

# God Speaks

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Preacher: Chris Thornton

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. Oh, that's terrible. Well, I know it's kind of early in the morning, but good morning. Wow, that's better.

Okay, we're awake. We're awake. That's good. That's good. We're going through this series in Deuteronomy, and I don't know, for you, the idea of looking in the Old Testament may be as attractive as kind of hitting your head against a brick wall.

But this is a really powerful book that we're going to be looking into. Because this morning, I prayed to the living God.

The living God, this morning, spoke to me. I wrote down in my journal some of the things that the living God said to me this morning.

I am on speaking terms with the God who created the universe and every galaxy. And more than that, I am his beloved child.

[ 1 : 07 ] And one day, I will meet with him face to face. And I will see him in his dazzling glory. That is the stunning claim of Christianity.

That an intimate relationship with the God of the whole universe, on speaking terms, is possible. Do you know that in the whole history of religion, that claim to have a God who is both intimately close but gloriously separate is unique amongst world religions.

But as Christians, we talk a lot of the time about having a relationship with God, don't we? We talk about having a relationship with God.

But I suspect most of us, including myself, don't think of those words with stunned disbelief. You know, when was the last time you thought, I just, I can't believe it, I can talk to God.

When was the last time you thought that? You see, we'll Facebook everyone and say, OMG, I saw Rihanna from like a mile away. I can't believe it.

[ 2 : 23 ] But we don't say, OMG, I just spent 20 minutes with the living God. Because it feels a little different, doesn't it? A little bit more intangible.

But why? Because other generations have lived with a deep sense of the fear of God. If you know, Martin Luther, back in the 1500s, he started a whole reformation because the truth that God in Jesus Christ had made a way for him to have a relationship with him blew his mind.

But if you think about it, our world is a slightly different world. It's a very interesting place. I don't know if you know what the Oxford Dictionary's word for 2012 is.

Anybody know? It's the word post-truth. Okay, go and check it out. Post-truth. Post-truth is this. This is their definition. Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

And so they've had Brexit and Trump where all these kind of fake news have come out and everyone's believed them more than what is actually true. And Speaker Ravi Zacharias, he tells a story of one day when he was watching a procession of a golden statue of a God being carried along the street.

[ 3 : 41 ] And there was one woman who had just received a blessing from this statue. And he goes up to talk to her and he asks her, do you believe this God really exists? And what he says is, he says, she looked very hesitant and then said, if you think in your heart that he exists, then he does.

And so Ravi said, well, what if you believe he doesn't exist? And she replies, then he doesn't exist. That's post-truth for you. Everyone's entitled to their view.

Everyone's got their own interpretation. It's all equally valid. Truthfulness is secondary. We're post-truth now. And all religions can believe in Jesus.

And they're all about loving each other anyway. And people who get too serious about religion, we've got to be very careful of them because they end up blowing themselves up and being bigots

and being intolerant. And we don't want that.

But, you know, people who are too religious become obic, homophobic, xenophobic, funophobic, every obic you can imagine, right? And you know what?

[ 4 : 47 ] I'm sympathetic. I've studied history. And I can see that often in history, some of that is very true. So I am not unsympathetic to that at all. And if you think about Hong Kong, it's an international city.

We have people. We've got 300,000 Muslims. We've got 100,000 Hindus. We have Hindus. We have Buddhists. We have atheists, Catholics, Protestants, Jews. We have everything here in this city. And there's some peace.

And we want to keep harmony, don't we? Because we don't want to be religious bigots. And many of my friends from other religions are actually very nice people.

They're nicer than many of the Christians I actually know. But how, as Christians, should we respond in a pluralistic, post-truth society in our culture? How should we even begin to consider our own relationship with God when we have so many different competing ideas around us?

And that's what we're going to have a little look in today. So have your passage open. We're going to dive into Deuteronomy 4. And you remember we talked last week about what Jeremy reminded us about moving on.

[ 5 : 50 ] About how God wants us to move on in relationship with himself. How we do that by looking back at what he's done and looking forward to where he's taking us. So if you look at verse 15, we're going to look in two particular sections.

We're going to look at an incomparable God and an incomparable word. Okay? Incomparable God, incomparable word. So here we go. Verse 15. An incomparable God.

Therefore, watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves.

And then he goes on to describe the different images they make. Because like Hong Kong today, the Middle East in the time of Moses was a pluralistic place. They had lots of different gods. The Egyptians had Horus, the god of the sky.

And they created little statues of birds. The Canaanites had their own little team of gods. You know, they worshiped the sun, the moon, the stars, everything around. They all had their own little gods. And they bowed down to them and they'd ask for blessing from these gods.

[ 6 : 56 ] So their life could be a little bit better. But Moses says in the midst of this culture, he says to Israel, your God is not like any of the other gods.

He is the Lord. And when you see that word Lord in capital letters in the Bible, that's the word Yahweh. It's the word when Moses asks God, what is your name?

He says, I am who I am. He says, that's the word. So when you see that, that's what you tell. What he's saying is, I am. I'm not tied down to any river, any lake, any sun, anything that you can physically see.

I am uncontainable. I am bigger than that. I just am. And because God is not like any other gods, there are two things you can't do.

The first thing you can't do is make an image. He says, even of me, you can't make an image. Because everyone else represents their gods in little statues around.

[ 7 : 54 ] We see this even in Hong Kong, but it was even more then. And they get their God down to a kind of manageable size. You know, I can cope with him because that's the kind of God that I like to have about that big.

But he says, I am not manageable. I am not containable. Don't make images of me. Because if you do, you'll no longer be worshiping me. You'll be worshiping your idea of me.

He says, rather than me making you in my image, you'll be making me in your image. And that's not the way it works. You know, so often, I try and make God in my own image.

You know, it's just like, you know, European painters and Hollywood movie makers, when they depict Jesus, how do they make him? He's always like white, and he's got blonde hair and blue eyes, right?

Well, I think we do the same thing. We want a Jesus in our image. So I want a God who hates what I hate and is lenient to what I'm lenient towards. You know, it's amazing how when I'm on my phone, and my wife reaches over to take my phone to have a look at the message, I get really

annoyed.

[ 9 : 05 ] And I think, you know, this righteous anger rises within me. But then when I go and reach over to my wife's phone and snatch it out of her hand, you know, I ask her to be a bit more tolerant.

Because, you know, you've got to be forgiving. In fact, I'm very lenient to myself in that situation.

And we can do this in a hundred different ways.

It's the God that we want to create. We get righteously angry and say, oh, God's very angry. He hates those people, and he loves those people that I like. But actually, so often we're making him in our image rather than taking him for who he really is.

So you can't make an image of him. But secondly, you can't worship any other gods. Verse 23, he says, He says later on in verse 23 and 24, he says, And later on, he says, You see, it's not just that he's incomparable.

It's there's none other than me is what he says. It's not that there's lots of different options to get to God. He's saying every other god is a no god. The word in Hebrew for idol means no god, empty, vain things.

[ 10 : 51 ] He says, The peoples around worship the sun. I created the sun. The peoples around worship the sky. I created the sky. I'm the one who is the authority figure around here.

And I've brought you into a covenant relationship, a love relationship with myself for my eyes only.

You see, he says this word, I am a consuming fire.

A jealous lover. And that seems a little bit, okay, scary God kind of thing. But this is not I'm a jealous God in the sense of, you know, you got a promotion.

I didn't. And now I'm not going to talk to you kind of jealousy. That's not what he's like. This is a jealousy that you get when somebody inappropriately touches your wife. There's a hot, angry jealousy which flows out of love.

He will not give you to another because he loves you that much. And he says, Don't have any idol before me because you're mine. I want you exclusively to myself.

[ 11 : 50 ] If you go with anybody else, you're a fraud. They'll be a fraud. You'll go with a player who will use you and abuse you. And they'll leave you. But I burn with a passion for you.

Do you know that? God burns with a passion for you. And he says, just as Moses, when he saw a burning bush and he took off his shoes in reverence, he says, Don't play with fire.

You see, I have a friend who, the day before his wedding, he found his fiancée in bed with his best man. Can you imagine what that's like?

Some of you may know that pain. But if he was to turn around my friend and say, oh, well, that's fine. I just figured that's fine. It's not a big deal.

If you're not angry in that situation, then I wonder if you ever truly love that person. Because love and anger go together. Because you hate what you love, what hurts what you love.

[ 12 : 59 ] And so when God says, I'm a consuming fire, he's talking about a holy love that gets angry at all that is not love. All that is not good. He will not tolerate it.

And God is so passionate for you that his fire burns for you to run to him, not to run away from him.

And so the thing is, if we are not exclusively God's, then we're going to be somebody else's.

And that's what the Bible calls an idol. We put things, anything we put higher than God, whether it's money, whether it's our own career success, whether it's our relationship, whether it's even just being right in a situation.

When I put that above God, he says that you're creating an idol. You're creating a rival. You're creating an adultery. Now that's kind of not very PC, right, in our society.

That's a little bit in your face. Now I saw last year, just near my house, a picture I'm advertising. Can we have that up?

[ 14 : 09 ] This picture, which I thought was really, really interesting. It says, God is too big to fit into any one religion. It says, religion is a powerful weapon that brings people together but also separates people. And that's true.

In this call for submissions, we are looking for art that is inspired by your interpretation of what constitutes God, be it a personal vision or an abstract concept. Interesting, isn't it?

And, like, I get the motivation behind that because we do want to live. I mean, as Christians, so often we can be so self-righteous and so intolerant and treating people of different beliefs in a way which is hurtful.

And Christians have to confess the way they've done that in the past. So they want to bring people together. That's a great desire. But the problem with their approach is if religion's perspective is inadequate, if we can't fit God into any one religion, then whose perspective is adequate, right? The solution here they give you is it's your interpretation. It's whatever God you want to have for yourself, basically. If God's all too big, all religions are basically the same.

[ 15 : 25 ] We all worship the same God anyway. And what they're actually saying is you've got to lay aside the beliefs of your own religion for the kind of God that is acceptable to all of us. Diminish your God to a lowest common denominator that we can all agree with, and then we're fine.

We'll be happy. But actually that's not really being respectful to the beliefs of the religions themselves. It's actually saying, well, maybe my opinion about what God should be like is not what any of these religions should be like.

And the struggle with that is when you have a kind of God which is just acceptable to everybody, then it's always a very diluted, very kind of impersonal, kind of floaty God who is very spiritual, but he wouldn't kind of say boo to a goose, right?

He's the kind of one who's not personal. He doesn't have an authority, so he won't make any demands on my life. So I can basically carry on living the way that I want to live. And, you know, what I'll do, I'll make God in my image, fashion him in a little way, and then I can go to church and I can pray and I can do the things that maybe help an old granny across the road occasionally.

And, you know, he'll bless me. I'll get life and joy and happiness and it will be fun. And that's kind of the gods of the people around Israel. But the Bible says if you believe in that kind of God, that's not a God who's worth worshipping if he just looks a little bit like you.

[ 16 : 53 ] And the Bible says, actually, God is not kind of impersonal, apathetic. He's a consuming fire who wants a love relationship exclusively with you.

And because he's incomparable, he calls you on his terms, not yours. And yet he says in verse 20, this is really interesting. The Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace out of Egypt to be people of his own inheritance.

Do you know what the iron furnace was? The iron furnace is where you made idols. And he says, you don't have another image or idol before me.

You don't make me into an image because I already have an image. And that's you. That's you. I'm a God who has rescued you out of slavery.

I brought you to myself. And what I'm trying to do, I'm trying to reshape you into my beautiful image. And if you diminish me in any way, you're actually going to diminish yourself. Because your image, my image is you.

[ 17 : 57 ] And so I want you to look more like me increasingly. You see, when you put an idol before God, it always dehumanizes us.

Worship anything less than a God who is great and awesome and majestic. And you'll diminish your own dignity and value and worth. And you'll judge everybody else according to your own standards of what's right and wrong.

And those are not reliable standards. So the living God says, I burn with passion for you. I am incomparable.

Don't have any other gods. Don't have any other images. And by the way, what that does is, we don't have to agree with people of different beliefs.

But if you see them as made in the image of an awesome God, then you treat them with dignity and respect. That's the difference that having a great God makes. An incomparable God, secondly.

[ 18 : 58 ] An incomparable word. How does God change people into his image? Okay? How does he change people into his image? Verse 33. Did any people ever hear the voice of a God speaking out of the midst of a fire as you have and still live?

What he's saying? Our view of God always shapes our view of his word and what he says. Okay? If this relationship with God is a consuming passion in your life, then his words will be precious to you. Amidst the crowd of voices that are all around us, it will be his voice you want to hear. Now, this is really interesting. Because the amazing thing about Yahweh, the God of the Bible, is this. He's not just incomparable, but he speaks.

And you think, duh, of course. But have you thought that it's grace that God speaks? It's grace. God could remain utterly silent.

He's got no obligation to speak to us at all. None at all. There's a theologian called Carl Henry. He said, In God's gracious self-disclosure, he forfeits his own personal privacy that we might know him. [ 20 : 11 ] God doesn't have a copyright privacy act on himself. He wants to reveal himself to us. God speaks. And what he says, he contrasts this.

All the other images around you, the idols, are mute. Jeremiah 10 verse 5 says, Their idols are scarecrows in a cucumber field. Okay? There's not many scarecrows in cucumber fields in Hong Kong, but just imagine the picture.

And they cannot speak. They have to be carried, for they cannot walk. The statues in temples of other religions don't speak to you. But here's an incomparable God who wants to speak to us, and it's grace that he does.

I don't know. In a relationship, you cannot know the other person if they remain silent. I don't know if you've tried that, just talking to someone and they never respond to you. Right? You're just not going to get anywhere.

Okay? You can put electric shocks on them. You're not going to get anywhere. But it's like a dad whose kids run up to him, and, you know, he's just watching TV, and they want to talk to him about his day, and he just stays silent, still watching the news.

[ 21 : 18 ] And he's there in the room. Right? He's present. But he's emotionally absent. He's not engaged in their lives. He's emotionally distant, because if he doesn't speak, you don't know him.

There's no relationship. And some of you know what that's like, that kind of devastating barrier in your families. But God is not an emotionally absent father.

He's not a God who kind of, who turns away just to kind of say, oh, not them again. He longs to engage you. That's why he speaks through his word, and he wants us to respond.

And do you know what? This is what I realize so much about myself. It's often me who is more emotionally absent than him. It's more me who's turning away watching the TV, not wanting to listen to him, than him.

Right? Anyone know what I'm talking about? His words have authority, but they're not authority just to kind of grind us into the ground.

[ 22 : 21 ] They're words that he speaks to us, out of grace, to do us good. Verse 39. It's not just that these are grace to us.

Verse 39 says, Know therefore and lay it to your heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath. There is no other. Therefore, you shall keep his statutes and commandments that it may go well with you.

The word well here doesn't mean kind of okay, not sick. It means fully flourishing. It means doing well in every aspect of life.

You see, a God who is jealous for you, who has this authority in your life, he speaks words so that you can flourish. So that you can flourish. Now, some of us struggle with the idea that God speaks an authoritative word that we need to respond and obey to.

We want to be a bit more like, I don't know if you know the rock band Queen, they sang a song, I want to break free. Okay? I don't want anyone else telling me what to do. I want to do things my way. But if you are like that, consider this.

[ 23 : 33 ] Everyone lives under the authority of somebody else's words. Everyone. Some of us have parents, friends, bosses, who have said words to us.

Words like, why are you so stupid? Can't you do anything right? You're not good enough. You're not smart enough. You're not good looking enough. Anyone ever had any of those words?

And even today, some of those words still have authority in your life. Because they still get to you.

They still drive you. Because what happens, if you're anything like me, you kind of take those words, and whenever you make a mistake, then you kind of loop.

You have this little kind of live stream loop that goes in your head. And then you say those same words to yourself. You say, why was I so stupid? Why has everyone else got a better life than me? It's just not fair. Right?

And we have this loop that's going on all the time in our heads. And that loop, actually, is what drives most of the decisions in your life. It drives most of the behavior in your life.

[ 24 : 38 ] You know, when people are workaholics, you're not a workaholic just because you love your work. It's because there's a loop going on in your head saying you've got to prove yourself.

You've got to do better. You've got to get ahead. When we're defensive in relationships, when we enter into arguments just to prove that we're right, it's because we've got this loop saying you've got to be good enough.

You've got to move up to the mark. You see, words have authority in our life. And if you want to know whose words have authority or who has authority in your life, just think whose words really impact you.

Even this week, whose words do you lean on? Whose words have the power to ruin your day? Right? You see, for me, it's the people I respect, it's the people I fear, it's the people I crave their attention and their approval from.

Their words carry weight in my life. You know, if, I don't know, just a random fruit seller down the road says to me, oh, you're stupid, Chris, and you're good for nothing, honestly, I don't really care. [ 25 : 46 ] But if my wife was to say that, and she doesn't, but if she was, I say, okay, we may have words afterwards, but, do you know what?

Her words, those words would crush me, right? Because her words have an authority because of a relationship that we have. You see, whoever you ascribe authority to in your life has the power in their words to lift you up or to crush you down.

And if anybody crushes you with their words and you have nobody else who has a higher authority, nobody else whose words have greater weight than theirs, then you will always be a slave to their words.

Then you will not live in freedom. You'll be resentful. You'll be angry. You'll be offended. You'll be hurt. You'll be like, I can't believe that person. And it will just ruin your day.

But the thing is, when God says, I want you to listen to my word. I want you to obey my word. I want you to trust me. What he's saying is, I want your freedom from every other word which could bind you because I love you that much.

[ 27 : 00 ] Do you get that? You see, when those loops, and this is one thing that I, I don't do enough, but when I do it, it's so life liberating.

I know what my loops are in my head. You know? If you go and sit down and just work out what are those loops that go on in your head, you'll be able to figure them out pretty easily. Oh, you messed up again. Why did you do that?

Oh, you're better than everybody else. All those different things. I sit down and I write them down and then I think, okay, what's the truth in this situation? And so what I've learned, that when those things come into my mind, and usually I'm wallowing in them for a while, if I have a truth from God's word which says to me, there's now no condemnation for you in Christ, Chris, do you know what? My world changes. I gain freedom. There is power in the words of someone who has authority, who's incomparable God, and whose words are given as grace to set me free.

It's grace. It's authority. These incomparable words to make us flourish. The third thing that these incomparable words do is they're costly words.

[ 28 : 14 ] I don't know if you noticed in that verse 33. It says, did any people ever hear the voice of a God speaking out of the midst of the fire as you have and still live? And the answer that they're expecting is, no.

The answer, there's this kind of shock that God could speak to them and they could still be alive. Now, I'm not sure that many of us kind of have that sense.

You know, I don't go and read my Bible and walk out of the room thinking, wow, I'm glad I survived that one. I don't. But sometimes I do go and I read the Bible and I go away with this sense of condemnation that I don't measure up.

I feel like I listened to a sermon. I feel guilty that I didn't kind of, here's this standard ahead of me and I didn't quite get there. And you just feel like, oh, and that loop goes again in my mind.

Oh, you're not good enough. Why does it do that? Well, sometimes it does that because what God's Word does, it shows you what pure love and grace and beauty looks like.

[ 29 : 21 ] And then you look at your own life and you begin to see the difference. And you know, for the Israelites, they had a trail of guilt, of disobedience, of rebellion all behind them.

It was enough to show them that man, in this relationship, we should be burned up by this consuming fire because man, we have not been faithful at all. There should be condemnation. But you know, the only way that they could hear these words and live was because there was a mediator who stood between them and God, this holy God of love. And that mediator at that time

was Moses because Moses stood there, God spoke to Moses, Moses then relayed the words to the people so that they could actually hear what God was saying.

Because you see, when you see a consuming fire, I don't know if you've ever met somebody who is just incredibly loving and you just stand there and you see them loving everybody else and you think, oh, I should have done that. Oh, oops.

Oh. And you realize you're so much less than them. That's what, when you come to see God, there is this holy fire and there is an anger at our sin and we want to run and hide from that.

[ 30 : 31 ] But 1,500 years later, God had seemed silent to a rebellious people. They hadn't heard his word for 400 years.

They were lost, directionless. And then a man comes and he starts teaching them. And he speaks words to demons and demons obey him.

And they go. The demons that everybody else feared, with a word, he casts them out. And everyone says, wow, this guy's teaching is incredible, but it has authority.

And then he has this burning zeal, this burning fire of a passion for his father. And he goes into a temple one day, smashes over the tables, because the people there had cheapened the worship of God and his word of God.

And they were just simply out to get what they wanted out of their religion for themselves. They'd made God into their own image. And the Bible says, zeal for my house consumed me.

[ 31 : 38 ] But a week later, this man, Jesus Christ, his burning, passionate love for his father took him to a cross. And he became the mediator between this people, who frankly, like you and me, are often emotionally and willfully absent from the relationship.

He took the holy anger of God at our rebellion. Some of us have heard that many times, but it doesn't resonate because we don't really see the hurt and the grief and the fire.

But he took it so that when you come to his word now, you do not come with fear, you come with confidence. You can come, because when Jesus rose again, he invited us into this relationship with himself.

And do you know what the first thing Jesus did when he rose again? He did a Bible study with his followers. He reminded them of what he told them. You know, he doesn't tell them, okay, go and do all this stuff first.

What he says is, I want you to hear my word first, and then you're going to go off and do a load of stuff. Because that as a church needs to be where we're up to as well.

[ 32 : 54 ] You know, there's this amazing advert where a guy wants to tell a girl how much he loves her. And I think it's Milk Trey. This is like a really old advert.

And he jumps into his helicopter. He dives, he jumps out of the helicopter into the sea, kind of swims through the waves and the storms, climbs up a rock face, gets into a car, climbs up a skyscraper, smashes through the window, and lands with a box of chocolates there.

And it goes, all because he loves. Whatever the word is. You see, he was trying to give a message to the woman of his love for her.

God gave a message so much more costly than that. He brought his son to die, and if his message and his words come at such a cost, will we treat them lightly?

Will we treat them lightly? An incomparable God, no other images before him. An incomparable words.

[ 34 : 05 ] This year, for us as Watermark, we live in a city with so many different voices, so many different things, but the only way we will be distinctive and different is not through first by being activists and doing a hundred different programs.

The way that we will first become distinctive is if God's word begins to shape us, and we become expecting, expecting the living God to speak to us.

Because some of us can read God's word, we can study in community groups, we can listen to sermons, but we don't actually expect him to speak. We just read.

Do you know, he wants, he's done all of this, not so you just read a book. He's done it so that you can enter in and know him, and he wants you to do that through his word. And that comes in many ways, and you know, sometimes we get into this thing, oh, have I read enough?

Did I, okay, some of us know that we should be reading the Bible and aren't, and we're feeling guilty about it, and this is just making you feel even more guilty. But if you think like that, then you've missed the whole point.

[ 35 : 15 ] He's not just about ticking some box, he wants a relationship. Here's a question I always ask when I come to listen to a sermon, when I come to reading God's word, I want to say this, if I actually believe this, if I actually believe this is true, if this is really God's word, I mean, not just, we theoretically know it's God's word, I mean, most of us, if we're Christians, will say this is God's word, but if I actually believed it, like really, what would change in my life this week?

What would change in my life? Do I simply read his words, or do his words have authority with the decisions you make in life?

That I find convicting. I want to show you a quick video. We did this a couple of years ago. That actually, this is not just me by myself with God.

This is a community thing where we're shaping. So, can we just show this video for a couple of minutes? A very youthful looking Eric.

You see, we want to be serious about God's word in community, and I know that some of us have a lot of questions.

[ 36 : 38 ] I'm not addressing all your questions here, but I want to start a conversation with us. Some of you may be thinking, if you're not a Christian, you may have questions, why should I trust the Bible? You may have questions, you've been a Christian, but like the Old Testament, and you read Deuteronomy and it's like, ooh, I have no idea what's going on.

We want to start that conversation. We want to be talking about this as a group. So, if you have questions, you can email me or email any of the staff, and we want to be able to begin to start talking about these things together because if God's word is this important, then we need to be serious about understanding it.

Last thing. when we come to the word of God, we don't come just wanting to do a religious activity. We come because we have an awesome God who wants to transform us, change us. He wants to make you flourish, and if you allow his word into your life, he will truly change you.

If you don't know how to read the Bible, if you've been reading the Bible for a while, and you've been learning how to discuss it in community groups, but it's dry for you now, here's my challenge.

[ 37 : 57 ] Come and find me afterwards. I would personally like to spit down with you and walk through the Bible with you. If you are like, I just don't know where to start, come and find us, and either I or one of the staff will come and go through it.

It's this essential to the life of our community. Because we're doing it together. We're on a journey together, and we want to know this awesome, incomparable God because he's going to change your life totally.

Let me pray. Father, I just, I realize that so often I kind of go through the motions in Christianity. I know the things that I should say. I know the right things I should read. I know the things that I should and shouldn't do. And yet I don't come expecting you to speak to me.

Even this morning, I pray that you would give us an expectancy. Whether it's a good sermon or a bad sermon. Whether it's a great community group time or not.

[ 39 : 15 ] Whether it's a, even when we're struggling to read the Bible ourselves, that we would see that you have made a way with such cost because you want to relate to us.

And you want to speak right where we're up to. Words of comfort, words of challenge, words of grace, words of transformation. Some of us, Lord, I pray that you would help us to turn from the words that have held us for so long.

The words which keep coming back and keep crushing us down. And I pray that you would help us to see that actually we have, we need to repent that we have allowed other people in their words to have more authority than your words over us.

I pray that this morning we'd hear that we are your children. That if there are people here who don't know you, Lord, that they would see that this is serious. That your love for them is not something they can just flick off.

We have a God who is not just vague and impersonal, but a gloriously personal God. I pray that people might come to know him this morning. In Jesus' name.

[ 40 : 28 ] Amen. Amen. Amen.