

Proper Priorities for God's People

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Preacher: Eric Scott

[0 : 01] Good morning, Watermark. That was really good. I'm impressed. If you don't know me, my name is Eric. I'm one of the guys on staff here at Watermark. It's an awesome privilege to be sharing with you guys today.

If you haven't been with us the past couple months, we've been looking at the book of Acts. And what we've seen is that the book of Acts starts out with an angel telling Jesus' followers that this good news about Jesus is going to spread.

It's going to start out in Jerusalem, which we said is kind of like our Pak Fulon. And it's going to spread to Judea, which for us is kind of like Hong Kong Island as a whole. And then it's going to go from there to Samaria, which for us is kind of like Kowloon New Territories.

And then it's going to go to the ends of the earth, which is like Lantau Island. Sorry, it's the rest, the ends of the earth. Yes, the ends of the earth. And the word is going to spread.

And we saw in Acts chapter 2 that the Holy Spirit comes and empowers the church to go and spread this message of Jesus. And God blesses his church.

[1 : 03] But the past few weeks, we've seen these cycles of God blessing the church and then the church facing opposition. They face opposition from outside and from inside the church.

So from the outside, there have been the Jewish religious leaders come and arrest the apostles a couple times. They threaten them. They've beaten them. They've told them to stop preaching and teaching about Jesus.

And every time, God has rescued them so far. And then from inside the church, there was this couple that came and came up with this plan to lie to the church leaders so that they could get prestige and recognition.

And again, God saved the church from the destructive power that this plan had. And today, we're going to take a look at another time in the book of Acts when the church faces opposition.

And what we're going to see is that while conflict within the church needs to be dealt with, preaching and prayer must remain priorities for God's people even in the midst of conflict.

[2 : 04] So let's pray that God would speak to us during this time together. And then we'll jump in and look at the passage. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this chance today to look at your word together, to hear what you have to say to us.

We thank you that you are powerful and that your word is powerful and gives life to your people and that you have spoken to us. And we pray that as we hear your word today, that we would be attentive and that it would transform us.

And in Jesus' name, amen. Amen. So in today's passage, it starts out with a problem. The problem is the church did this distribution program to care for the widows and the needy.

And there was one group that was being taken care of better than another group. Division was starting in the church. And division in the church is a big deal. Division, more than anything else, has the ability to just split the church in half.

I've been part of a church before where there were divisions that weren't dealt with properly by church leadership and the church split. And so in such an early age of this worldwide global church movement, for there to be this type of division, that is a big deal.

[3 : 18] But it's not just any type of division. See, this is a really big deal because it's ethnic and cultural division. If you look, it says the two groups are called Hellenists and Hebrews.

Now the Hebrews are the Jews who have been born and raised in Israel. They speak the language that they speak in Israel. And they culturally are as Jewish as you can be.

The Hellenists have been born and raised outside of Israel. They speak Greek. Some of them ethnically are from a different group than the Israelites and have converted to Judaism.

So for that part of the Hellenists, it's actually an ethnic difference. For some of them, they were born Jewish but outside of Israel. And so they speak the different language. They have a different culture.

And even though they're the same ethnic group, they're culturally very different. And so the lines are not just drawn to separate and distinguish people. The lines are drawn along this ethnic and cultural lines.

[4 : 19] And ethnic and cultural division has incredible power to spiral out of control very quickly. Because in ethnic and cultural division, you're not taking the time to get to know someone.

You're looking at external features about them and making judgments about what type of person they are based on the color of their skin or the language that they speak. And in this context, there was great potential for things to spiral out of control very, very quickly within the church.

And so when this problem arises, what does it say happen? It says a complaint arose. Now just to give you some context, that's not a good thing.

What this doesn't mean is that people saw a problem and brought it to church leadership. What it does mean is that they saw a problem and they started talking about it in the background.

The word here that's used for complaint literally means speaking in a low tone of voice or behind-the-scenes talk. So what it means is people saw the problem in the church, but rather than going and talking to the apostles about it, they just went up to their friends and they're like, did you notice how our people aren't being fed like their people are?

[5 : 35] And the murmuring and complaining and grumbling got louder and louder and louder as more and more voices got added to this talking and complaining.

And it got louder and louder until eventually the apostles couldn't help but be aware that something was going on. Like I said, not an ideal situation.

People saw the problem, simple solution, go to the apostles, tell them, they can deal with it, and it actually takes less time to deal with the problem than you spend complaining about the problem in the first place, right?

But because the people complained and talked behind the scenes, it allowed the problem to take on a life of its own. It allowed people to make assumptions in their hearts about the attitude of leadership towards the people affected.

It allowed people to develop these feelings of anger and bitterness inside their hearts so that by the time the apostles finally became aware of something that was going on, the problem had grown way bigger than it ever needed to be.

[6 : 40] And this still happens today. Can you believe it? It happens in churches, but it also happens in workplaces. And it happens in schools. People see a problem and they assume, well, if I see the problem, then the people in leadership must see the problem as well.

And if they see the problem and the problem's still here because they're not doing anything about it, it must mean that they don't care. I've done this several times.

Several might be too small of a number. You see this issue. You think the people in charge who have the power to do something about it don't care. But nothing's happening, so you eventually start to think, maybe it's just me.

So you go to your friend and you're like, I noticed this. Did you notice this too? And your friend's like, yeah, I noticed that too. And then you start sharing theories with each other about why leadership doesn't care and isn't doing anything.

And once you've confirmed with your friend that it's definitely that the leadership who's responsible for this decision doesn't care and isn't doing anything because of that, then it's much easier to go around and talk to other people and be like, can you believe that this is going on and they just don't care?

[7 : 48] And it grows and spreads when all along, actually, the people responsible don't know there's a problem because they're dealing with other stuff and haven't seen the same issues that you see and no one's told them that there's a problem.

That's exactly what happens in our world today and it's exactly what happened here with the apostles. So, all that to say, if you see a problem here in your kid's school, at your workplace, talk to people, not in a gossipy sort of way, but the people who have the power to do something to change that problem and work towards a solution and offer to be part of that solution instead of just grumbling and complaining.

So, eventually, the voices get louder and the apostles realize something is going on. And it says that they gathered together the full number of the disciples, all of the Christians they brought together because everyone is affected by this decision.

And they bring them together to work towards a solution and they say it is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Now, that seems odd, doesn't it?

The apostles, now remember, let's think about who the apostles are here. They have spent loads of time studying the Old Testament. They know that God's word says that the compassion of a community is going to be judged by how that community cares for the most weak and vulnerable within the community.

[9 : 19] Not only that, but these were the guys who were with Jesus when he said, whatever you do to the least of these, you've done it unto me.

And not only were they there when he said that, but they're the reason that we've heard that he said that. They're the ones who passed that down to us. And these guys were the guys who the night before Jesus died, he grabbed a towel and he got down on his knees and he washed their feet. And he told them, if I, your Lord and Master, have done this for you, now you go do it for others. They knew that caring for the poor and vulnerable and serving are crazy important.

So this is not them saying, we're above that type of work. No, this is something else. See, it's actually quite likely that up to this point, the apostles were the main people in charge of this daily distribution.

That makes sense of a lot of things that have happened in Acts. For example, in Acts chapter 4 and 5, it talks about these people who sold their houses and gave the money to the church. And when they gave the money to the church, it says they gave the money to the church by coming and laying it at the apostles' feet.

[10 : 34] Now, why would you lay the money at the apostles' feet? Because the apostles are the ones who are turning around to distribute that to the church. And when a problem arises, typically the person responsible for that problem is the one who's responsible for finding a solution.

And here, the apostles are the ones tasked with finding a solution. Which implies that up till this point, they were the ones who were primarily responsible for this task of this distribution.

So this isn't them saying we're above this kind of work. They've probably been doing this work all along. But if that isn't them saying we're above this kind of work, what is it?

Basically, what they're saying is there's a priority to the things that they're doing. And God has made preaching and prayer their number one priority. I mean, these are the guys who spent three or four years following Jesus around, listening to every word that he said.

And God had given them the special task and responsibility of passing those words on to the church. And they were equipped for this in a way that no one else was.

[11 : 46] Yes, other people preached, but the apostles were equipped and prepared for this in a way that no one else was. And service is very important. But the job that needed to be done to serve these tables now had gotten so big that the apostles could not adequately do this job and do the job of preaching that God was calling them to.

And so in order to prioritize properly and focus on the things that God wanted them to focus on as the number one priority, they needed to delegate certain roles to different people in the church.

If you're thinking sort of of a modern-day equivalent of this, imagine that you're a doctor, some of you are, and you're having a dinner party, and someone at the dinner party drops a glass on the floor and it shatters.

As the host, you clean up the glass because not having glass on the floor is important. But same dinner party, someone drops a glass because they're having a heart attack and they collapse to the floor.

If you as the doctor jump up and grab the broom and dustpan and start sweeping up the glass, everyone looks at you and says, what are you doing? There's a priority here.

[12 : 58] You save a life before you clean up broken glass on the floor. Yes, the broken glass is important, but anyone at the party can clean up the broken glass. And you as a doctor have a special gifting and skill to save a life in this moment.

And the apostles knew that the preaching of God's word brings spiritual life. Yes, feeding these widows and serving the tables is vitally important.

But preaching God's word and giving life to God's people is even more important. And the serving of the tables can be done by a lot of people within the church.

And this job of preaching and teaching God's people to give life to them through God's word is something that the apostles were specially equipped for, which is why they needed to prioritize it even in the midst of this conflict.

So their solution is to find seven men of good character, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and appoint them to take over this task. They find seven guys. Interestingly, all seven of these guys have Greek names, which implies that they came from this group that was feeling excluded and marginalized.

[14 : 09] They were the people who would have known specifically which widows felt neglected and the best ways to reach them culturally, which is an interesting insight into dealing with conflicts.

And the problem is never again mentioned in the book of Acts, which I think means we can pretty reasonably assume they dealt with it properly, because problems that aren't dealt with properly come back. So I want us to take a minute to look at the pattern for how the apostles dealt with this conflict, and then spend the rest of our time together today looking at their priorities in the midst of the conflict.

So first, their pattern. And their pattern is the gospel. If we look at the story of the gospel, what we see is that God creates us and we owe complete allegiance to him, and yet we sin and rebel against him.

There's this conflict between us and God. And God, being God, doesn't look at that conflict and say, that's it, we're over, we can never have a relationship again.

But at the same time, he doesn't ignore our sin. He looks at it and he takes it seriously. And in the person of Jesus, he steps down into our world to get personally involved in our conflict, to work to bring a solution for us that we can't bring for ourselves.

[15 : 31] And that's the model that God wants us to have as a church for dealing with conflict.

When we see complaining, when we see grumbling, when we see problems, we don't ignore them, but we also don't blow them out of proportion and say, that's it, we can never have a relationship with you again.

But instead, we step in, we engage, we get involved to help bring a solution for those who can't bring a solution for themselves. And that's exactly what the apostles do here by stepping in, taking charge, delegating the task so that it will be done properly.

They get involved to bring a solution for those who cannot bring a solution for themselves. And that's how God wants us to approach our conflicts today, I think. But then, the priorities of the apostles in this passage are super interesting to me.

Because as someone who works in the church, I can tell you, when someone in the church comes to you and says, I have a problem with something that's happening within this ministry, the easy, instinctive reaction is to jump in and fix it yourself.

As probably most of our tendencies, when people come to us with problems in our workplaces or in things that we're responsible for, we want to jump in, we want to do it ourselves. We figure things are already messed up, that's why people are coming to me with a problem.

[16 : 50] If I delegate it and it doesn't get properly fixed, then they're going to be even more upset with me for not just doing the job right myself. It's easier to do it right, get it done, and then we can move on with life.

But that's not what the apostles did here. They knew that if they did that, they would be losing sight of the priorities that God wanted them to have. And so they delegated the role because they needed to prioritize preaching and prayer.

And they recognized that if they did the job of feeding the widows, they could not prioritize the things that God wanted them to prioritize.

So I want us to take the rest of our time today looking at these two priorities, seeing why they were so important for the apostles then and why they're so important for us as a church now. First up, preaching.

Why is preaching important for us as a church? Preaching is important because God's word is important. If you do a quick search through the Bible about the importance of God's word, it's amazing the things that the Bible tells us about the power of God's word.

[18 : 06] You start out in Genesis chapter one, start of the Bible, and what happens? God speaks, and through his word, everything that exists comes into being.

Fast forward to Isaiah chapter 40, and we see the grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of God endures forever.

In Ezekiel chapter 37, we see that the word of God gives life to God's people. In Psalm chapter 119 verse 11, we see that by learning God's word, it helps us to fight temptation and resist sin in our lives.

In John chapter one, Jesus comes to us. We had this verse on the screen earlier today, and it says that Jesus is the word of God made flesh. In Hebrews, I think it's chapter four, verse 12.

Yes, it tells us that the word of God is living and active, is powerful, is sharper than a two-edged sword, and it discerns the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, that God's word looks at us and does this deep inspection into our hearts and shows us the places that we fall short of being the people that God wants us to be and what it takes for us to become those people that God wants us to be.

[19 : 37] In 2 Timothy chapter three, verse 16, Paul tells Timothy that through God's word, God's people are equipped to become the type of people that God wants us to be, that through God's word, we are equipped for every good work.

And then in the book of Acts, God's word goes forward through preaching. It moves from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth as it is preached.

And this is both Christians growing in their understanding of who God is and growing deeper in their relationship with him, but also non-Christians hearing God's word as it is spoken publicly so that they can know him and come into this life-giving relationship with him.

And so God's word is vitally important throughout scripture. And this is just a brief survey, a brief overview, but God's word brings life.

If you are here today and you are a Christian, God's word is vitally important to your spiritual health. If you're here today and you're not a Christian, I encourage you, keep coming and keep listening to God's word being preached here every Sunday because that is how you will discover spiritual life and a relationship with God.

[20 : 59] And preaching is one of the most important ways that God delivers his word to his people. Now I know that might be a controversial statement, like what about reading my Bible?

What about going to community group? Can't I just do those? Why do I need to have God's word preached to me? Well, let's start with reading our Bibles. First, you should be reading your Bible.

If you think of God's word as the thing that gives life to God's people, you can kind of compare it to food. If you come on Sunday and you eat this massive feast and then you don't eat again until next Sunday, you're going to be malnourished.

It doesn't matter how great the meal was on Sunday. Even if you eat on Sunday and then on Friday night at your community group, if you don't eat the rest of the week, you're still going to be malnourished.

And so we need to be people who are being fed by God's word every single day. And to do that, we need to be reading our Bibles on our own. And if you're here today and you don't know how to read your Bible on your own, I encourage you to talk to me after the service or talk to your community group after the service, community group leader after service, because we would love to teach you how to read your Bible so that you can grow closer to God.

[22 : 20] However, although it is important to read your Bible on your own, it's not enough. Because there is power in God's people coming together under the teaching of God's word.

And here's what I mean. When I read my Bible on my own during the week, that's great. But when I come to church on Sunday and I hear God's word preached to me and I'm sitting listening to the same sermon as my community group and my wife and several other friends, there's this level of accountability in responding to God's word that's greater than the sum total of each of us individually reading our Bibles on our own.

Because I walk out of here and I know the sermon that Alfie heard on Sunday and I know how he was challenged to respond to God through that sermon. And he knows how I was challenged to respond to God through this sermon.

And throughout the week, we can hold one another accountable to growing closer to God because we have that common basis of having heard God's word preached to us throughout that week.

Also, hearing sermons together helps build us into a family that can encourage one another and build one another up for Christ as we're growing and learning the same things about God together.

[23 : 45] And hearing sermons allows us to have God's word applied to our world today by people who God has gifted for the good of the church. The Bible says that God gifts the church with people who are able to teach and preach his word to the church.

So while reading our Bibles on our own is absolutely important, it's not a substitute for hearing God's word preached to us as a group. But what about community groups?

That's a group thing, right? Like there are people in there who can teach us God's word. Can't we just do that instead of having a sermon? Well, the importance of a sermon over a community group is that a sermon forces us to come under the teaching of God's word.

If you've been in a community group for any length of time, there's two experiences that I'm pretty sure you've probably had. The first is when that person in your group takes over the whole conversation and just shares the updates from the past like six months of their life.

Anyone been there? Yep. And you walk out and you're like, I don't think I even like opened my Bible tonight. Definitely don't remember if I did.

[24 : 55] The other type of community group meeting, and I think this is probably the more common one, is the one where we get so focused on what we think that everyone in the group is sharing, everyone's interacting, everyone's sharing what they think, but we're basing it on what we think, not on what God thinks.

And we walk out of the group and we're like, that was great. I got to share with everyone what I think. And then, but is what I think the same as what God thinks? Not really sure.

We didn't look at what God thinks. And it can be very easy in the context of a community group alone to focus on our thoughts and our stories and to actually ignore looking at God's word or easy to read briefly through a passage but not actually talk about what that passage means or how it applies to our lives.

And when we come to a sermon, if God's word is being preached from the Bible, it forces us to interact directly with God's word and with God himself and respond to what he is saying to us.

Now, I know there are some preachers who don't preach from the Bible and just share fun stories from their life to make interesting talks. And if you hear one of those sermons, don't use that as an argument against the importance of preaching.

[26 : 19] Rebuke the preacher because God's word brings life to God's people. And if a preacher is not preaching God's word, that preacher is robbing God's people of life-giving sustenance that is essential for their growth.

So the proper response to a preacher who ignores God's word is not to discount the importance of preaching but rather to emphasize it to that preacher and call them out for not preaching God's word to God's people.

And community groups are great, don't get me wrong. I think they're wonderful for helping us reinforce what was taught in the sermon, for helping us go deeper and personalize the application to our lives.

But because of the nature of what community groups are, they're not a substitute for hearing God's word preached to God's people. Now, as a millennial with many millennial friends, one thing that I hear quite often is, I just find it so hard to focus during a sermon.

Anyone ever heard that? Yeah? What if that's me? What if, you know, I can really engage during a community group because I'm talking and listening and interacting and in a sermon I'm just like, he's been up there for a long time.

[27 : 39] Well, first, if you have trouble listening during a sermon, I would challenge you in terms of the attitude that you bring to a sermon and here's what I mean.

We live in a very well-educated city and my guess is that almost everyone in this room has been in a situation where we have sat through a lecture that is long, way longer than a sermon and dry and dull and boring.

And we've walked out of that lecture and memorized every single last word the professor said because we knew it would be on an exam. And then we come to church and we sit in our seat and we struggle to stay awake and play with our phones and hope that we magically hear from God.

Do we come ready to engage with God's word or do we come expecting to just magically have something happen to us because we're in the same room as the place where God's word is being taught?

You know, preaching isn't a magic formula. Spiritual growth doesn't have a magic spell. It happens as we get to know God more and engage in a relationship with him. And this might not be what some of us want to hear.

[28 : 59] But the primary way that God has revealed himself to us in the 21st century is through a book. which means that if we want to know God and we want to get to know him fully as he wants us to know him, we have to engage at least a little bit of the academic side of our brains in order to do that.

Which should be fine because Hong Kong is great at engaging the academic side of our brains, right? But we need to have that side of our brains switched on when we're interacting with God's word if we want to fully hear from him the way that he wants us to hear from him.

So I have a couple tips for helping us become better at listening to sermons. Okay? And some of you might think these are really obvious and basic but I guarantee you there are people in this room who if we apply these things will get much better at listening to sermons.

Step number one, get a good night of sleep. Like I said, it's obvious, it's simple, but as a single person there were nights where I'd get home at 3 a.m.

the night before church and show up for church expecting to hear from God after hardly sleeping at all. If we want to hear from God we need to be able to stay awake while his word is being taught to us.

[30 : 15] And so proper preparation for listening to a sermon starts the night before with getting a good night of sleep. Step number two, probably equally obvious, pray for God to speak to you.

If we believe that God answers prayer, how often do we ask him to speak to us through the sermon? Like hopefully we did it 20 minutes ago when we all did it together but other than that, when was the last time that you prayed for God to speak to you through his word?

It doesn't take long. Something simple like, God, I know that this Sunday I'm going to hear your word taught and that your word gives life and I pray that you would speak to me through that. It's quick, it's simple, but it's powerful because God answers prayer and if we're not asking him to speak to us through his word, then how much should we really expect to get out of hearing his word?

Third, again, obvious, take notes. By taking notes, you engage the tactile senses and the visual senses in your learning which reinforces learning.

Plus, it gives you something written down that you can review later on so you can remember what was said from God's word. Again, very simple but very powerful in helping us to hear from God when his word is being preached to us.

[31 : 36] Fourth, engage in active listening. I think sometimes we have this attitude when we come to church and I've had this before where we sit down and we kind of expect listening to a sermon to be like watching a sitcom.

Like, entertain me. dance. But that's not what a sermon is. The sermon is God's word being presented to us and if we want to hear from God, we need to be engaging with his word actively because these are powerful words that give life.

So we need to engage with them as we hear them. So as the preacher is speaking, ask questions. You know, he's saying this. If that's true, how should that impact the way that I interact with my friends?

If what he is saying is true, how does that connect to my life? Think of it not as a monologue but as a dialogue where there's a back and forth and we're talking with each other, thinking through the ways that God's word applies to our lives.

And if the preacher says something that doesn't make sense to you, write it down and ask him about it after service. It's actually great. Preachers should love it because it means that you are paying attention and listening to what they were saying and it helps us think through and understand the way that you're hearing what we're saying so that next time we can communicate more clearly when we preach.

[32 : 59] And final step for improving at listening to sermons, talk about it with a friend. Find someone after service and say, here's one big thing that stuck out to me from the sermon and one way that my life can be different this week because of it.

It's a simple step but verbalizing it cements it in our learning and forces us to synthesize it and process it to a level where we can communicate it with others.

And then it allows us also to hear what stuck out to them from the sermon so that we can learn from what they've learned as well. See, God's word is vitally important.

The preaching of God's word is so important that the apostles said it's one of the top two things we need to spend our time prioritizing. And God's word is important for us today because God's word gives life to God's people.

So we need to, if we want to be the people that God wants us to be, we need to learn to engage properly with his word. Now the second thing, I know we're basically out of time, but the second thing the apostles wanted to prioritize was prayer.

[34 : 09] And just like preaching, prayer is essential if we want to be the people that God wants us to be. Last week, if you were here, we talked about how life is a spiritual war that is fought on the turf of our hearts for control of our souls.

And there's a pastor named John Piper who says that prayer in that spiritual war is the walkie-talkie to radio into headquarters. I love that picture because it shows the desperation with which we should be approaching prayer in our daily life.

And if we aren't praying, it means that we're depriving ourselves of this valuable resource that's essential and necessary for being the people that God wants us to be in this spiritual war of life.

And I don't want to spend too long talking about prayer today because I actually want to take some time together to pray. But if you're like, come on, Eric, you spent all this time talking about preaching, I want to know about prayer too.

I have great news for you. Starting next Sunday after service for the month of July, Henrika is going to be running a prayer course. The details are in your bulletin and you can get in touch with her to sign up for that and you'll go way more in depth into prayer in that prayer course than I can go in five minutes right now.

[35 : 23] So if you want to know more about prayer, get in touch with Henrika and sign up for the prayer course. It's going to be awesome and it's going to be a great time learning how to pray and getting opportunities to pray together.

But just to recap what we've talked about today, we looked at conflict in the church. We looked at the gospel as the pattern for dealing with conflict in the church. We talked about priorities in the church of preaching and how to listen to a sermon and why God's word is so important for God's people.

And then we've briefly, briefly touched on prayer. But I want us now to respond to God's word by praying together as a church family. So we're going to put a passage from the Bible up on the screen.

There it is. And what we're going to do is when I say go, we're going to split into groups of three to five people or so. And we're going to pray together using these verses as a prompt.

Now, if you're like, I don't feel comfortable praying out loud or in groups of people, that's okay. You don't need to pray. You can just simply join the group. But I encourage you to try it at least once.

[36 : 26] If you're someone who's more comfortable praying, you can pray as many times as you want. But I encourage you to keep each time short so that other people have a chance to pray too. And if you're here today and you're not a Christian and you want to know more about Christianity and what it is that we Christians believe, when we split into groups, I encourage you to ask the people in your group more about it and they would love to share with you.

So using these verses as a prompt, we're going to pray. So for example, how this could work is have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus. Jesus, we thank you for your humility and we pray that you would make us a humble people as well.

Or every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Jesus, we praise you because you are powerful and you are big and we thank you for your greatness.

These types of prayers inspired by these verses. So let's split up into groups and in a few minutes, I'll come up and I will close us in prayer. Father, we thank you for your love for us.

We thank you for sending Jesus to rescue us. We thank you that when we were far away from you that you didn't look at us and ignore our problem but you also didn't look at us and blow our problem out of proportion and say that's the end of it for a relationship between us and you but that you sent Jesus to rescue us.

[37 : 52] That you sent Jesus to give his life for us and we pray that we would be a people who follow that pattern, who humble ourselves so that you can exalt us rather than exalting ourselves. We pray that we would be people who build our lives around your word, who have proper priorities,

who seek to know you and find life through growing closer to you.

We pray that we'd be a people who seek you in prayer. We pray that as we do this that you will build us into the people that you want us to be, that you will grow in us a love for you and a love for one another and that you will use us to impact our world and spread your word to those around us. Thank you again for your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.