

God's Lost and Found: The Running Father

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[0 : 00] Hi there, everyone. Hello. Good morning. Good morning. Hi, my name is Michael, and this is my wife, Vance. And this is Curtis right in front here, and also Chloe, our daughter.

We're from the Uncharted CG, and we just want to share a little bit today about an experience we had earlier this month on a boat trip. Okay, so first slide.

Right? So, oh, wait, okay. All right, so two weeks ago, we had a drunk trip. When our group decided to have this drunk trip, that was before the October 1st tragedy.

So did it have an impact on our invitation? Yes. So a lot of people turned down when we first asked. And then, but then, you know, we prayed a lot, and I think when we are weak, he is strong.

So I think through a lot of prayers, I did experience, like, something really, really touching from God. I remember three weeks. That was this Saturday when I was at home, and then Michael and I prayed, right?

[1 : 10] And then all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit just moved and asked us to invite different people. And so, like, yeah, we just sent out WhatsApp, and we called those people.

We emailed them. And then, like, all of a sudden, we got these replies. And then, I think two weeks before the boat trip, we only had half of the boat full.

But then we were targeting to recruit about 30 people. And at the end, 32 people showed up. So that was really awesome. And then also, I think, through the prayers, we just, we were very touched by God and see how different people came to this boat trip.

I think we had a good mix of people. We had 10 people from our own CG, 10 other people from Watermark, and then 10 other people from around this neighborhood.

And so we had really great, amazing people, people who are seekers, people who are new believers, people who are struggling with their faith.

[2 : 19] There was this girl who is a student, and she studies in Macau. And she said in Macau, the environment is very different for her faith.

And because she was a new Christian, you know, people challenged her and said right into her face that the God that she believes is not true. So when she came, I think Christina and Tobin encouraged her, and Dr. Hanno's there.

And so, yeah, it was good to see how this just bonded everybody. And so, next slide. Okay.

And I think what, as a very young community group, and a young boy with us all the time, one of the things that we experience is how we engage people on the boat.

And that's something that we were really worried. We're thankful that even there are a couple that were not able to join us were praying for us. And we can really see how God helped us through those hours.

[3 : 23] And thanks, Tobin. You know, God always gives us a hand during that. One of the things that happened that was very similar to this was when we were on the boat, there were at least, there were a time, there were different moments during that period where God really showed us how he helped us through those experiences.

And, for example, there were about nine children, and they all want water activities. But how do we continue to talk to people?

I remember James were with, like, five or six children in the water looking after everyone at one time. So thanks, James, for that. And that helped other groups to have other activities like chatting. I recall that there were some great man's talk at one side of the boat, and Tobin was there to share even, you know, the gospel with some people right in the boat.

And we also have some praise and worship time, some singing time together. And these are just little things that God has done during the trip. For a very young CG like us, we need that

encouragement to get something going because we were nervous.

[4 : 43] But when we're there, we know that God has prepared something very special for all of us. Okay, next slide. Yeah, when we first started, yeah, it was a very small community group.

It started with our family, the Hammonds and the Smiths, Graham and Joshua. And then I remember we, you know, we attended Watermark for some time, but we had a discussion and we said, you know, we just don't feel comfortable joining a community group because, you know, life is busy and, you know, all those excuses, right?

But then I think God is amazing. So when we prayed, we said, okay, should we join a community group? And we hear Tobin often talking about walking this journey together. We prayed and then God just led us to this group, you know, small enough for us to be comfortable with.

And so that's how we started. And I think throughout this journey, we always talk about the journey. It's great to walk with people who share the same faith and just see God doing miracles in our community group.

And so now, yeah, we've expanded within six months of time. Next slide, please. Yeah, so we have, yeah, all these people. And I think our CG just reflects how multicultural Watermark is.

[6 : 02] Yeah, just bring a lot of amazing people here. And you would see some of those faces today as we're one of the groups that are doing the welcoming out there today. And so let us all pray.

And we can also pray for the Watermark kids. Let's pray together. God, we want to thank you for always being there in our journey. And one of the reasons we know we're here is to share your love to those who are in need.

And we want to pray for all the CG's, especially the young ones who are having the same challenge as us, trying to embark in this journey to share your love with others.

And we also want to pray for all the kids here as they are a great and important part of this journey, God. And we want to pray for them and that for those who didn't know you would get to know you very soon.

And, Lord, we want to thank you for how you've guided us in this journey. Lord, we thank you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. And so Watermark kids, you're dismissed. Thank you. Thanks, guys.

[7 : 13] Okay, I was so into that time, I missed my cue. So I had no idea that I was supposed to come on up. I feel like I just should stay there and keep worshiping with everybody, right?

How you guys doing? Yeah, good. That's amazing. I feel like after the testimonies of the ten who will be baptized in a couple minutes, after just seeing that, I feel like we just need to stop and not do anything else because it's just, that's why we're here, right?

That's what we said as a church. We're here to trust the Lord, to reach people who don't know Him, the songs and the music. And it's all about Christ. We are on a journey here.

So we have been doing a Lost and Found series for four weeks. First thing, we found this venue, okay? Just so you know that. We've been praying for like, for a month, we had no place to meet. Literally, today, tomorrow, next Sunday. And we just kept praying and kept praying for like God was going to open up something and He gave us this place again. And as far as we know, we're here until the indefinite future or until Christ comes again or something like that happens.

[8 : 29] So you shouldn't have to look on your bulletin for a while. Just keep coming back here. So do I hear amen to that? I was like, wow, that's amazing. So that's a huge blessing for all of us, I think, in some ways, until we outgrow this place and we have to figure out what we do next.

And then the 10 people who shared their stories today, I think that, to me, is amazing. So we're on this journey, and we've been studying Lost and Found for four weeks.

And I always have this fear when we look at a passage more than two times. And the fear for me, it's personal, is the fear that I'll know the passage, but I won't live the passage.

Does that make sense? That we walk through our spiritual life and we want to know, know, know, but we don't talk about living.

And often I think I struggle with confusing knowing with maturity, but knowing is not maturity. Living, the passage, is maturity.

[9 : 37] And so we come to this passage today, and even as we do it, I'm just mindful of how often we could read something and see something and miss the whole point.

I remember the story of this prison guard who one day was approached by the warden. There was a massive theft in the prison, and the warden wanted the guard to stop it.

And so he charged the guard with stopping it, and no one knew who was stealing anything. And so the guard watched day after day, and one thing he noticed that was consistent is every day about five o'clock, a workman who was working in the prison would come up to the gate with a wheelbarrow in his hand full of sawdust and a big smile on his face.

And the guard said, that's the guy who's stealing everything. And so he went over, and for the first time ever, he patted the guy down, checked the wheelbarrow, checked the sawdust, and there was nothing in it.

And the guy just smiled, and the guy walked by. And he did that day after day after day, and things kept disappearing day after day after day. And he couldn't sleep at night.

[10:46] And he started thinking, what am I missing? What am I missing? It's so plain. It's in front of me. What am I missing? What am I not seeing here? I know this is the guy who's stealing stuff. And so the next day, he grabbed the guy as he's walking out with his wheelbarrow full of sawdust with a big smile on his face, and he said, you're killing me.

I can't sleep at night. I know you're taking stuff out of here, but I just don't know how you're doing it. I promise I will not arrest you. What are you stealing?

And the worker looked at him, smiled, and said, I'm stealing wheelbarrows. You get it? Every day, he pushed the wheelbarrow out.

Okay, think about it. The reason I tell that story is because I think that's so often like our life, that we see things that are right in front of us.

We see things that should be so clear to understand and to interpret, but we don't get them because we are tainted by our history, by our culture, by how many times we come to the scripture and reread this passage over and over.

[11:59] And we just assume that we know it. My prayer for us today is we come to this passage again, that we would read it as if for the first time, and that God would speak to us, and that he would show us the wheelbarrows in our life that we're missing because they become so common in our habits and in the things we do.

The story is Luke 15, and Jesus is eating with some sinners. The Pharisees, the religious people, the good Christians, the churchgoers are looking at him, and they're pretty disgusted with him because they said, there's no way a holy person would do that.

There's no way that a man of God would spend time with sinful people. He'll be tainted. He'll be changed. God would never work with unrepentant people.

And in the midst of this, Jesus tells this story, and you've heard it before. He actually tells one story, but it has three parts. The first part is about a shepherd with sheep.

The second part is about a woman with coins. And the last part is the story we come to today. The third part is about a wealthy landowner who has two sons. And the youngest son asks and receives his inheritance, and he's given the right to sell it.

[13:18] Now, in Jesus' day, this request and this granting of this request would have been unthinkable. No one would have ever thought of it. No one would have ever done it. I've known guys who've lived in Middle Eastern cultures for 30 years, and for 30 years, they've shared this story with people in their cultures, and they've said, have you ever heard this or seen this happening?

And everyone has always said for 30 years, no, it would never happen in this day. Culturally, everybody would have expected the dad to refuse his son to grab him and have him beat publicly. Because what the son was saying was, I don't really care about you, dad. I want you to die. I want your stuff. It would have been so intense in that setting that the community, the village, would have come after that young son, and they would have expected, they would have demanded honor and retribution.

They would have come after them, and they would have grabbed the son after the dad had beat him and disciplined him, and they would have beat him over and over, and then probably he would have been banished forever, never to come back to the city or to the little town.

They would have wanted and expected the dad's honor to be upheld, and the honor of the community to be upheld.

[14:36] And this son was out of control. Well, this father does an amazing thing. He doesn't punish his son, but he grants the request. Everybody, again, watching this would have thought this

was totally, totally foolish.

There's no way that a dad would do this, because it's a massive act of love. It's a massive act of mercy. It's a massive act of sacrifice. In doing this, the father is potentially putting his own life and his welfare at risk, because he's selling things and allowing things and resources that he might need in his later age.

But he freely gives it to his son. What's interesting about this story is that the older son is watching. And his role within the family and within the culture in this time would have been to bring shalom, to bring peace.

He would have been the one expected to reconcile. He would have been the one expected to come between the dad and the younger son and bring peace, but he doesn't. And when people heard this story and they asked, why didn't he do that?

They would realize right away that something was wrong with the dad's heart. The son's heart, the older son's heart. Something was wrong with the older son's heart and that his relationship with his dad was just as bad as the younger son's relationship with the dad.

[15:54] Culturally and in the text, both sons failed. Both sons failed to live together in peace with each other. They failed to live together in peace with the father.

And everybody watching this story happen. Everybody reading and listening would have realized the sons don't really love the dad.

They just love the stuff. The dad can give them. We're told later on that the younger son escapes. He sells all of this produce, which again would have been a terrible slam on the dad in the culture. And he escapes the community and he runs off to a distant land.

He abandons his father. He abandons his tradition. He abandons his heritage. He abandons community. He abandons the family of God. He leaves everything. We're told that as he is in a foreign land, he wastes his inheritance on extravagant living.

[17:01] And in Hebrew and Greek, the word is not he bought prostitutes. The older brother brings that up at the end. Because the older brother wants to cast blame on him and maybe have the younger son killed because of his actions.

But we're not told that here. All we're told is that he lives beyond his means. And living beyond his means in this foreign land sounds very much like many of us in Hong Kong.

He loses everything. A famine hits. And in Middle Eastern cultures, famines were the worst thing ever. Because everybody would have been affected.

Millions or thousands or millions of people would be dying. He looks for a job. And he finally finds the only job that will have him, which is herding pigs. Now again, in a Jewish culture, that is the worst job you could have.

Some rabbis would even say it was better to be a prostitute than a pig herder. So we're told that he's herding these pigs. And as he's doing it, he's starving.

[18:07] He's hungry. He doesn't have anything. And so in verse 17, we're told here that he comes to his senses. In Greek, the words are, he returned to himself.

He's not thinking about what he did to his dad. He's not thinking about how poorly he treated the father. He's just thinking about how hungry he is. There's no sense of biblical repentance in this story whatsoever right now.

Sometimes I read it like that, but I miss the wheelbarrow. He's just hungry. And he doesn't like being hungry. And so he thinks of this scheme to come back to the father.

And on his way home, he thinks through, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to come to my father. I'm going to apologize. And I'm going to offer myself out as a hired person. It's very interesting.

Because in this culture, there were three types of workers in a family. There was a bondsman who was almost like a relative. You just loved him. You worked with him forever. And he was just a part of your family.

[19:18] There was a slave. They walked around barefooted. It was a symbol of being a slave. They had no authority. They just did whatever they wanted to. And then there was a hired man. This is what the younger son wanted to become.

He wanted to become a hired man. Mostly because he didn't want to be under the authority of his dad or his older brother. Because a hired man was free.

And his goal was to work hard enough to do enough, to make enough money to pay back all of his debt. He wasn't thinking about the infractions that he had.

He was just thinking about that he was going to work hard enough to do all of these things. And then he'll pay back his debt. Because in Jesus' day, that's what redemption was. When you talked about repentance.

When you talked about getting right with God. What the Jewish person would have thought was, you work hard. You cry a lot. You show remorse. And after you've done that enough, then God will bring you back.

[20 : 22] And this is what the younger son is thinking. His plan is. This is what his scheme is. His goal is to save himself. And after he's worked hard enough, he'll pay back his debt. And then he'll be a free man. He'll be able to do everything that he wants to do.

The younger son is also incredibly worried. Because he realizes that the village has been incredibly embarrassed and dishonored.

And he's worried about if he walks into the church. If he walks into the community of faith after blowing it. He's worried what the other Christians. He's worried about what the other villagers are going to do to him.

Are they going to accept him back? Or are they going to shun him? Are they going to demand the kazah ceremony? There was a ceremony that was called kazah.

Basically what happened is when someone went out, they left, they dishonored. There was a dishonor not only on the person but the whole village. And so to accept this person back, when this person came back and you saw them from a long distance, all the villagers came out and they lined up on a row.

[21 : 27] And then the guilty party would have to walk in between the villagers towards the village. And as he walked through this people and this mass of angry people, they would throw stones at him.

They would spit at him. They would yell at him. They would pull his hair. They would beat him. And in the history of Middle Eastern culture, no one ever survived this ceremony.

So you know that the younger son, he's really, really worried about that because he knows that he deserves that. The passage tells us that he heads into the village.

And as he heads into the village, he's totally overcome by something that he didn't expect to see. I mean, he sees something that in his wildest dreams is totally unexpected.

He sees his dad demonstrating an incredible act of humility. Because as his dad sees him far off, the villagers are lined up.

[22 : 27] The villagers are ready to punish him. And the dad sees his son not wanting his son to take the hit. He picks up his legs. He picks up his robes. No man over 40 would ever run in a Middle Eastern culture.

But the dad picks up his robes and he runs through the gauntlet for his son. So the gauntlet is set. The boy is supposed to come through.

He's supposed to take the hit. He's supposed to take the punishment. But no, the dad loves the kid so much that he embarrasses himself. He picks up.

He exposes his legs. He does something that no Middle Eastern man would do ever then or today. And he runs through the gauntlet. And he takes the abuse and the scorn and the anger that was all meant for the son.

He takes it. And as everybody watched this, they would have been incredibly embarrassed. They would have been incredibly amazed. They would have never seen anything like this.

[23 : 35] They would have never seen such a costly grace, such a costly forgiveness, such a costly love. And when the son sees this and the dad grabs him, he begins to confess.

And if you notice in the text, he doesn't follow out his scheme. Because he only gets to the point, I am not worthy to be called your son. He's way beyond the idea of trying to buy back his freedom. He's way beyond the thought of trying to redeem himself. Because he's seen how costly the father's love is for him. He's seen how much the father has done to redeem him.

And so all that he can do is he can sit there and he can confess his unworthiness. He sees grace. He sees love. He accepts the return to sonship.

The father gives him a robe, which is a symbol of authority. He gives him a ring, which is a symbol that he can do business for the father. He gives him shoes, which are symbols of freedom. The son

at that moment realizes that his sin wasn't losing all the money.

[24 : 43] But the sin was a broken relationship with the father. And as he thought about that broken relationship, he realized that there was no way he could ever, ever, ever pay it back. He sees repentance.

He sees confession. And he realizes that he is totally unworthy. All the community sees it and they're freaking out. They're rejoicing. They're celebrating. And the dad says, it's time for a party. Because my son once was dead, but now he's alive.

And everybody realizes in that village that restoration and grace and mercy has happened because of the father's sacrifice. And they no longer have to beat up the son.

And they see this son who is welcomed in. Now in two weeks after Jesus tells his story, the same thing is going to happen in Jerusalem. Jesus is going to go into Jerusalem.

He's going to be on the Mount of Olives. He's going to be captured. He's going to be taken to Pilate and to Deherod and then to Pilate. And then he's going to be beaten. He's going to be scorned.

[25 : 47] He's going to walk a gauntlet through Jerusalem. We call it the Via Della Rosa today. The path of agony and pain. And as he walks through the streets of Jerusalem, people are going to hurl at him and yell at him and spit at him and hit him and beat him.

And much like the father did in his story, he takes the hit for us. And then he goes to this hill on the northern part of Jerusalem. It's called Golgotha.

The place of the skull. And he's crucified. For you and me. We're told later that the older son is outside.

He hears all this noise. He wonders what's going on. He wants to come close to the noise, but he doesn't because in his heart he's so far away. All the community is there celebrating this incredible thing that the son has come back, that God has brought them back.

And the older son, he's supposed to be there. Culturally, the older son was supposed to be in the very center of the party. He's supposed to be the one welcoming everybody in. He's supposed to be the one taking people's shoes off. He's supposed to be the one putting people's robes on.

[26 : 50] He's supposed to be doing all these things. But in his anger, in his pride, in his selfishness, in his hate, he says, no. Why should I let this person who's fallen back into our fellowship?

The community would have seen this and they would have been ashamed. In fact, the older son's actions are probably worse than the younger son's. Worse. Worse.

Worse. Because the older son is doing it in public where everybody sees it. The younger son did it in private. But the whole village is gathered because it was this massive feast. Everybody would have been there. And everybody seeing the older son's actions would have expected the dad to grab the older son and to beat him.

Because that's what culture demanded. That's what sinners get. That's what people who make mistakes get. They deserve to be beaten. They deserve to be thrown out.

They deserve to be beaten. And all the culture would have expected that. And again, the father does something incredibly radical, incredibly different. For the second time today, the father goes out of the community.

[27 : 56] He goes out of the home. He embarrasses himself. He humbles himself. He does things that no one would ever think of. And he asks for his son to return. He extends incredible amounts of love and gentleness, compassion on his son.

He keeps talking to him. He wants him to come back. And the older son, in this story, he's found. But he doesn't want to be found. He doesn't want those things.

So he stays away. He says, no. It said the older son attacks the dad and he insults him in a massive way. He basically says, this you. He doesn't even address him correctly.

Your son is just like you. And you're just like your son. And you've never given me what I deserve. And he goes after and attacks him. And I think, you know, how often do we do that?

God, I deserve this. God, you owe me. God, I've been working so hard for you. God, how come you haven't done these things that I need? You should have been doing these things.

[28 : 59] How come you aren't doing these things? There's this huge celebration. And the older son stays apart from it. He doesn't want the peace. He doesn't want the family. He just wants the things. And in the midst of all this, he expects an apology when he's the one who should be giving it.

The story ends. You don't know what happened to the older son. You don't know if he's made a decision to come into the community. You don't know what's going on there.

It just ends. There are a couple things I just want to share with you that God's been teaching me in this passage. Hopefully, as a church, we can go on this journey together.

What I see here in this passage is that in Jesus, we see God's heart for lost people. It's amazing to me that in the story of the sheep and the shepherd and the coin and the woman, the shepherd didn't have to explain to everybody why they should celebrate because they found something material.

They found a sheep. Yeah, let's celebrate. The woman who found the coin, she didn't have to persuade people to celebrate. She found money. She found a coin. It was worth something. And everybody just celebrated. But in this passage, the father has this over and over and over explain to people why they should be celebrating when something is so much more valuable than a coin or a sheep is found.

[30 : 29] But no one gets it. No one understands it. At the core of this text for today is God's reaction to lost people. We see God's heart for people in need.

And the question for me, for Tobin, is as a son of God, do I have this same heart? Do I feel the same way that the father does?

I mean, if my son Kip walks up here, you'd know right away that he's my son because he looks just like me. And the Bible says that as we walk on this journey with God, we start to look like God.

And we see the father's heart here. The father's heart was always about lost children. The father never thought about himself. He would never have regards to himself. He never stopped looking for or pursuing his lost children.

The father knew his sons and daughters perfectly. He knew everything about them intimately. And still he loved them. The father pays a heavy price coming after the sons and daughters. He tries to win his children over and over. The father continually offers compassion, identity, love, forgiveness, sonship, daughtership.

[31 : 47] The father continually breaks all cultural expectations. He looks foolish to the people around him. He's continually humbling himself.

He's continually pursuing himself. Remember, he wants sons and daughters. He doesn't want slaves. He doesn't want robots.

He wants people to have a relationship with him. And so he continues to pursue them, pursue them, pursue them throughout history over and over and over. The story of reconciliation is not just played out in this here, but it's played out in our world.

I wanted to ask two of the girls who are about to be baptized to come up and very briefly share their story of how God found them.

Coming up, guys. Irene and Felicia, how are you guys doing?

[32 : 49] They'll be very nice. They're your family, okay? So this is like a dinner table. So you have the impossible task of like in five minutes to share the amazing things that God has done in your life.

So I want you to introduce yourself and then tell a little bit about your story. And if you want, you can sit down or you can stand up. Sure. Hello, everyone. Hello, Tobin.

Thank you very much for having us here. Good morning. My name is Irene. Irene Na. I was born and raised in mainland China. And after finishing college, I spent two years in the United States for a master's degree.

And then came back to Asia in 2010. And since then, I've been working in finance industry in different sectors. And currently, I'm a private equity analyst.

It's basically who I am. One thing that's pretty interesting in my experience is that I have been kept on changing city to leave once a year for five years in a row. So currently, I really want to stay somewhere longer where I can find the sense of belonging.

[33 : 52] That's great. Felicia. Hi. Good morning, Watermark. I'm Felicia. I was born in Indonesia. I'm an Indonesian Chinese. So, yeah, I spent the first 14 years of my life in Indonesia with my family.

Yeah. And then God brought me to Singapore to study for four years before I, before he sent me to Hong Kong for studying in Hong Kong U. So this is my second year in Hong Kong.

Thank you. Your story of just what God's done in your life, Irene. Yeah, sure. Like I said, I was born and raised in Milan, China. And whoever grew up there would understand two things.

One is most people don't know about Christianity. It's more about Buddhism and ancestor worship. And so does my family.

We don't believe in anything and don't know how much impact of a religious belief can have on people's life. And we didn't wonder about it either. And second is the furious competition for young people to grow.

[34 : 55] Probably just because the large population we have and because the system has been shaped in a way that doesn't give too much attention for young people to grow. So it's more like a one-way oriented path.

So you not only need to be smart but also hardworking and very tough to stand out. So competition status is like a constant status people get used to without really knowing about the motivation behind.

Nonetheless, I grew up in that kind of environment. Before I first encountered the concept of Christianity, I thought I was living a purpose-driven life, which is basically driven by my dream of being better and achieving higher.

Going through ups and downs, I still insist chasing the dream in my way. Although setbacks sometimes drag me down into self-doubt and depression time after time.

However, I have been making progress on my way, though. I jump around from city to city, school to school, job to job. I don't care.

[36 : 01] People say it's impossible. I'm not afraid of difficulty. Making endeavor and following what I want, my coordinating myself, is perfectly justified. However, as time goes by, it's getting more and more difficult to manage the unbalanced feeling inside myself when I was facing myself, counting the gains and losses along the way.

The first time I was introduced to Christianity was when I was doing study in the U.S., where a group of Americans set up an English-speaking club for foreign students.

And they didn't just talk to us in language. They also invited us to all kinds of events, held events for us, or even invited us to private talk. Just talking about what you are worrying about and what's on your mind recently.

During that period of time that I was handling unprecedented difficulties on a daily basis, it's really helpful and warm. And I was so surprised to see how kind Christians are and how warm it could be to have them around.

However, I think I'm still in control. I'm tough enough to handle the problem in my life. So even though they invited me, I thanked them but refused to let Jesus in.

[37 : 16] Ironically, things began to evolve in a way that forced me to understand I'm not in control. That actually, I'm desperately going after things that can only offer me temporary joy but everlasting worry and unsettled feeling.

Things such as achievement, acknowledgement, title, praise, certificate, and so on. I just found myself very tired, paralyzed, and fatigued.

That I lost my passion in chasing or even life. Until one year ago, the idea of reaching out to a Christian to reveal the warm feeling came across my mind.

And this time, God's words really sinking through Bible, sermon, songs, and prayer sharing. It just touched me so deeply that I found a real way to get the real joy and the purpose of life.

I can feel God's words is changing my attitude, my perspective to life little by little. I feel relieved when I put my purpose to Jesus instead of myself.

[38 : 29] I feel appreciative when I look back at those blessings I was given even before I found God. And I feel safe when I know I will be with God if there is anything really bad happening in my life.

And I feel less anxious about career success or love because I know God has this plan. And he's preparing something best, tailored to me. It's just not yet to come.

So even though one year ago I always converted, but at that point of time I didn't know too much about Bible story. So during the past one year I thought out different ways to find it more, to understand it better.

So I feel very appreciative. Watermark gave me the opportunity to get baptized today to make it even more public that I'm a Christian. When I'm fully aware of what I'm getting into.

Thank you very much. Do you want to share your story with us, Lisa? Yeah.

[39 : 35] So unlike Irene, I was born in a Christian family. So my whole family is Christian. And they brought me to church since I was young. So I was familiar with Bible and I know Christ.

And yeah, I wouldn't say I really know Christ back then because I just know who there is a God. And never really understood who God really is.

And yeah, I was living a pretty normal life till I entered junior high school in Indonesia. That was the age of 11. So I started to begin. I started to feel very frustrated and, you know, depressed because it's just the feeling of I'm never like the best in a single thing.

Like I'll never be smartest. I'll never be the most popular in school. And it's just I started to doubt myself. What am I here for?

If I'll never be like the best in anything, people won't even look at me. People won't accept me. And so, yeah, I started to feel really depressed and I started to even hurt myself, kind of trying to transfer emotional pain to physical pain.

[40 : 47] And so I was at the age of 14. Suddenly this opportunity came. I sat for a scholarship test to Singapore.

And I remember the night before I sat down for the test. I prayed to God. That was the first time I kneeled down and prayed to God, desperately praying, God, I really want this.

Like I really want to move out of this place where you show me who you are and you show me your purpose in me. And so he did send me to Singapore.

And my first few years in Singapore was not a very smooth one because I was having trouble catching up with the pace of life in Singapore. It was really different with Indonesia.

And so, yeah, I was just lost. And my teacher gave me, before I departed to Singapore, my teacher gave me this book called Purpose Different Life.

[41 : 46] If any of you are familiar with the name. Yeah, so I read the book only to kind of improve my English. But in the end, the content of the book was so good that it changed the way I viewed my life.

I began to be more optimistic about my days, more enthusiastic about my days. But at the time, I was not really sure whether it was actually God or it was actually me trying to deceive myself, trying to convince myself that I am indeed here for a purpose.

And so, Easter 2008, I remember like one of my friends, she asked me to come along to this Christian fellowship retreat. And so I was just going there to make friends.

But then I remember because it was Easter, so they were telling the stories about Jesus' crucifixion. I've heard about this story so many times, but at that night, it was really different.

And so I was looking at the pictures of the hole in Jesus' hands. And at that moment, it struck me a lot that all along, there's one person who loves me unconditionally, no matter what.

[42 : 58] And that night, there was a prayer time. And one of the supervisors, she came to me and she approached me and she was praying for me. She said, God showed her a vision of me dancing in the middle of the field with ribbon and just dancing.

So she prayed that God wants to use me as his instruments to just give joy to others. And I was crying so hard at the moment because there was kind of the answer to what I've been looking for so far.

And at that moment, I experienced a true moment of healing. And it was just I had the urge to forgive all my past, all the hurts that people that have hurt me before about myself, what I've done to myself in the past.

And so since then, yeah, I would say that that was the turning point of my life where I really came to know and experience Christ in my life. That was the day when Jesus really answered the question, the big question in my life and changed my life.

Thank you so much. We have eight other people. I know there's everyone has a story if you're in the family and we wish we could do that. We want to share these two with you.

[44 : 20] And then we're the rest of them are in the booklet there. And we're going to do baptism in a couple of minutes right outside. So we just encourage you not to leave. But we're just overwhelmed that, yeah, what God's done in your guys' life and that he found you.

As we talk about the story today of God pursuing us and he never lets go. I want to pray for you guys. Is that okay? Is that okay? Let's pray. Father, we thank you for yourself, that you are amazing and that you are the reason that we're here.

And we sing of your son. And thank you for these two precious daughters that you've pursued and you've pursued and you did not let go. And you showed them their incredible need for you. And they saw your son Jesus and they fell in love with him. Well, I know that this isn't just a one-time story, but you've called us to live this story every day in our church and in our lives. Every day we're called back to remember why we've come to you and what you've done and what you've promised. And so we just come to you now and we just worship you and we thank you for these lives.

[45 : 26] Your word says that eternity is rejoicing because of you bringing peace between people who were lost. And now they're your sons and daughters. So we pray these things in your son Jesus' name.

Amen. Thanks, guys. Thanks. Thanks. Amen. We, yeah, we are way over time.

Amazing. Two quick thoughts. As I pray through this passage here in my life and for us as a church, the question I keep asking myself is, what would it look like if our church lived out this story every day?

Not that our church knows this story because hopefully if you've been here for four weeks, you know it. And you are tired of me telling it again. Not that if we just knew this story, but what would it look like if we lived this story out?

The question that I always have to ask myself at the very beginning of this is, what was a dad actually offering the sons?

[46 : 43] Have you ever thought about that? I mean, they were already sons. They already had everything that the dad had.

Was he offering them really the ring? Authority? Was he offering them the robe? Was he offering them the shoes or the money or the good life?

I mean, we all want good things and good times, but is that really what God is offering them? I think the passage says really clearly, and we're going to miss the whole story of the Bible if we don't get this, is that the only thing that God is offering them is himself.

He's offering them a relationship. I mean, sometimes we just think of God as this gift giver. But sometimes we have a hard time about thinking of him as the gift.

What if God is just a gift? He wants to give you that relationship with him. What would that look like as you walked out of here today?

[47 : 58] I'm worried sometimes when people come to church or they get to a community group and they think that we're going to offer them something besides Jesus. Because if we come, people come in here and we offer them anything but God, in a relationship with God, what we do is we automatically put them into a master-slave relationship.

And they're going to come in and they're going to do, do, do, be, be, be. And when they don't get everything they want, they're going to try to do harder and be harder. And they're going to wonder why God doesn't give them all the things that they need and why isn't he doing these things for them.

And they're going to get caught on this crazy cycle of doing and being. Some of you know what I'm talking about. I know a lot of us in here are crazy with our schedules and our relationships.

The older son was crazy. Where's my calf? Where's my goat? Where's my money? Where's my house? Where's my spouse?

Where's my boyfriend? Where's my girlfriend? Those are all things people say when they're in a master-slave relationship. But God wants us to be sons and daughters.

[49 : 15] And what would it look like if our church shared that with people? What would it look like if people walked in the door to our homes and to our communities and they experienced grace? They experienced repentance.

They experienced forgiveness. They experienced love. They experienced compassion. Because they've been so far away and they've been in foreign lands. They've lost everything and they never feel like the Father could bring them back.

What if we could show them a relationship with God? Would that be enough? I hope so.

My last thought that I've been thinking through myself is God's love is out of control in this passage. God is pursuing. He's sacrificial. He's all-knowing.

There's no secrets between him and us. His love is painful. God weeps. Did you know that? God weeps when we break the relationship.

[50 : 15] God weeps when we don't meet with him. He gives up everything. His love is out of control. And the question I have to ask myself is, how do I really respond to that?

How do I respond to God's love out of control? Do I just know it? Because I've read this passage a billion, zillion times?

Or do I live it? Is it exemplified in my life? Is my life out of control? Do I see my life changing? Becoming like the Father?

Like the relationship that he wants for us? When I look at my resources and the things that God has given me, do I say, oh, this is great.

I'm going to spend them all on myself because I need it. Do I see my life? The younger brother did. Or when I look at my resources and the things that God has given me, do I think, well, this is great.

[51 : 18] I deserve it. I work so hard. I'm so clever. I'm so gifted. It's mine. The older brother did. Or do I look at my resources that God has given me and I realize that they're incredible gifts and incredible tools that the Father has given me so that I can pursue people who don't know him and that I could use to bring people back into community.

When I see people playing with the pigs, you know what I'm talking about.

When I see people playing with the pigs, do I want to join them? The younger son did.

Do I walk away in disgust and anger and feel like, I cannot believe they did that. That's terrible. The older son did.

Or do I look at them and I feel an incredible amount of sadness and anguish as the Father did? Do I realize that I'm just like they are or I was?

[52 : 38] And do I use everything within my ability, my relationship, my gifting, everything that I have, do I use all these things to try to bring them into the house, to try to bring them into the party, to try to bring them into the celebration?

Do I do that? Sometimes. The passage here says you can only live three ways.

You can live like an older brother. You can live like a younger brother. Or you can live like someone who has a relationship with a father and knows him deeply and intimately.

My prayer for us as a church and everyone in here is that you wouldn't just know this story, but that it would bother you.

And that you would leave here and you would ask God, what does it look like for me to live this story today? What does it look like for me to go on a journey and realize that this story doesn't just happen in this book 2,000 years ago, but it happens every day, every moment of every day.

[53 : 52] And the Father is pursuing you with all his love, all his mercy, all his grace.

Do I live that? Or do I just know it, walk out of here, and don't think of anything else? God is pursuing you right now where you are.

He's looking for you. The passage says that repentance is not just being found because we're all lost. But the passage says that repentance is being found and wanting to be found.

One brother wanted that. The other brother did not want that. But the Father kept pursuing.

The Father keeps pursuing. Father, we just thank you for this day. We thank you for this story that we know that it is not just a story, but it is life.

[55 : 13] And you continue to play it out. You continue to live it out. That we all in here, at one time or another, and for people like me, it's often, we all act like older brothers, and we all act like younger brothers.

In the midst of our foolishness, you continue to pursue us. And you offer us the only thing that will truly heal us.

And that thing is a relationship. A relationship with you through your son, Jesus Christ. So Lord, we come to you this day as we celebrate your amazing goodness in these ten lives.

And we just worship you because you're amazing. Help me to understand that more today. Help us as a church and community and family.

Understand that more today. Help us to understand your love. We pray these things in your son, Jesus' holy name.

[56 : 27] Amen. Amen. Hey, I want to invite the baptism candidates. Can you guys come here for a second, please? So they're going to come up. There's ten of them. When we see what God's doing, we realize this is why we started the church.

We didn't start the church to reach people who are already in church. We started the church to reach people who aren't in church. And so I want you to take a look at them. And this is about God

and the amazing things that he's doing.

And so I'm going to let them go really early because they're going to go get changed. We spared no expense. We have this play pool out there. So we do our baptism right out back.

So bring your kids. We want this to be a family affair. They need to learn and understand what we're doing in this journey. And I'm going to pray for you guys and then you guys can go, okay, and get changed and I'll meet you there in two seconds.

And your family will be out there watching you too. Your family. That's everybody, okay? Father, thank you for my brothers and sisters here. We thank you as we sing this song. We realize that you are always watching.

[57 : 31] You are always pursuing. And yeah, you find us and we surrender to your love. And so I thank you for my brothers and sisters here. These ten that are all about you, not about us.

We lift up your praise and your glory. In Jesus' name, amen. You guys, you can go get changed, okay? Also, right afterwards, we're having a choir practice.

So if you are in the Christmas choir, you want to be in a choir practice, Melissa, right? Melissa's in charge of it. She's our expert. It is an amazing time for adults. So please hang around here.

The prayer team will be up front. They'll be able to talk about everything going on. Also, sometimes people ask me, I've had a couple people ask me, they're new to church and they're like, how come we don't take a tithe?

And they think that's really strange. And we believe that tithing is an act of worship, just as the passage talked about today. So there's these little blue envelopes and as you respond to what God has done in your life, we would ask for you to tithe appropriately and stick the envelopes in the box and they allow all the outreach and everything that we do to be possible.

[58 : 39] And also, anything I'm missing? Nothing I'm missing. Okay, so in about eight minutes we'll be out front. Let me pray for us. Father, we just thank you for this day. We thank you for this church family that you brought together.

We thank you for these kids, the adults, the singles, all these cultures. It was just humbling to hear the stories of all the cultures that you've brought together in your kingdom.

And we know that today is just a taste of what heaven will be like. And so we come and we worship you, the true king, the true father. And we come and worship the true older son, your son Jesus, who did not shirk his responsibility as his son in the story did, but who went out and pursued and found us when we were very, very, very lost.

And so today we come to worship you and we thank you and we pray all these things in your son Jesus' holy name. Amen. God bless you. See you out back. Oh, hey, we want to start a series of talks.

People have been asking a lot of questions. Here is a telephone number. It's a new number. No one knows who comes in, but if you have any questions you'd like to text, we're going to build a sermon series on it.

[59 : 54] We've already had a lot about sex, marriage, and homosexuality. And so hang on and pretty soon we'll start talking about those from a church and biblical aspect. But if you have any others, please text them in and we'll cover them.

See you here, here, next Sunday.