

Freedom or Slavery – unveiling the truth of the gospel

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Date: 20 May 2012

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[0 : 00] This morning's reading is found in Galatians 4, verses 8 through 20. Please follow along in your bulletin. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.

But now that you know God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

You are observing special days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you.

You did me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. And even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.

[1 : 18] Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us so that you may have zeal for them.

It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you. This is the reading from God's Word. Good morning, Watermark.

How are you guys doing? I guess you can't start a sermon without asking that question anymore here. We are in the church plant, but we have a lot of traditions starting. My name is Mike. I am working with the university students here at Watermark.

Let me just say thank you for all the people that have helped over the past two days. We had an amazing outreach to the college students with Gangor from the U.S. There were a lot of people helping with that.

[2 : 27] Also, a lot of people have supported us on making the mission trip possible. We are going to the Philippines next Saturday with a group of students. So I just want to start out saying thank you to so many people who have been praying and supporting and helping out.

So I've been a part of Watermark and just seeing how we've come together as a family really has been humbling and amazing to see. We've been on a journey of studying the book of Galatians. And I've studied the book of Galatians many times before, but this is the first time studying Galatians while being a part of a church plant. And it's interesting how many new dimensions and layers of the scripture are revealed when you look at Galatians just through the lens of church planting and being a newly formed community.

To quickly recap, we are on that journey. We are now in the third week of looking into Galatians. And just to recap for those who either have not been here or are new to the church, I just want to give you a brief overview of what we've been looking at.

So the book of Galatians is actually a record of a letter written by Paul. And the letter was written about 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ.

[3 : 36] Paul had become to believe in Jesus as the one true God. And now he has been starting to travel through the Roman Empire and sharing this message of Christ. And the people that started believing in the message formed communities, churches.

And so one of these churches starts in Galatia, which nowadays is central Turkey. And so there is a community that starts gathering and they are like-minded followers of the message that Paul has been passing on.

Now, what Paul is addressing in the letter of Galatians is that there's a conflict arising. Now, the conflict is that there are new people stepping into the community and they are bringing a message in that is contradicting to what Paul has been sharing.

And so there's a struggle over, so what message should we follow? What's really the truth about this? Paul's message that really united that community is called the gospel.

The gospel means the good news. Now, what was good about this news? Why was it a good news? The news was basically that as we look around, the world is broken and we see injustice and hurting people.

[4 : 46] And ultimately, this brokenness in our world, we see a sin. Now, the good news is that God didn't leave it with that, but that he actually came in the person of Jesus Christ.

And he died on the cross for the forgiveness of the sins. He reconciled everything back to himself. And so by his love and grace and not by our own good deeds and anything that we can add to that, that's what we are saved by.

The conflict arises because these people that are stepping in, they're looking at this message and they are saying, yeah, that's not really the whole message. No, you actually have to do a lot of things.

You have to observe these like dietary laws and rituals and traditions and Jesus' death on the cross is not really all that there is. So here we are now in chapter four and starting in verse eight, it says, Now, just last night I experienced that, that there are these things that I've learned, that there are not gods that try to pull you in.

They are by nature not god, but we treat them like a god. The god that I'm talking about is the god of football. For those who know that sport is soccer, let me explain about last night.

[6 : 18] Because last night, exactly between like three and six a.m. in the morning, there was a Champions League final. Now, the Champions League is like the Super Bowl, right? But a lot more interesting and exciting.

So, last night there were these temptations of these weak and miserable forces that wanted to enslave me, getting up in the middle of the night, watching TV, despite having had a really busy week, not a lot of sleep, having a cold.

And on the other side, there was God saying, no, you should get some rest. You should take care of yourself. The message that you should give, you should be rested for that and you should focus.

And so I leave it up to you, your imagination, whether the miserable force is one or God. Just that much, when you start to follow the miserable forces, they have a habit of disappointing you.

So, there are countless gods trying to grab our attention. They want to enslave us.

[7 : 23] They want us to worship them. They want us to devote our time. They want us to devote our resources, our passion. But really, by nature, they are no gods at all.

Let me share you a story that, throughout the seminar, I'll use it to illustrate a little bit more what I'm talking about. The recent conflict between China and the Philippines reminded me of that story.

Actually, in the year 1944, there was an island in the Philippines, the island of Lubang. And a person, Lieutenant Hiro Onoda from the Japanese Army, was sent to this island of Lubang, just about 100 miles south of where the current conflict about an island is happening in the Philippines. And so he was on that island, sent in the Second World War, to gather intelligence and coordinate guerrilla attacks out of the jungle during the Second World War. Now, here's his mission report and what it said.

Your mission may take three years, it may take five, but whatever happens will come back for you. Until then, so long as you have one soldier, you are to continue to lead him.

[8 : 31] You may have to live on coconuts. If that's the case, then live on coconuts. Under no circumstances are you to give up your life voluntarily. Now, soon after he arrived on this island, the island was overrun by the Allied forces.

The surviving men, they retreated to the jungle, and Onoda actually joined with three others, and they formed a little unit. And there they started to organize attacks on the people that were going by and tried to survive on coconuts, as the mission report basically stated to them.

Now, there was something happening in 1945. They found a little leaflet, and the leaflet said, the war is over, come back out. But they were very smart. It's a trick from the enemy.

They are just trying to get us out. We're staying right here where we are. So they stayed. And the years passed by. And after several years, all his friends had either died or surrendered.

But Hiro Onoda stayed true to his calling till the year 1974. After almost 30 years in hiding in the jungle, a college student from Japan got on the plane, went to the Philippines, and he followed the myth of Onoda, trying to figure out what happened to him.

[9 : 51] And he found him in the jungle. Now, when he told him that the war had long been over, he did not believe what Norio Suzuki, the young college student, had to say.

So he said, not till I get from my commander the report that says that my task is over, will I leave this jungle. So he flies back, gets him, comes back, and there his commander tells him, yeah, it's true, the war has long been over.

Freedom had come, but Onoda did not believe in the message of peace. Instead, he has wasted many years of his life, enslaved by the lie that he believed, not realizing that he had just had to step out of the jungle into freedom.

Galatians 4 says, formerly you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. And then, how is it? You are turning back to those weak and miserable forces. Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

So what is Paul talking about here? We are all slaves to countless gods. We are slaves to idols, lies that we believe.

[11 : 01] And Paul describes these idols as not being God in nature. They actually are weak and miserable forces. In my own life, I've seen that a lot.

When I worked in banking, I had an idol lifted up of success and money. Now, as a pastor, it's what status and how people think about you. We all build up these idols in us.

Idols desire our passion. They desire our devotion and everything about us. And ultimately, they control our life. Let me share one other story that happened about two years ago.

One of my new friends here in Hong Kong, from mainland China, he studied at a university here as well. He came to Christ. Now, I'd been discipling him for a while, and we were sitting up on a pond up in Kallun Park.

And we were just talking about the gods we worship. And he says, I'm from mainland China. I am an atheist. Until the day that I became a Christian, I did not have any gods in my life. So I need to continue talking about what it really means to having idols and having things we worship to have a Christian.

[12 : 07] I asked him whether he has anything that ever brought him good luck. He said, oh, yeah, yeah. And he pulls out of his pocket this little jade coin or like circle. He said, my mom gave that to me before I left to Hong Kong.

And every time I had an exam, I took it into the exam. And I did really well. I've been really lucky. So I took that coin and I said, so do you mind if I just like throw it in the lake?

And he, no, no, no. And I, what? Like, why do you react so strongly? Like, I thought you don't have any idols. Oh, and as we are starting talking about, he realized that he had assigned something very powerful, something divine to this little thing.

And he had given that little thing a power over him. And he put his hope in it. Paul talks about these weak and miserable forces, which are no gods by nature, but we do assign power to them.

And we let them rule over us. There's a leading theologian from the 18th century, and this is a little tongue-breaker, Friedrich Schleiermacher. And he talked about this whole concept in detail.

[13 : 14] So he has these different levels that he talks about to help us understand how many gods we actually create. So the first level that he talks about is what he would kind of describe as talismanism.

So a talisman is a man-made thing, a little item, that we assign something powerful, something divine to. Now, it's like my friend's jade coin. Well, when I was young, I had a little stuffed animal that I would actually take to my exams as well, so I could relate to how my...

It was my good luck monkey that I took into all my exams, and I did really well. I was very lucky. Now, you may have a little necklace you wear. You may have a pen that you use to sign all your important papers, make sure that all your contracts go well.

You may have red underwear. Some people do, I heard, in China. Or you may have a little golden statue in your home. Even the banks and police stations, actually, in Hong Kong, you see they have cannons or dragons in the entrance.

And they actually are man-made idols to keep the evil spirits out. The police station, the cannons were set up so that the police would not be depressed. And the dragons were set up to keep the spirits from coming in and bringing bad fortune to the bank.

[14 : 25] Now, it's pretty obvious that we have man-made idols all around us in this city. But it's not just man-made things that we can assign the divine to and lift up as idols over us.

There's also people. So the second level that Schleiermacher talks about is shamanism. Now, a shaman is a divine person. Like, we assign the divine to a human being and lift them up as being something powerful.

In Hong Kong, you see that at Temple Street, for example. You go to the fortune teller, they'll read your hand, or they'll look in the stars or your birth date, and ultimately, they will point you to what you need to do, and you assign the divine power to them over your life.

You may adjust your life according to it, or you call the Feng Shui master into your home. Now, there may just be an architectural thing about it, but ultimately, there's a whole spiritual dimension behind it. And you may want to adjust everything in your home according to how the spiritual balance and harmony in your home should come through that.

And then you may actually pay money for it, and suddenly you realize how you've elevated a person with something divine to your own life. But I would say we even do that with pastors in Hong Kong.

[15 : 43] The way that I have sometimes seen pastors being viewed as this powerful person that has something that I cannot have, and I need to go to that pastor for not just wisdom and a pointer to God's power, but that somehow this person has power that I cannot have, but Christ has come to be the mediator for us.

So we see that even there, we begin to assign something powerful, something divine to people, but it may be as subtle as your spouse, your children, and you begin to find more hope in your own family than you find in Christ.

And suddenly you realize how much you have elevated people in your lives. Now, the third thing, the third level that this guy talks about is nature and the unseen.

So we've talked about things or people, but there are also unseen things that all around us we assign something powerful to. It may be something like a spirit of a mountain or of a river, but even if you look around in Hong Kong, if we could look this way, you know that there's a spirit of a dragon in this mountain, and in the Bel Air, one of the most expensive real estate pieces in the world, they had to cut out holes so that the dragon actually will not get upset and bring bad fortune to the people living there.

Now, when you think about how expensive real estate is over there, why would an architect ever cut out a place for 20 apartments that's like 50 million Hong Kong dollars just to please a dragon spirit?

[17 : 16] Now, or the number four, how many people would not want to pay the same price for an apartment on the fourth level of a building? So you suddenly realize that there are forces that we assign the divine to that we don't see, but we give them power.

This morning, I stepped out of my door, and there's my neighbor, and he does his thing in the morning. He has a little pot right in the middle in front of my door, and he burns all that stuff for the ancestors.

He has a little sticker that he put next to our lift so that the ghosts don't come up. And in Sai Yen Poon, you know that there has been a mental institution that there are a lot of ghosts in that area. So he's very thorough.

Every morning, he goes through the ritual, and you see how he has been enslaved by pleading the spirits by the unseen forces. And don't hear me wrong. I'm not saying that these forces don't exist and that they are not real and that they are something to joke about.

I very much believe that there are forces that can be assigned to people or to the unseen and that there's a spiritual world all around us. But in the words of Paul, I believe that these powers are not of God, that they are weak and miserable forces that ultimately try to enslave us.

[18 : 31] As you think about your own life, what and whom are you assigning divine power to? What resonates with you? What idols are there that are a part in your life?

Are there tangible things in your life that you put your hope in? Maybe you have good luck charms, but maybe it's just your flat, your money, your status, and you put your hope in the security that comes through that.

Or are there people that you seek out for your well-being? It can be a monk or a fortune teller, but it could be your spouse that you put in more hope than Christ.

Or unseen forces, spiritual forces like the chi and everything that's related to the chi and ghosts and ancestors, but maybe also the unseen spirits of pride and lust and being in control of everything.

Now, I spent a lot of time unpacking some of these idols, but I think it is important to just stop and not just look at Galatians and what it was for them, but what does it mean for us now, here in Hong Kong, right here in this year?

[19 : 41] It's easy for us to say, I don't really have the same kind of idols. Actually, if I look at my life, I don't really think I struggle so much with gods that I lift up. But are you sure that you are not like Lieutenant Onoda?

That after years and years living in the jungle, one day you look back at your life and you realize, money enslaved me, studies enslaved me, I had idols in my life that I lifted up and they controlled every one of my steps.

Paul reminds the Galatians of the truth that freedom has come and Christ has set him free. For Lieutenant Onoda, when he was in the jungle, there were flyers that were dropped in the forest. There were cars going around the jungle with big speakers announcing peace. But every time when they were starting to talk about these things that were happening, they talked to each other and confirmed to each other that, oh no, this is all a lie.

They were so caught up after some years of living this false reality that it became their truth. He could not really flee. He couldn't really step out and was completely uncaptured by the lie he was living.

[20 : 49] And I wonder, so when I look at the Galatian church and being a young church, what does it mean for us? Like Watermark is only a year and a half old and we are on a new journey.

And a lot of people, maybe young believers, some of you, you may have still like a lot of questions about the truth of the gospel. So what does it mean for us?

How can we find out whether we're living in the truth or whether we're living a lie? So I want to just look at a couple of things and how we can maybe protect ourselves, how we can evaluate that.

How do we not fall into that trap that the Galatians fell into and how do we identify these lies that come at us? So one of the first things that I would suggest is that we can do as a church is to simply know the gospel.

Like if you know what the truth is and you match it with what not as truth, then you can like know where to go. But the point is, knowing the gospel is not like knowing the right answer to your exam.

[21 : 58] The gospel is all of life. There's so much about this message. And you saw the Galatians being very confused as soon as like a new twist and a new little bend to that message came. They said, oh, maybe that's still true.

So I grew up in Germany and I lived in a culture that supposedly is Christian. But as I grew up, I actually went to Christmas services.

I also went to Easter stuff, but it had more to do with the bunny and not so much with the real message. So ultimately, as I went through that, I realized that the DNA of the gospel was so hidden. The truth of the gospel was so hidden beyond all this other stuff that I couldn't really see it. Now, when I was 19 years old, I started to think about it more.

And I was confronted with the gospel. And step by step, I realized that the gospel message about God coming to this world in the person of Jesus Christ being 100% God, 100% man, dying on the cross for my sin.

[23 : 01] And that there was no way around to twist that message and that this God is not a distant God, but that he longs for a relationship with me. I wrestled with that.

I started to study archaeology and history and I did not want to embrace this message. But all my searching and wrestling with it ultimately led me after several years when I was 23 to ultimately give my heart to that message.

And the deeper you begin to understand and allow the gospel to sink into your lives, the more you become rooted in the message. I've been thinking about what it means for us and one of the things that has come to my heart was like seeing Eric work with the youth.

I've been a youth minister for three years when I first stepped into ministry and started to think about what does it mean for your kids and the youth in this church. Because one of the things that I have seen and that I've wrestled with while being in Hong Kong is that sometimes you see parents dropping their kids off at church on Sunday morning, maybe sending them to youth group and the hope is that somehow they'll become good kids and they'll do the right things.

But there are like these three, four hours of exposure. And as they go back into the world, into their schools and into their families, is that the same message? Will they come back and will their parents pray with them?

[24 : 25] Will the kids look at their own parents? Will they see the gospel message, the truth being lived out on a day-to-day basis? And I don't know how it is for you.

And there's a tension obviously in looking at this message and realizing that there's freedom, but there's also responsibility for us to live out this message. So I'm not, I not want to put that guilt and responsibility on parents, but for us as a church family to ask this question together, how can we expose, how can we make the gospel known not just on two hours on Sunday morning, but in every aspect of our lives?

How in the school, in your family, how can we come alongside each other and exposing each other and rubbing that DNA on each other of the gospel? Now the second thing that I think is pretty significant is community.

Now who is the community that surrounds you? What do they tell you? In verse 17, it says that those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good.

What they want is to alienate you from us so that you may have zeal for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good. And to be so always, not just when I'm with you, I have had people in my life that I was very close with, very close friends, and as I look back, I realize they did not have a good purpose.

[25 : 58] And I look at my life and I realize sometimes I haven't had a good purpose about being around people. When I think of a true friend, I would ask myself the question, do I have people in my life that would really tell me the truth?

Honestly, that's difficult stuff. Like think of you being upset with your boss or with your wife or you have a conflict with a friend. What do you want them to say? What do you want them to say?

You are right. He's a jerk. Your boss treats you bad. You are right. Your spouse just should respect you more and do this better and love you more. Or do you have friends that actually will tell you, you know what?

You really messed up. You need to go to apologize. Stop treating people that way. Stop being prideful. Stop with your unethical business practices.

Now, which friend would you prefer? And I have to say in my heart, I want people to like me, support me. But what does the gospel say? Now, in verse 16, Paul says, have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

[27 : 15] I think it is a very clear indicator of how honest community looks like. At Watermark, you know, we talk about Watermark Community Church, so community is the center of where we want to go. So how we can protect ourselves from not falling into lies and living out these wrong messages is to be in a community where we tell each other the truth.

So we have community groups all over the city. And so I would encourage you to think about, if you're not a part of a community group, to step into a community group. And I'm not saying that they will all have a good purpose, but hopefully we will move step by step and go on this journey together that we become people that will have a good purpose for each other, speaking the truth to each other.

And when we fail, that we can approach each other again and become step by step more transparent and real with each other. That's my hope for what it means to stay true. Like, I don't want to sit in the jungle with three people that wrestle with, oh, I think it's a lie, and then ultimately wake up and say, I wasted my life.

I have been following these idols. The third thing that strikes me about Galatians is that I don't see anything mentioned about an outward focus.

Now, we talk about upward, inward, and outward here a lot at Watermark. Upward is your relationship with God, and that's an important part. And then inward, that you are a part of community and you grow deeper. But this outward part, I think, is very essential.

[28 : 41] You know, when I think about being outward, I think about being missional and being in the workplace, being in the family, and living out the gospel, not just in the Christian Bible, but there where I may not have Christian community.

Sometimes when you talk about maturity in the Christian faith, we think about coming to church and how much Bible knowledge we have. But I would suggest a different question. A question of Christian maturity could be, who do you disciple?

Who do you mentor? Who do you pass on the message of Christ? Who do you rub Christ on? And if you have a hard time thinking about who these people are, then maybe you need to ask yourself, like, how can I take steps into being outward?

And again, remember, there's freedom, not a burden in this. It's not to walk away and feel like, I have to do these things. No, Christ has set you free. Now, how do you go in a community together on the journey that we become more outward focused?

I like this phrase of saying, maturity is not how much solid food you can eat, but how much milk you can give to the immature.

[29 : 54] So how much do you feed the babies, the young people? How much do you pass on? Is your life centered around, oh, I go to all these Bible studies, I know so many things. Or do you ultimately say, because I know these things, I now want to go outward and impact people around me.

I look at the Galatian community and I wonder, where are the people? And when Paul writes that letter to the Galatians, like, why is he not saying, hey, listen to your elders.

Listen to the people that tell you what you need to do. No, it's him who has to write and direct people. So I wonder, where were the people that took that leadership?

But it was probably, like Watermark, a very young community. So we just need to hope and pray that as we all take steps forward, that we grow in maturity, that more and more people will become people that are not just eating solid food, but begin to pass things on, care for those who are not as far down in the journey.

And finally, ask yourself whether you actually want to be free or do you want to be enslaved? Now, you may say that's a ridiculous question.

[31 : 03] Of course, I don't want to be a slave. I want to be free. But when I look at my life, I have to say, do I really want to? Now, let me explain that. In Galatians, that was a big question.

On the one hand, the message of grace was there. God did everything. He came down. He died on the cross. By grace, by his mercy, you are freed. That's it.

Now, the other guys step in and say, hey, that's not really the full message. It's actually also what you need to do. You know, you can observe these dietary laws and go get circumcision and follow these festivals and it's all that you can do and you can control how you're saved.

And somehow, it's in us that we want to be our own savior. And I think we all have that in us that we somewhat want to control areas in our lives. Do we really want to be in that freedom?

Paul writes in verse 20 that I'm perplexed by you. Why would you ever want to turn back to that? It's like, Lieutenant Onoda, after coming out of the jungle after 30 years, he would have said, oh, okay, there's freedom, but actually, let me go back to the jungle.

[32 : 14] The funny thing is, he wrestled with that. The jungle had become his dear home for 30 years. That's where he functioned. The world had changed so much. So how to adjust to that?

Or some studies have shown that when people have spent years and years in prison, they have a hard time living in freedom again. They prefer the controlled environment of prison. So the responsibility of really living and wanting freedom is big.

We much rather want to have a religious system where we know, if I just go to church and I go through my daily Bible reading plan and then I tithe a certain amount, then I'm good and I've done what I need to do.

But Christ has done it all already. Nothing for you and I to add, but to live out the gospel in all its beauty.

And that's freedom. And so the only challenge I can leave you with today is embrace your freedom. Let's pray. Father, we just come before you realizing that that freedom that you want to give us is not something that we run after and that we really desire all the time.

[33 : 31] So we just pray that if we don't know that freedom that the gospel message really talks about, that you would reveal it and really show the lies we're living, that we would step out of the

jungle in our life, realizing the idols that we follow, that we are enslaved by so many things in this world.

Father, that you would just reveal that to us and help us see the beauty of the freedom that is in you and in what you have done on the cross. Father, I just pray that no one would walk away today with the burden of guilt and responsibility and I need to do all these things and I do these things wrong, but what you hear is your message of freedom.

The freedom that you invite people into community with you and community with one another just take steps forward at a time to really embrace the fullness of the freedom that you have given us, Father.

And so help us see the idols that we worship. Give us the freedom to step out of it as we find the freedom and the beauty of what you have done for us and we would fully embrace it.

I pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Wow. You want to be free, right? That's the question we have to ask ourselves today. What does it look like in our lives? What does it look like to walk out of here different and free and not go back to the jungle that so easily kind of beckons us back?

[35 : 04] I kind of feel like I don't need to do announcements right now but just continue worshipping a little or just thinking about the message and what God wants for us in our relationship with Him.

What does it look like to be free? Do we want that in our lives? Honestly, do you want that?

Or do you want to go back? There's a lot of neat things going on in the church, in the community. I want to encourage you to get into a community group. It's the next step. It's the only thing we want you to do here.

It's where life is lived out. It's where people wrestle. It's where people are honest, hopefully. Again, we've always said we're young and we make a lot of mistakes. We're not perfect. We're trusting the Lord as we go on this journey with Him.

I wanted to ask Natalie Mann to come up and share a little bit about what's going on with the children's ministry for the summer. So, summer is here and it feels good and our church is growing which is another great thing happening here at Watermark.

[36 : 11] And I wanted to share that we are looking for new volunteers. So, we're not just looking for them, we actually need them. So, I wanted you guys, those of you who had a feeling like, wow, I love kids but I just don't know if I have that energy or I just don't know if I want to give up, you know, my Sunday service.

It's actually a really great opportunity. We're only asking for once every month. So, for those of you who think, hey, I can give up one Sunday a month, we really do need you.

So, parents who have kids in the nursery or in the three and four year old class, whoever you are, we're looking for you. And so, please approach me after service.

The great thing about this opportunity is we have training this week. So, Thursday night, dinner provided, it's going to be an amazing time, 7 to 9 p.m. if you can come for an hour, that's great too. Saturday morning from 10 to 12 p.m., breakfast provided. So, you won't miss a meal. It's all about the food, right? It's all about the food. And so, please, if you have any questions, if you're kind of on the brink and thinking about it, please just ask me questions.

[37 : 22] But we do need you. So, we're saying we need you. That's at the community center. At the community center, Watermark Community Center in Sying Poon. So, thank you so much and happy summer.

That's great. Thank you. We have just a couple of really quick things I just want to run through. Next week is the beach party. So, you want to come. There's buses that will be available to take you out of here.

There's places to eat there. We've already told them to be careful and be ready because there will be a lot of people coming to visit them. And so, we'd love for you to come and get a pick up a ticket on the way out. There's two or three buses that will leave immediately after this.

And so, bring your beach clothes. If you don't know what those look like, just revert back to my birthday picture two weeks ago. That's what it looks like. Colorful, loud, and just easy to wear in the hotness.

So, that will be next Sunday. Also, someone asked me last week, they said, okay, you don't talk about tithing anymore. Are we not supposed to tithe? And just so you hear our heart, you know, we haven't talked about it for about three or four weeks because we feel like it's a journey that we're going on as a church, but it's a response to God and what God's done in your life.

[38 : 33] And so, we need you to tithe. I mean, the scariest time for churches sometimes is the summer because everybody leaves, but ministry keeps going on and community keeps going on and outreaches keep going on and training keeps going on.

But sometimes we forget about how that happens. But we want tithes to be a response on your part to what God has done in your life. So as you think about the message, as you think about the church, as you think about Galatians, as you think about what God has done in your life, we want you then to respond in that fashion.

And everything you give to God is already His. It's already His. But Scripture says that's probably one of your highest forms of worship because it's the thing that grabs our heart the most.

So there's little purple envelopes. You can fill those out and put them in the boxes and worship God. Blue. We have this little discussion in our office all the time.

We're going to do an Israel trip next May. We're already planning that. We already got the dates, so we want you to pray about that. We think it's a great opportunity for the church. Christine and I have had the incredible privilege of taking people every other year.

[39 : 49] My mentor will be taking us again. We have, I think, the best tour guide and one of the top church historians in the world. And so we'll be praying about being a part of that. We'll give you more information, but it'll be in May.

And I just want to pray right now. I'm kind of a little hesitant in doing this, but we have the university students going out, and I think that we talk about missions, right? There's one other person here I wanted to pray for, but they're not here, so I think they're serving in the youth because they're going to be going out to another city, another country.

But Scripture says that we're all missionaries, that we're all on a mission. And so the minute you leave here, you are a missionary. The minute you go to work, you're a missionary. Wherever you go back to your family, for some of us, our families are the hardest mission field we'll ever be in.

But we're called to be missionaries and to point people to the gospel and to Jesus. So I'm going to pray for the university students as they go to be missionaries in another country as opposed to their university where they already are missionaries.

But I want to pray for all of us as we head out. Remember the great responsibility we have and the privilege of throwing out flyers and saying there's freedom.

[41 : 03] There's freedom. You don't have to live in a jungle. You don't have to be in bondage. That's why God has called us here as church.

Father, I pray for this family, our family. What an amazing privilege to come and just worship you. To feel your spirit in our life. Father, I pray for us as we leave here that we're different than when we came.

I pray that we wouldn't so easily be entangled by the jungle around us help us to be friends and yell out at friends who jump into the jungle and remind them get out of there because you're going to get caught.

Help us to be missionaries wherever you send us because you've called us to do that as a church and that's our chief purpose is to glorify you and to make you known to the nations wherever our nations are and wherever you send us.

So I pray for the university students. I pray for safety and travel and just an amazing time. I thank you that you've given us the privilege of sending them out to minister in a different country as opposed to Hong Kong.

[42 : 16] But Lord, in the same way I pray for all of us that as we go out of here today that we just realize that we're all missionaries and we're all called to love well and to share well and to serve well and to give well because of what your son has done for us already.

So Lord, we love you and we need you desperately. We pray all these things in your son, Jesus' holy name.

Amen. God bless you and have a great week. We'll see you next Sunday. God bless you. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.oria