Jesus defining what a disciple is.

[26:22] John chapter 8, verse 31. I'm going to spend about 10-15 minutes talking about what a disciple is, and then I'm going to talk about what it means for us to be a whole household of God. Is

that okay? Okay. So John chapter 8, verse 31 says this.

He's talking to the Jews. So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him. So he's talking to his church. He's talking to his people. Okay. He said, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.

And then the second part of that verse is the one that maybe has been the most used and abused and butchered in human society. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. But let's go with the first part.

If you abide in my word, you will truly, you are truly my disciples. Let's go with the first word, abide. There's an app called Abide, which is great. What does the word abide even mean?

It means to dwell. It means to be in that, soak in his word. What is his word? Well, here. This is his book. Why do we stand and make ourselves a little bit uncomfortable, even just for a millisecond, is we're trying to remind ourselves that this is the word of God.

[27:29] When I asked the team to go, hey, can we pass the Bibles out? Do you realize what I just did? I said, guys, what does God want to say to us today? This is the word of God, the creator of the universe, distilled into a few pages for us.

Isn't this beyond precious? If you are truly his disciple, if you move. Now, we're all on a journey, okay? So not all of us are disciples here.

And on one level, that's okay. We're all on a journey, and God is so patient. And we are recipients of that grace and patience, and we're on that journey. And on Monday, I talked with my group about this, that actually the journey is to go from someone who doesn't know Jesus to believing in him, but eventually not to stay at believing in him, but eventually go to the place where we are following him. And so this journey is, how do you get on that journey? It starts with actually taking seriously what he says. How do you abide in his word?

How do you spend time in it? Do you spend time in it? And a few weeks ago, I challenged all of us, when compared to our Netflix minutes, when compared to our gaming or our social media scrolling, how much time do we spend truly with him?

[28:42] I still remember the days where I was falling in love with my wife, and she was texting me. But back then, in the late 1900s, each text could only be 160 characters.

Does anyone remember that? 160 characters, and it cost 10p a text. And so she, being ever efficient, would text without spaces.

She would just use the capital to kind of differentiate the next word. And then all the words would be abbreviated. So you'd look at it, it just looks like code. Oh, but did I abide in those words?

Did I look and think seriously, ponder, dwell on how many X's she put at the end of that 160 character message?

When you are in love, when you are in love, when you want to spend time, you will ponder those words. To this day, my mother still keeps the phone where my dad messaged her before he passed.

[29:43] Holding on to that phone, holding on to that message. And yet, with the word of God himself, we ignore.

We take for granted. We scroll through. If you abide in my word, you will truly be my disciples.

Psalms 1 says this. I delight in your word.

I meditate on it day and night. I want to be his disciple. Do you? If you do, then it starts with being in this word.

And if it's really hard, because the ESV is really hard to understand, then get the NLT. And read it in a language that you maybe feel more comfortable. If actually English is the hard one, then find the Chinese one.

But then the Chinese, Christianese is a whole other language. But so good luck with that. So then you go back to English. And then if you go back to English and NLT is still confusing, then praise God for Eugene Peterson.

[30:39] Go to the messages. Go to the message and go, okay, so that's what it means. And then, don't stay there though, please. And then go back to the other versions and start looking into it. If you care about something, you will just look deeply into it, is all I'm saying.

Dwell in his word. Abide in his word day and night. You think about the rhythm of the early church. They devoted themselves to what? The apostles teaching. What is the apostles teaching? What were they teaching? Peter wasn't saying, hey, here are my seven steps to the best life.

Peter was saying, this is what Jesus taught me. Go to it. Spend time in it. And honestly, it's really hard to do it alone. So we have to do it together. So one of the ways to do it is when we gather like this.

When we gather like this. And my prayer and my commitment to all of us here is that actually those who come up here to share from the word of God will share from a place where we are being as true as possible to the word of God.

That we are not using the word to then basically share our own things, but we are going to the word, submitting ourselves under the power of the word of God. And we are staying there. And that's what we call exegetical, expository preaching, where we look at this and we go, the word will speak for itself.

[31 : 42] We just need to open it up. We just need to just shine a light on it. Help each other understand what the word of God is saying. That is what we are trying to do. When you gather here, what you're trying to do, you're trying to find out more about God.

You're not here to listen to me and my jokes. You're here to find out about God. And I'm here to share with you about God. And I'm here to share with you about how we need God. We'll call that sin. We'll call that our depravity.

Actually, we are here to find out about us and how we are in deep need of a savior. That is why we spend this time here. And then we find out that actually the savior that we need, he's actually all we have.

That's why we are here. To reorient, to recalibrate ourselves. And that's why Gabe a few weeks ago shared from Colossians 3. To dwell richly. In what?

The word of Gabe. No, not the word of Gabe. The word of Christ. To dwell richly. Brings me on to something else. I don't know if we are that rich in the word of Christ.

[32 : 46] I think our biblical literacy on the most part is quite poor. Is quite weak. That's why we train ourselves. That's why we try and use this. Get to the point where we are more familiar with what God is actually saying.

Because if we want to be a disciple, that's where it starts. John chapter 8. The second one is this. John chapter 13. So scroll a few pages ahead.

This is a defining one. Okay? So this is the second time out of three times. Okay? The second time is this. He's having dinner. Not just any dinner. This is the last dinner. We know it as the last supper. And it's the last supper where he's about to die. And so he goes out of his way to do a few very special things that maybe he hasn't done before. And we see it documented here in John 13. I preach this at Gabe and Jojo's wedding as well. Which is, he takes off his robe. And then he kneels down by their smelly feet. And then he starts washing their feet.

[33 : 45] Rabbi! Their master decides to turn the tables. Even with Judas. Just so you know.

He didn't let the traitor go before he did it. He did it knowing that he was going to go betray Jesus. And then he shows him, well, this is what you're going to do. And then John chapter 13, verse 34. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. You also are to love one another. Verse 35. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

If you have love for one another. So if you're going to be a disciple, one, you need to spend time with him, reading his word. The second time is you have to be with people. Because you cannot love one another without people around.

You cannot love one another on your own. Which is why we keep talking. Sanctification is a community project. It requires us to be together. So you may find this place, and someone shared with me this morning, Oh yeah, I struggled to come today.

[34 : 49] It was a hard one. Well, I was like, good on you for coming. Praise God that you were able to come. Because this is how you fulfilled this second requirement for becoming a disciple. By being amongst people so you have an opportunity, so you have an outlet.

You have a way to love other people. Now, Jesus went to the extreme. If you've been in a Christian circle before, and you've been to Christian conferences, maybe you've washed someone's feet, or maybe you were hardcore like Gabe and Jojo, and you actually did it on your wedding day, which is this beautiful, most beautiful and appropriate display of love for one another.

But we all know that, again, people are hard. But next time you look at someone, you go, you're really hard to love. And then you remind yourself, okay, well, this is exactly why Jesus, before he

died on his last meal, reminded us, this is how we love one another, by laying down our own preferences, our own comforts.

And so we look and go, okay, I need you to become more like Christ. I need you to become a disciple of Jesus, because you're the one that gives me an opportunity to love like Christ loved me. We need those people around us. But just bear in mind here, that act of washing feet is a big one. How many of us do that at a dinner table?

[36:00] Not often. The act of dying on the cross is an even more powerful example of loving. But if you just pause there for a second, and I pondered this last week, actually the biggest act of love that Jesus did, yes, washing the feet, yes, dying on the cross.

But my goodness, he left heaven to come and be with them. Simply sitting at the table was a display and an act of ultimate love already. Can you see that?

He didn't need to come down to be with them, to spend 33 years in this mortal body that needed to eat poo and do all the human body things.

He is God, he's divine, and yet he chose to come and spend time with us. When was the last time you deliberately spent time with someone who you don't actually like to spend time with? We don't do it because we're so busy that we would rather spend time with those who we love.

And yet the Prince of Heaven decided to leave Heaven's throne to spend time with people who would eventually betray him and deny him and run away from him. Isn't that just the biggest act of love?

[37:04] So next time you're sat on Thursday evening in life group looking at someone who you're like, oh, I don't agree with you. I don't really like you. I don't like the look of your face.

Sorry, Matthew, I was completely accidental just looking over towards you. I actually do quite like the look of your face. I'm like, wow, but Jesus came to sit at the table with me.

And now he's telling me to do the same. And if I do this, I fulfill number two out of three, which is I'm a disciple of Jesus. I'm following in the way of Jesus. Isn't that exciting?

Isn't that good that we can do that? So next time you see someone that you really don't like, you're like, I am so glad that you're here because because of you, I get to be more like Christ.

How beautiful is that? Jackie's like, hmm, I know quite a few of those kind of people. Many opportunities. Can we see? That's what Jesus is showing us.

[38:04] Okay, final word on that. We hear a lot. It's hard to come to this church in particular, or not just this one.

Everyone says this about all the other churches. Oh, but there's not people like me. I need people who are of the same demographic as me, the same age as me, the same preferences as me. And only then will I feel like I belong.

Only then will I feel comfortable. Well, let me ask you again about that Christmas family gathering that you had, or the one that you're going to have with Chinese New Year. You look around your family gathering.

How many of the people are just like you, who are the same age as you, who like the same things that you do? Not that many. Why? Because it's a family. That's the whole definition of a family. That there are across all the generations, there's across all the ages, and everyone has that annoying, weird uncle.

Everyone. But that's family. Another chance to show that we are disciples of Jesus. And finally, just maybe even be on the same page, John chapter 15, verse 8.

[39:06] He's talking about abide again. Abide. Be with me. Stay with me. Dwell with me. Cling on to me. And then he says, you know, abide to me through the vine and the branches. Chapter 15, verse 8.

And then says this. By this, my father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. So there's two aspects to this.

There's an inward one, and there's an outward one. The outward one, let's start with that one, because last week we talked, when you are a living stone, as we saw in 1 Peter 2, people outside the Gentiles, those who don't believe, will look at you and go, whoa, you guys are different.

You guys love each other in a different way. You love people who you don't naturally want to love. And so that actually attracts them in. You're actually spending time with these people, and so there's an outward fruit. So if you bear fruit, you will be a disciple.

That means when people look at you, and you actually contribute to just human flourishing, you contribute to society, you contribute to life, you do good things. You look at the schools around in this city, you look at the hospitals that are around.

[40:07] How are they built? Who are they built by? Christians. Those who have a love for God, who want to be disciples of Jesus, and you see Christians everywhere, since the beginning of time, in every city around the world, being the people who are on the front lines.

Wherever there is trouble, they will go to the front. Why? Because they are disciples of Jesus, keen on abiding in him and bearing much fruit. So there is a good works aspect to this.

The Apostle James says, actually, faith without works is dead. So actually, the way you live, the way you, what you believe, should overflow into how you actually live. And you actually, the goal here is this.

You have friends, or you have family, you have colleagues, who will call you in their time of need. Who will be like, actually, sorry, we haven't really spoken that much. Just as Jasper experienced. We don't really know each other that well, but you were that annoying person that sent me those reels in the past.

And not only did you send me those reels, you seem to actually live by them. You're actually different. Built different, is what Juju said. And then they go to you.

[41:09] And they go, hey, can you help me with this? Can you pray for me about this? The challenge here is this. How do we do this? Is, can we get to a point where actually our colleagues will reach us out?

Reach out to us and go, hey, I'm going through this tough time. I know you believe in that Jesus stuff. Can I have some help? Can you hear me out? Can you pray for me? It's you and your school friends hanging out, and then a friend going, actually, I'm really in trouble.

Can I come and help you? If you can get to a place, if we can get to a place where people look at us differently, in a positive way, bearing in mind, not everyone will look at us in a positive way, Jesus is already accounted for that in his Beatitudes.

He said, blessed are you when others persecute you and say, vow things against you because of me. Then you'll join me. But can we get to a place where others will look at our good works and give praise and glory to our Father in heaven?

That's the goal that we have here, that we have this outward living, outward expression of our faith. When we do that, we will be a disciple of Jesus. But there is an inward one as well. Because when I think about fruit, I think about my favorite grapes, which are the Australian crispy kind of grapes.

[42:12] Yes. Not the squidgy soft ones. I'm not a fan of those. I'm thinking about the fruit of the spirit. I'm thinking about fruit that takes time to grow. I think about fruit that once they're given time to grow, they will bring sweetness to people's lives.

I'm thinking about Galatians 5. I'm thinking about love, joy, peace, patience, kindness. Flo has a song about that if you want to have her sing it to you. The fruit of the spirit. So not only do we have an outward expression, we also have an inward one where people look at us and go, that person is really patient.

That person. Look, we all work in different kinds of places where there is a hierarchy and those at the bottom of the ladder get kicked the hardest. Could we be those people who when we progress, when we were kicked at the bottom of the ladder and by the time you get to the middle or the top, you don't kick people in return.

That you can be like, hey, I remember what it was like. But don't worry. These are the standards that I live by. These are the values of the kingdom that I live by.

And so for people to be able to see the love and the joy and the peace and the patience and the gentleness and the kindness and the self-control that our Lord displayed himself. Doesn't mean we're pushovers. Doesn't mean we're doormats.

[43:28] But just in case you're worried, Jesus ended up on a place worse than the doormat. He ended up on a cross for us. So that should exempt us from any fear of losing out. When our Savior ended up on a cross, it would be okay if we were a doormat, even temporarily.

But can we be people who exhibit fruit in our lives as well? Inwards and outwards is what we're looking at. Those are the three points. That's it. If you want to be a disciple, you just think about those three things.

Am I abiding in his word? Am I loving other people? And am I bearing fruit? Can we be a family of disciples expecting and inviting guests to come?

That's what our church is about. Where are you on this discipleship journey? Have a think. Have a think where you are. And I want to finish with just maybe a couple of different examples just to see where you're at.

My whole point is actually that you can have a little bit of a reflection and go, hmm, where am I? And I'm going to split it into three different parts. When we're talking about being a household of God, members of this household, I can think of three different things that we can go about this.

[44 : 30] One, you might be a guest. Is anyone here for the first time? I will not embarrass you. Here for the first time? Excellent. Welcome. Good to have you. And so you are a guest. We don't know you.

I don't know you. And you're here just to basically inquire. Maybe you were invited by a friend. Maybe you were forced to come by your mother. Whatever it might be, you are here and we welcome you. You are a guest. Don't know you.

And you're here just to inquire about what it means to who Jesus even is. That's completely okay. And my prayer is that you'll, as you are a guest, and as you come in and you go, oh, I'm inquiring. I know a little bit more about this Jesus thing. And then maybe my prayer is that you'll encounter him. Not only just inquire about him, but that you will actually encounter him. And you go, oh, I think I can feel some kind of love here that I've not felt outside before.

That's my prayer. So you're a guest. There's another kind of guest where maybe I don't know you, but I do know your face. I have seen you around. And maybe you actually, especially in Hong Kong, maybe you actually go to a different church and you're here just to get some rest, just to recover a little bit.

[45 : 36] Maybe reorient your mind, recalibrate just your mindset going into the next week. And you're here just, look, I'm not part of this family. That's completely okay. I just want to be here as a guest. You might see my face. You might recognize me, but that's okay.

I'm here just to spend some time with God to worship. And to you, I'd like to say, welcome, welcome that you're here. We are a family expecting guests. We are family of disciples expecting and inviting guests.

But you may graduate from being a guest where I either don't know you or simply know your face. And you may now move it. You're not quite family yet, but you will move into another stage. We're defining the relationship here, by the way. You might be a friend.

I know your face. I may even know your name. And you may come up and say hi every now and again. If you're brave and you don't let your introvertism define you, you may even grab lunch and come upstairs afterwards and have lunch with us.

Daunting, I know. But actually, if that is the case for you, can I invite, come up to speak to me first. And then I will take you up to lunch. And we'll just hang out. And I'll introduce you to some people. And again, just hot take here, but I believe that we are majority introverts.

[46 : 43] Okay? I am not joking. I think we are majority introverts here, so you are not. You are definitely not alone. It's just that as the way is, as just being with people it is, it just lends itself to extroverts more.

Okay? But we are majority introverts. You're a friend. You might stay for lunch. You might be really good at football, so we've invited you into the football team or for the basketball team. Or you may have come to play dodgeball with us or volleyball with us or spikeball with us.

We've done all these things. So you are a friend. And so we know your name. And I want to say, welcome you. Welcome you on this discipleship journey. In case you are in doubt, I want to make sure that you know that you are a friend, but you're also still on this discipleship journey, just like a guest.

Okay? You might then upgrade your friendship to the next level. When you upgrade to this next level, you are another friend and friend where we not only know your name, but we actually know your life. We know what you do.

This is the stage where, as a part of this community, you might even consider entering into a life group. A life group is a time where a group of people spend some time together finding out even more about each other.

[47 : 52] It's what the world outside calls let's do life together. And so beyond just coming on a Sunday morning, now you're choosing to spend extra time with us. When you don't have to, not that

you have to be here anyway, but you actually want to spend time with some of these people and you decide to go and grab others for coffee.

Go and visit them at their workplaces. Go and watch the shows that they're putting on. Whatever it might be, you are starting to become a friend where you're actually doing life with people. So not only do we know your face, we know your name, or we know your life and what you do.

This is getting exciting because you're starting to get to know the people. There's a sense of belonging that's building up. You walk in here, how do you, when you come into church, it's really daunting when you see all these people here and you don't know them, but it's always much better as soon as you look across and you see the five, 10 people that you know.

Like, ah, these are my friends. They know me. They know what I do. They know my life. This is good. That sense of belonging is growing. But we also don't want you to stop there because that's not the end of the discipleship journey.

Ephesians 2 does not talk about being strangers and aliens and eventually finding some good mates to hang out with. It says you become fellow citizens with the saints and a household of God, members of the household of God.

[49:08] And so then we move into the family territory. And I pray that there are a group of us here who actually feel as though we can call ourselves, well, we can call this church, and family. What does this look like?

Not only do we know your face, your name, your life, and what you do, we start to know your middle name. My name is James Tang, but actually, legally speaking, I'm not James Tang.

I'm actually Tang Yatman. So actually, James is a completely made-up name by my mother just to help me assimilate into British society so I wouldn't get bullied at school. But if you started to know me more, then you'd know my middle name is Yatman.

And my brother's middle name is Heyman. It's funny, right? Yeah, you can still bully him. We start to know you a little bit more.

And you can just go up to Say Heyman. It's pretty funny. We become family. And what do you do when you're with a family? Ruben, what do you do if you're part of this family?

[50:05] You wash the dishes. You hang the clothes. And you contribute to the household to prove the reason for your existence.

When you're part of a family, you serve. And so you're getting to this place now as you're on this discipleship journey, you're starting to serve. You're starting to contribute. You're starting to say, how can I help?

How can I help? I want to bear fruit. I want to love you. What does it look like? So you're part of this place where you're actually starting to serve. And if you keep going further and further into the family, well, maybe what's been most exciting for me this year is starting something called the fellowship off, where I get to spend time with people who I can see them every day on a prayer call, where I can read the word of them together every day.

And my goodness, we had the most touching time, even just for me on Friday evening, where we just got to see a brother and a family and just pray for them. I was like, nothing, nothing beats being together.

Nothing beats being together, not only in the good times, but in the bad times. You become family. You spend time abiding in the word. You spend time loving in one another.

[51:18] You spend time trying to bear fruit together. And you realize you are now family. Tell you what, all of that requires commitment.

All of that requires us saying, I would rather spend time with you than do this. I'm going to give up this and make you the big rock in my life.

That's what family is. And this is where, actually, I'll share with you again. I shared with you before. Growing up in the UK, I'm not used to this, where there are so many churches to choose from.

There is such transience because we're a city where people come in, make as much money as they can, further their career, and then move out.

And the moment you don't like the worship in a church, or the sermon in a church, or the room that you're in, the moment that happens, you go, you know what, maybe I'll go find another one.

Forgive me if I'm treading into slightly deeper and dangerous waters here, but I don't know if that's what being a member of a household of God means.

[52:24] I think it means when you commit to a group of people and you look at them and you go, I think you are so ugly and so annoying, but I'm going to stay here because you are part of my family. Being a member of the household of God. And this is where I want to share a little bit more because it's something that I've been learning about membership, about what it actually means to be part of the church.

Because I'll tell you this, as I was sharing about the different people who have different challenges, I'm like, I actually don't know who's really part of this family. I'll tell you why it helps a shepherd or a pastor like me.

When I know that you are part of the family, I'll know that I need to show up at the hospital when something's going wrong. That if you're having trouble, some trouble at home, I know that I'm supposed to show up at your house to look after you, to call you, to text you, to check in on you. This is why it's actually important because there's a part of me that has also thought, you know what? Membership isn't important. We all have so many different things that we're juggling already. Maybe it's just too much to even ask people to commit and to have a show of commitment to a family.

[53:29] But I'm like, you know what? It helps me to know who actually wants to be cared for here. Or whether you actually just want to stay in the guest level and the friendship level, which is okay. But for those who are actually wanting, okay, this is my family, this is my home.

As a pastor, I need to know. So that when you go through good times and bad times, I want to be there. Can't be there for everyone, especially for those who are members of other communities because they have their own shepherds and they don't want to go into that territory.

But if you're part of here, it's been what I've been thinking about. How do we get people here to actually be able to articulate that you are a member of the community here?

And I recognize this causes to a different level. Something that I'm figuring out, but I wanted to share a little bit with you because I think we need to learn how to commit to one another.

Actually commit to one another. Jonathan Lehman says this, Ephesians 2 represents the church as God's household. In a household, members know who is in and who is out.

[54:31] They share a name, a table, a common life, and mutual responsibilities. Church membership is simply the church's formal affirmation that you belong to the household and share in its privileges and responsibilities.

I'm here to tell you, guys, I think there's something in membership. I think there's something in publicly committing to a group of people and saying, I'm with you through thick and thin. And actually, you are my shepherd and I need you to be with me and help me.

This is where I'll pause for a second because you must understand this. We are part of a wider church. The wider church is called Kongfuk Church. Kongfuk Tong. Bord of EFCC is the denomination that we're part of.

The gathering is the English congregation within this bigger church. And so there actually is a membership thing, part of Kongfuk Church. Can I just have a show of hands as to who's even part of that?

There we go. Of course, we have Hank over there who is literally the OG. Kelly, also the OG in a different way.

[55:41] People who have committed to being part of this church, and I'll tell you how important that is because we're part of this wider family. When you're part of a family, there is a presence and there is contribution that comes with the belonging.

The fine balance that actually Hank and I were just talking about the other day was how do we help those of us who, myself included, I said I'm only one page ahead of you, how do we help those of us who are on this journey commit and actually learn to grow in being a member of the community? So I wanted to just share with you here, we're figuring things out. Actually, next week we're going to talk to the leaders about this. How do we come up with maybe just like a stepping stone for us to actually understand the community that we're actually committing to? How do we actually be actually part of this family?

So I want you to prepare yourself and I want you to spend this time thinking if I'm going to be part of this family to be a disciple of Jesus, then actually there's going to be a show of commitment now in the convict side, actually you can only serve if you're a member.

But here, of course we're organic and we've been trying to figure it out whether it's 10 years ago when KFCI started or these last few years when it's evolved into what it is. We're always trying to figure out what it means for this next generation, for us growing up into this community, what does it mean for us to commit?

[56:49] What does it mean for us to hold each other accountable, to call each other higher and to be with each other at the lowest? Being a member of the household of God. And you may look at all of that and go, man, that's hard, that's a lot.

And here's my final statement and I realize I've run out of time. Actually, those are the three places that Jesus describes what a disciple is but there's actually one other place where he talks about what it means to not be a disciple and it's in Luke 14 and he's talking about when you count the cost to be a disciple of Jesus that actually you have to surrender the relationships that you have.

You actually have to surrender all the possessions that you have. You actually have to surrender just your comfort, your luxury. He says, don't be a disciple unless you count the cost. Unless you decide that this is worthwhile, then don't do it because being a disciple of Jesus is not easy.

The one comfort, the only comfort that we have, the only comfort that we need though is that Jesus looked at us and decided that we are worthwhile. That he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of man.

He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. Why is it worth becoming a disciple of Jesus? Because he looked at you and said, you are worth it.

[58:12] I love you so much that I am willing to die for you. So yes, it does come with commitment and in these coming months we are going to talk more about what it means to commit to this community. Maybe by God's grace we will have some kind of form for us to look at to be able to articulate clearly what that means.

Come on, even the grocery shop 759 has some kind of membership in the members card. I am here saying as a household of God we need to figure out with clarity and with love and with grace what it means to be a household because that is what we are called to.

Because we are called to be disciples who count the cost and follow regardless. Recognizing that we need each other to become more like him. We are going to finish with the time of communion now and I want you to spend some time now, I want us to spend some time to pray.

To ask ourselves what is going on in our hearts? When I talk about commitment maybe that is the word that you have struggled with for so long. You don't even know what it means to commit or what it actually entails and you are still hesitant and I am saying whether you are a guest or a friend or a family it doesn't matter.

There is no judgment here. There is all grace. We are a community and family built on grace and grace alone. The question is what do we do with that grace? How do we respond to that grace?

[59:28] So we are going to a time of communion where we remind ourselves that we here commit to being part of the body of Christ. Can I just give you a few moments now just to reflect by yourself?

Thank you. A thousand generations falling down in worship of the one who is and is to come.

So Lord, teach us what it means to be disciples of you to follow in your way. Teach us what it means to be fellow citizens.

Teach us what it means to be members of a household. Lord, we commit to you because you committed yourself to us. You loved us first.

We thank you that we are a new people, a new community. We are your church. We give thanks to you.

[60:38] We glorify you and you alone. In your name we pray. Amen.