

Hiding in Crowds and Lonely Places

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[0 : 00] Hey, and after you've greeted somebody and you sit down, make sure you squeeze in because we have probably 40 or 50 people standing up. And so we'll open up room pretty soon as the kiddos leave.

So just squeeze in a little and you'll make room there. How you guys doing? Oh, I didn't hear that. How you guys doing? Okay. Hey, my name is Tobin.

I'm one of the pastors here. And if you're joining us today for the first time, we are finishing up a three-part series on community. So last week you heard from Eric, who's the youth dude, our youth pastor.

Today you're going to hear from Mike, the university dude or the university pastor. And three weeks ago you heard from me. But we're talking about community and what does that look like as a church and the journey we're going on.

You know, we're all on a journey. And when we started this church, we prayed about what kind of church did God want us to plant. And we realized as we prayed about this that we felt like God was calling us to plant a church that would bless the city.

[1 : 04] The scripture is really clear that every one of us in here is an alien if you're a follower of Christ. This is not your home. You're in this city. And we're called to bless the city.

We're called to pray for the city. We're called to seek the welfare of the city. Now, we think Hong Kong is an amazing city. And God has done so many things in this city.

But often when people come in as business people or new people, But the more I've been thinking about that, even as people who've lived here for a long time, Often our mindset is to use the city.

We're here for two or three years to make a lot of money. We're here for 20 years to make a lot of money. We're here for a whole life to make a lot of money. We're here to use the city. And when we're done using the city, we just get rid of it and we go to another city to use.

We realize as followers of Christ, that's not why Christ has us here. He doesn't have us here to use the city, whether you're here for a little time or for a long time.

[2 : 08] Sometimes people will come and they'll say, I'm only here for five weeks or one year or two years. What can I do? And one of the thoughts we had as we started thinking about this church Was this sign that was given to me by my students in mainland China.

And if you come to the community center, it has it everywhere. And the sign basically says, The first person plants a seed, and the next people benefit or enjoy the shade.

And so as a church, as we pray about why God has us here, We believe that God has us here to plant seeds. We believe God has you here to plant seeds. No matter how long you're here, whether it's two weeks or five weeks or ten years, Our heart and our desire and the thing that we want you to hear from us is We want you to plant seeds for the future generations.

That's why we planted this church. It's why we want to plant other churches in the future. It's why we're starting community groups everywhere. It's because we want to bless this city, and we feel like we do that by planting seeds So that God can take that seed and can grow it into something amazing.

So we're a part of community groups. And so this last two or three weeks, community groups have gone out, And they've cleaned up Sandy Bay from some dumps that happened. They're playing a seed. Yesterday, community groups and some people gathered together at one of the new local schools, And we carried stuff up six floors because they didn't have the resources to do that Or help to do that.

[3 : 32] We're playing a seed. This last week, community groups are going to nursing homes. People who are shut in, who have no one to visit them, And loving on them, and caring for them,

and singing songs, and just saying their name.

We're playing a seed. On Thursday, in the university, there was an outreach, And there were over 200 university students who came, Most of them having no relationship with Jesus Christ. Most of them from other countries. But they came to be a part of what the Christian fellowship And what the Watermark University students were putting on to talk about Christ. Over 200 were playing a seed.

The youth went out this week, and they took several of their friends who are not in church, And they're telling them and talking to them on this retreat about Christ And what it means in their life. We're playing a seed. Our hope and our desire is that wherever you are, however long you're here, That you would get into a community group within our church, And that you would allow God to use you to plant a seed.

To bless this amazing city. And trust the Lord to take that seed, And to do something incredible as he redeems everything. I'm going to pray for us.

[4 : 49] And then we're going to release the kids, And so hopefully a little more spaces will open up. Father, we just thank you for this day. We thank you that every moment we have here is a gift from you. And no matter how long you put us here as a church, Or as individuals, Or as a pastor, Or in business, You've called us to be faithful, To trust you, And to plant seeds of the gospel.

To plant seeds of your son Jesus Christ. To plant seeds of mercy and grace. And to know that you're the one who causes things to grow. You're the one who causes the rain to fall, The sun to hit it, Other community people to come in, To talk to them.

You're the one who causes the growth. You've just called us to be faithful, To plant the seed. So Lord, we pray as this church, And as these community groups, And as individuals, That we would trust you.

That we would step out in faith. And we would plant seeds through our time, And our relationships, And our money, And whatever else you've put us here with gifting.

So Father, We pray for the trees that are going to grow up in this area, In this part of Hong Kong and beyond. We pray that they would focus and point to one person. Not this church, Not the pastors, Not the staff, Not the people in this church.

[6 : 03] But they would point to your son Jesus Christ. Because that's why we're here, And that's who we worship this morning. So Lord, We come before you, And we love you.

And we pray these things in your son Jesus name. Amen. You are dismissed, And follow the leaders, And Eric as the other junior highs, Senior highs, You are all dismissed.

God bless you guys. Today's scripture reading comes from Luke 19, And John 4. Please follow along in your bulletin. Jesus entered Jericho, And was passing through.

A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector, And was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, But because he was short, He could not see over the crowd.

So he ran ahead, And climbed a sycamore fig tree, To see him, Since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, Come down immediately.

[7 : 04] I must stay at your house today. So he came down at once, And welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this, And began to mutter, He's gone to be the guest of a sinner.

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, Look, Lord, Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, And if I have cheated anybody of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.

Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, Because of this man, Too is the son of Abraham. For the son of man came to seek, And to save the lost.

And in John 4, We find this. Jesus left Judea, And went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria, So he came to a town in Samaria called Sakaar, Near the plot of the ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

Jacob's well was there, And Jesus, Tired as he was from the journey, Sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, Will you give me a drink?

[8 : 18] His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, You are a Jew, And I am a Samaritan woman.

How can you ask me for a drink? For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, If you knew the gift of God, And who it is that asks you for a drink, You would have asked him, And

he would have given you living water.

Sir, The woman said, You have nothing to draw water with, And the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?

Are you greater than our father Jacob, Who gave us the well, And drank from it himself, As did his sons and his livestock? Jesus answered, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.

Indeed, The water I give them will become in them a spring of water, Welling up to eternal life. The woman said to him, Sir, Give me this water, So that I won't get thirsty, And have to keep coming back here to draw water.

[9 : 40] He told her, Go call your husband and come back. I have no husband, She replied, And Jesus said to her, You are right when you say you have no husband.

The fact is, You have had five husbands, And the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true. Sir, The woman said, I can see that you are a prophet.

This is the reading of God's word. Good morning, Watermark. So, I'm Mike. I'm the university dude. And I've been a part of Watermark pretty much from the beginning, when the church didn't meet. Like, there was a, there were small gatherings, and Christina and Tobin's home, and some of us came together, and just started to dream about a church plant. And, so we had this hope that on the western part of Hong Kong, there would be communities growing, and as Tobin shared, that these communities would begin to, to impact people in the neighborhoods, and would just plant these seeds in the area.

So next month, we're actually celebrating our two-year anniversary, so hope you guys all will be there, and it's just unbelievable to see, like, even now that all the seeds are taken, and people are invested, and we have community groups that are growing everywhere.

[11 : 09] Just seeing God move, and seeing how he changes lives in the process, it's just, just really humbling experience. Throughout my life, I actually lived in quite a few places.

Some may hear my accent, I'm from Germany originally, but I lived in the UK, and I lived in the US for a while, and then seven years ago, I moved to Hong Kong, but of all the places that I've lived in, I think there are some things that are pretty unique about Hong Kong, and one thing is, it's very transitional.

It's probably the most transitional place that I've ever seen or experienced. Back in my little home village in the central German highlands in Germany, it's not that transitional. It's actually, when you decide to move to the neighboring village, people don't understand that.

Like, what do they have that we don't have? So, it's a strange thing for them, and then actually leaving the country? Like, why would you ever do that? Like, you have everything here, and here, you see people moving every two years.

When the lease runs out, and you just move to the next place, it's closer to your work, or sometimes you don't even stay for the two years of your lease, and then you move out and in of the city.

Probably a lot of you have that same background of actually having had a transitional life.

[12 : 20] And so, especially in this time of the year, we actually see a lot of people coming and moving into this part of Hong Kong. We see a lot of people moving here for new jobs. We see the university starting this week, and people moving here that are new to Hong Kong.

And people wonder, like, where should I get invested in community? Like, how will my community, how will my relationships look like? And so, community has been a topic that from the beginning stages of the church has always been discussed and been really up on the forefront of who we are at the church.

Actually, it's one of our three core values, and you see those around on the banners. So, the first core value we often talk about is gospel. And so, what do we mean by gospel? Some people may not be familiar with the term, but the gospel is that amazing news that in our relationship with God, it's not about all the things we do and how often we pray and how often we, yeah, just run to church and read the Bible or do religious duties, but it's really about what God has done for us.

That the gospel is that God came... That God came to earth and that he actually would, by grace, get connected with us.

And that in his death and resurrection, that's where we find a starting point of a relationship. The second part is mission. So, we don't only talk about the gospel, we talk that there's a mission, there's a purpose for our church to actually not just rejoice in the truth of the gospel for ourselves, but actually to live it out ourselves in relationships and invite friends and invite others into that

relationship with him.

[14:01] And then the third aspect is community. So, it's our third core value. And so, we have been on this journey, as Tobin said, to explore community a little bit more over the last two weeks. And today, we are closing the series on community, and we will be looking at what the Bible has to say about community and what these two stories that we read specifically tell us about community.

And there must be something in there that not even 2,000 years ago, but even still today, it is something that connects with us. I don't really know what you feel, what you think about when you hear the word community.

Like, I think everyone has some emotions or some feelings connected with that. When you hear that, for some people, community is a pretty good term. It's pretty exciting. Especially if you consider yourself more extroverted.

Like, you are a people person, you get some energy from being around people, you just like to be around people, you just don't like to be alone, so community seems something very attractive. But how about if community is loaded with some more negative feelings?

So, community is something you don't look forward to. Maybe you are an introverted person, you are not like so excited about just being in crowds and being around people, maybe just draining to you.

[15:19] Maybe when you think about community, you realize, I'm in community all day long. I wake up, and I have my spouse around, or my kids, maybe your roommate at the dorms, and then you go to work, and there you have your work colleagues.

And so you are around people the whole time, then you come back home, and then you are asked by church, go to community group, and be around people, and you feel like, wow, you know, I've been around people the whole time, like, I just can't take anymore.

And it's a little bit like, people ask you, you need to go to the dentist. Like, it's like, okay, it's said to be good for you, I have some dentists here, so they all know how the people feel about that. So it's kind of, you know, it's good for you, but it doesn't sound very pleasant.

So maybe that feeling is like, a little bit like community. Oh, they will ask me, you know, to open up, and it will kind of hurt, and maybe it's like an additional chore, and I don't really know where to fit that in, and so it becomes like life draining to you.

Or maybe community does sound good. It's something you are longing for, but you really fear it actually happening. Like, being in the transparency and vulnerability with other people may be something that keeps you away from it.

[16:33] In my own life, I think I have been in all these places. I can look at different places of my life, and there were times where I wanted to be in community, and it was scary, where I was hiding in community.

I'm pretty much a people person. As you may know, I'm not afraid of talking to people, and talking, and listening, and I just like being around people. And a lot of people consider me an extrovert. But my wife knows me a little better, and so sometimes when I come back home, and I've been around people all day long, and I just can't talk anymore. I just can't listen anymore. We have this phrase that I use.

I say, I'm peopled out. And so I just crash, and I just can't, I just have to have my brain stop. And just this past Thursday, so we had this welcome party with 250 students, and that was really exciting.

And I loved the conversations, and then I got home, and I just crashed, because meeting like 30 new people, and even like now, I'm meeting people, and I don't remember their names, and you just can't take in all the information from meeting all the people.

[17:40] So I think that's a little bit of how I've experienced community in my life. I think there's something confusing about what community really is. Because I believe you can be as much alone in a big crowd of people as you can be alone just by yourself.

I mean, thinking about community, you can be surrounded by a lot of people, but not really experience that intimate relationship that you would want.

Like, you have your spouse, maybe you have your kids, you have all these people, but you still feel lonely. Working with the students at Hong Kong U, I actually talk about it quite a bit.

Loneliness is probably one of the top themes, and if you are new to Hong Kong U, you may wonder, like, how will it be for me to adjust? But the topic of loneliness seems to be like one of the main

issues that I hear people talk about.

So over the past year, there's actually one of my friends from the university, and we have talked for about a year about his journey and his story, and he said it's okay for me to share a little bit about our conversation.

[18 : 56] So when he arrived in Hong Kong, everything was new, being more like an outgoing person, he got pretty quickly connected, made a lot of new friends, and he built these relationships, but pretty quickly, they become kind of like overwhelming.

Outwardly, things were going okay. Outwardly, everyone thought it's all good, but deep inside, things are very different. Nobody really knew him, nobody really knew his story, and in his upbringing, in his childhood, he had some really painful memories, some really painful experiences that nobody knew about.

And when he, the kid wanted to talk about it, his family, his friends, they didn't really listen. And so what he learned as a kid was, oh, if something is going wrong, then I just need to pretend.

I just need a smile, and people just want to have a happy kid around. And so it became a habit to be the happy kid, and just pretend to the people, and not really being real.

So coming to Hong Kong U, that increasingly became difficult. The pressures of joining kind of like all kind of fellowships, like, you know, the Hall Fellowship, and then you have the Faculty Fellowship, and then you have classmates, and everyone, like from your country background, everyone has these like little groups, and they all want to hang out with you.

[20 : 17] But none of these places really was deep. They were all pretty shallow. And at one point, it was just too much, because nobody really there wanted to know him with his worries, with his questions, just the real him.

And I think that's what can happen in community too, that we surround ourselves with so many people, but nobody really knows us. So seemingly the only option sometimes seems to be to step out of community altogether, and just go and retreat to the lonely place, to withdraw from the demands, from the emptiness found in community.

So as my friend, I believe many of us either hide in a crowd, or we hide away from the crowd. Some of us here may have this tendency to hide away from the crowd, to withdraw, but then for some of us, it may be that stepping into the crowd that is our way of dealing with our loneliness and hiding. In Hong Kong, there are some really interesting things about the culture. It seems to be that it's one of these things that is expected from you that you always have to do something. You always have to be on the move, on the go.

So when I'm on Chungcha Island, this is really strange to me, because I never really see people walking there on their own. Like they go there and I thought, oh, you know, let's just escape from the city, from the crowds. But they gather a whole crowd of people to go there to be around people while they're getting away from the city.

[21 : 51] And if they walk on their own, they have earplugs in and listen to stuff because they don't want to walk alone. One of the things that I noticed as well is it's really awkward in Hong Kong when you go to lunch or dinner on your own with anybody.

Like someone, like you have this immediate feeling like I want to sit down next to them and see whether everything is okay in their life because they don't hide in this crowd. Brennan Manning, Brennan Manning is one of my favorite writers and he tells the story of a man that comes to a counselor with depression.

The man shares his struggles about being just like burned out and burdened with life and overwhelmed. And after listening for a while, the counselor says to him, what I recommend you do, go just by yourself to a mountain cabin for two weeks.

And the man says, I don't really understand. Like how should it help me in my depression? But the counselor says, just come back in two weeks and share with me your experience. So two weeks go by and the man returns and immediately starts saying, this has not helped.

My depression got worse and worse being up there. I don't know what this was all about. And so the counselor says, so what did you do while you were up there? Oh, you know, I just went up to the cabin and first I read some Tolstoy and then Edgar Allan Poe and then when I was tired of reading, I actually listened to Tchaikovsky and Chopin but it didn't help at all.

[23 : 15] And so the counselor tells him, you know, I didn't ask you to go to the mountain to spend your time with Tolstoy and Poe and Chopin but just by yourself.

And the man responded, just by myself? I could not imagine a worse company than that. And I think in that story we find ourselves sometimes that we want to hide from even meeting ourselves because we know when we slow down and we stop and we really look at our lives and what's happening in our lives, we may be so disappointed and we say, that company or that person that we really are, I don't really know whether I want to spend time.

So we start falling prey to the idols of the city and start working and getting busy with all kinds of things and so we realize that community can also become the hiding place because we only want to escape from ourselves.

When we look at the life of Jesus, he is surrounded by people a lot. He's surrounded by crowds that follow him and the crowd grows and grows and when he's not in the bigger crowd, he is with his group of disciples.

So imagine a 24-7 community group and being all together, doing everything together and then there's sometimes these places where he just goes away and goes to these lonely places where we just want to look at these stories that we heard just in the reading before and what we can see about being with people and being away from people.

[24 : 49] So our first story that we heard and if you want to follow up in Luke and you can read a little bit through it, we're actually in Luke in our sermon series here at the church for the past two years.

So we're walking through the book of Luke and we come to the end and this is a story that we'll actually look at in more detail in just a few weeks. But today, we want to just highlight a few parts of this passage that have to do with community just so that these community elements in that story. So the story there begins with Jesus passing through Jericho. So he's passing through because he's on the way to Jerusalem and this is the final stop of his journey of three years of ministry. And as he goes there, the crowds actually are following him and the crowds surround him in the city. He's become kind of like a celebrity. The Jews are getting convinced now that this ministry has more dynamic and he has shown his power that he must be the one that is promised long ago in the sacred text from hundreds of years ago that he is the one that will come and he'll be the savior, he'll be the king, he'll defeat the Romans and he will lead them to freedom and nobody wants to miss out on that.

So the crowds are united as a community in their hope, in their selfish hope that Jesus will fulfill their dreams and their hopes. But honestly, do you think that anybody in the crowd there really was interested in Jesus as a person?

[26 : 23] Do you think anyone there was really interested in knowing him and knowing his story, knowing his struggles, knowing his worries? So we look at this crowd being caught up in their expectation and the demands and so here the community puts this demand on Christ, on who he's supposed to be and what he's supposed to fulfill.

But as Zacchaeus enters the village and the crowds gather, there's this one guy that we hear about, Zacchaeus. He's the only one mentioned specifically in this story. We don't learn about any other person's name.

We actually only hear about Zacchaeus. And Zacchaeus was not a part of the crowd. He actually was one that was rejected by the crowd. For him, community was probably one of these scary things.

You can imagine being a tax collector, he didn't have a good standing. People only saw him as the one that took the money from them. So they would probably talk behind his back. Wherever they had a chance within the community, they would show him that he's not wanted.

And the closest community that he had said, I wonder what that was. Maybe there were some other wealthy people that experienced the same things. Maybe there were some other tax collectors.

[27 : 40] But then the tax collector, since he's the chief tax collector, they all probably were working for him. So being up close and personal with them probably was not very possible. So I would assume that it was more a business relationship.

But anyways, when Jesus comes to the village, he's just by himself. So when Jesus enters the city, and I just imagine that probably being like, I don't know, like an hour on Friday night in Mong Kok, like getting through the crowds, like so many people gathered, and nobody really interested in relationship, but there's this like huge community gathered.

And he's fighting his way through that. And as Jesus walks into the city through this crowd, he picks the most unlikely person. and he invites himself to his home.

Now, like living in Hong Kong, you know how unlikely it is to get an invitation to actually come to a person's home, especially with like space pretty rare in Hong Kong. But hospitality was a little bit different at that time. It was about honor and showing people respect as they walked through. It was kind of like an unexpected thing, but it's still a pretty intimate place. It's an intimate place where the family meets, where it's a personal space, that Jesus invites himself into.

[28 : 57] And the story, in the story, the crowd gets pretty upset. They actually say, why does he go into the house, like in this personal space, of this bad guy that we all want to show that we reject him?

But Jesus enters the home and he breaks through all the rejection that Zacchaeus has experienced within his community. He doesn't care about it.

He breaks through the pain and the feelings of rejection. He breaks through his feeling of not being worthy of community. And I'm pretty sure that the wealth that he had did not really change that. In that moment, Christ just shows him this bit of dignity and worth that he has not experienced by anyone around for a long time. And being treated in that way, it changes Zacchaeus' life. It's just this one little step, this one step of him stepping into a relationship and this encounter becomes something where Zacchaeus looks at all his possessions and he finds them not worth anything.

[30 : 07] He begins to give half of his stuff away. He says, and I'm using the rest to make up for any wrong that I've done because in this one encounter he has experienced the wealth of a relationship, a deep, intimate, personal relationship, true community.

And that's what Christ does. That's what Christ does in the second story. We see Christ in the second story having another encounter with an individual.

It's a woman that he meets at a well. And that well, it's, the encounter that happens there is interesting as well because it is a Samaritan woman.

She already experiences rejection because she is a Samaritan. A Jew and a Samaritan, they would not really get along well because a Samaritan, ethnically, they intermarried with another race. So, for them to talk with each other was very unlikely. But it's not just a cultural challenge here. She actually comes to the well on her own during the day.

[31 : 12] So it's, it's not that she comes with the other ladies of the village, that she actually comes there and then during the day when it's hot, I wonder whether she's avoiding meeting the others there.

In the encounter with Jesus, we actually learn that she had, has, has had five husbands and now she is with another man. So either she had some painful experiences with someone dying or getting divorced but a very likely possibility is that she just simply had five husbands and now she is with someone that she's not even married to.

Whatever her story, the relationship has left her probably scarred as well, looking for community in some places that ultimately left her unsatisfied.

And towns at that time were pretty small. So, everyone knows everyone and she, like Zacchaeus, experiences that, that rejection of being not part of a community. But now when Jesus encounters her at the well, he breaks through all these relationship barriers that exist.

He breaks through the culture barrier for, of her being a Samaritan. He breaks through the barrier of talking to a woman which was very uncommon. And he finally talks to her as a woman from a questionable background.

[32 : 38] So, we look at Christ here and what he does is he's not just simply having a conversation with her but as she builds up her defenses and kind of, you shouldn't approach me, he reveals in a remarkable way knowledge about her life that is to a depth that is just, just, yeah, just, yeah, just a lot of knowledge.

So, we are all experts in hiding like the woman. You know, we all have these kinds of things. We hide from people truly knowing us. We don't really want people to get so close.

We build up these barriers. Especially, we don't want people to know our dark side. So, just imagine you meet someone that you truly respect and you really want to get into relationships so you kind of pull out your name card and try to show them who you are and then maybe you actually get into a conversation with them and in the conversation you try to like drop some lines that build up reputation.

You know, I just did this big like business deal last week was really, really good that that happened and I just got this new house up on the peak and, yeah, I actually have to fly out for business next week.

I go to a few different countries or you might just say, oh, I just got into Hong Kong U. Whatever it is you try to do to impress a person and try to get the standing and present yourself in a certain way but imagine the other person says, you know, it's okay.

[34 : 17] You don't have to do this. I know about your messed up finances. I know it. I know all your accounts. I know about your marriage problems and where you are, really.

And I know about the trouble you have with your kids inside out. I know about the other woman you have, the other man. I know about your depression and I know that you feel lonely and that you are in despair.

I know all that. I know all the things that you are trying to hide from me. But honestly, it doesn't matter to me. I just want to meet the real you.

I don't want to meet the person that you're trying to be. So stop faking it with me. Just come out of hiding. You don't need to fear that I'm putting you to shame, that I'll embarrass you, that I'll hurt you or disappoint you.

And when Jesus sits down at the well, when he talks to Zacchaeus in both of the stories, that's what he does.

[35 : 27] He sits in this intimate place away from the crowds. When he talks to the Samaritan woman, he talks to her while the community group is getting food and is worried about dinner.

And he uses this intimate place to be real. Jesus invites the Samaritan woman into a safe place, true community.

He reveals to her his knowledge of the most vulnerable places in her life and shows her that he loves her through it and that in him she is safe.

So when we begin to apply these stories to our life, we may have to start there. If we want to see what these stories mean for us here, today, in our daily lives, then we have to see that true community ultimately can only start with Christ.

I mean, in this world, let's look around, you'll see that ultimately there is no safe place for us to go. No person in this world, no community will not at one point leave you pretty disappointed.

[36 : 45] I will leave you disappointed. Tobin will leave you disappointed. Your friends and family will disappoint you. Your community group will disappoint you. Your church will disappoint you.

But the reason is because we all fall short of living perfect relationships. In every relationship we seek out, we realize that they are broken.

Today, I've been married for a year and four months and I think one of the biggest blessings is that we are not trying to fulfill the other person.

That we try to be everything for each other. We actually have an amazing relationship. We both love most of the things about each other, I think. But marriage taught me more than anything else that the starting point of every relationship, every community, is Christ.

The starting point of community can only be the one, the only one, that's always faithful and true.

The one who made us, who knows us, and who loves us, and pursues us all the time.

[38 : 10] We talk a lot about community at Watermark. But community is less about the amount of people that you gather, but more about the heart behind it.

We can gather as a church and be a crowd. And we can hide in the crowd and we can go to community group and we can have a meal. We can learn something and walk away and not know about each other.

But throughout history, God has called us into true community. He has called us back into community with Him, into that one starting point of community where we know we will not be left disappointed.

So true community starts and is found in Christ. Now I believe if we really begin to understand that, if we really begin to focus our starting point of relationships on Christ, then that's the foundation, that unshakable foundation about the all-loving character of God that ultimately helps us accept ourselves.

You know, you may be like that guy in the story from Brendan Manning. You may not want to spend a minute of time just by yourself because you have a hard time looking at you how you really are.

[39 : 40] I shared with you about my friend from Hong Kong U and I think that's what God is teaching him right now. That Jesus sits at the well with him and that he really listens.

God has unlimited time, unlimited patience, and he wants to hear our burdens, our pain. He does not get tired of listening like me.

And that place of intimacy that he offers us is not just a place where we reveal who we are, but in that place of intimacy, that first place of intimacy with him, there's also healing.

The slow healing that only Christ can bring, that God restores our lives and I think slowly my friend is learning that and I hope we all are learning that step by step and day by day.

But that's not where community stops. It's not just about the community with Christ and how we begin to see that community and this understanding of community transform our lives, but God calls us into community with one another.

[41 : 01] And that can be a slow process. I said, you just look at Christ and you realize that he did not have the community group around and said, oh, woman at the well, why don't you just open up your heart and let me just reveal to everyone what I know about you.

So maybe it's just one person you take that first step with, maybe a pastor, maybe your closest friend or one person in that community group that you have grown closer and grown to trust.

Or look at Zacchaeus. When we look at him, his life is restored but what he does is just astounding that as soon as he has this one glimpse of true community with Christ, his response immediately becomes, I want to redeem and reconcile relationships all around me.

I want to make up with anyone I can. I want to pay back everything that I've taken for someone. I want to do what I can to reconcile the wrongs I have done because I have now seen that all my wealth is worth less than that one relationship that I have just encountered in this one meal with Christ.

And the Samaritan woman, if you continue reading the story later on at home, you will see that her response was astounding in the same way. She gets up and she runs back to the village.

[42 : 33] She does not care what the people say about her now. She has seen the one that has given her that one intimate place that she always looked for in all these relationships and now she is truly founded in the one that's true and faithful and she tells everyone in the village come and see the one person that has told me everything about my life.

I think this is the community that we are called to as Christians. First of all, it's started in Christ and Christ begins to heal us and then we take what he has done in us to bring it to people all around us to redeem and restore relationships in our families and our friendships and our workplaces and our university campuses and providing these places where people are not just stuck in their guilt and in their shame and in rejection but in the love of Christ.

In our first message two weeks ago on community, Tobin talked about a picture in the Bible that is the imago dei, the image of God, that we are all made in the image of God and we had this mirror up and ultimately he said that community is, why we do community is also that we are reflecting God's image to the world.

So if God pursues us so passionately, if he wants to love us and he wants to love everyone and we are his mirror image to the world, then how are we doing?

Have we found that healing, that starting point of relationship in Christ? And do we begin mirroring who he is to us and to the world to everyone around us?

[44 : 22] I want to leave us with just these thoughts of where are we with this? Where are you in the journey of community?

Have you accepted this love, this amazing love that the God of the universe pursues you? That he wants to sit at the well with you? That he wants to know the real you?

That he does not look for, oh, you know, I've done these holy things, I run to church and I go to community and I read my Bible, but he is looking for that deep relationship of intimacy where he meets the real you.

And have you allowed that reality of his love to transform your heart, to really impact your heart? And do you take that to the people around you?

Are there relationships that you want to reconcile and redeem like Zacchaeus did? Is there a village that you need to run like the Samaritan woman? Any person that you feel like, I've seen that person struggle with community.

[45 : 26] Maybe he or she is that rejected person that I see in my office, in my dorms, around me that nobody wants to talk to. But Christ looks through the crowds and points on that person and says to you, you need to talk to them.

And I think this is what Christ leaves us with, to pursue these relationships, to heal relationships, till one day in the kingdom when Christ comes back, everything will be restored.

That one day when the God of the universe calls us into eternity, that we will live these healed relationships and their true and deep intimacy with each other and with him.

Let's pray. Amen. Father, we just come before you and yeah, we're just thankful that you pursue us, that you don't give up on us, that you don't want us to stay hidden in the crowds, that you don't want us to hide in loneliness where we are stuck with our feelings of despair and hopelessness, but that you sit right there in this space.

And we just remember that when Christ went to the lonely places, he did not go there to escape, but he went to the most infinite place to be with the Father and we just pray that you give us that heart that we would not escape from who you made us to be, from the intimacy of relationships that you call us into, that you call us into community, that you do your work of healing and restoration in us.

[47 : 07] Father, we just pray that we would just have the confidence to talk to just one person, to open up, to just take a start in allowing your way of community to form in this world.

Father, we just pray that we would become a community that provides safe places, that we would provide a safe place where people could be real and not try to meet up to demands and expectations.

Father, we just pray that you give us a heart to reach out to the lonely and lost, that are stuck in lonely places, they're still hiding from who you want them to be, but that ultimately we all become your image bearers and that we would mirror your character to this world.

I pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Hey, right now it's 10 after 12. At 20 after, we're going to meet right next door in the theater area for a new membership class, new member class. So if you want to become a member of the church, you want to have questions about the church, want to find out more about the church, it's only going to be 30 minutes long. We have snacks, we have child care, so we'd like for you to just come join us and grab some drinks out here, some coffee, then at 1220 right in the theater, right next door, we'll meet and have that for 30 minutes.

[48 : 39] Also, the community group table is out front, so if you're not in the community group, we want to encourage you to sign up and get involved in the things that we've been preaching about and talking about and praying about for the last three weeks.

We have a great marriage course that's going to be opening up the first week in October. We ran it already in the spring, and the reply and response was so great, we were going to wait a year to do it, and then we decided we need to do it again, so that's going to start off on October 9th, so sign-up sheets will be available for that, so please, husbands, why don't you just go to your wives and say, hey, let's join this together.

Your wife will be very surprised, right? Wives just go, that's great, honey, I love you, and go together with that. It's going to be a great opportunity, it's six weeks long, food is involved in, as in all things in the church.

Food's involved, right? Hey, we didn't pass the offering plates around, and we're trying not to do that because we believe it's active faith, that there's purple little envelopes everywhere with kiosks, and so we just ask that as you worship the Lord that you would tithe back to him what he's asked you to tithe back, and that makes all this and all those seed plantings possible.

Mike, thank you for bringing God's word for us today, and let me pray for us. Father, we just thank you for this day. Father, we pray for this community. To me, it's amazing what you're doing here in people's lives, and not just numbers, but just people's growth in their hearts, and so we pray for that, Lord, that you would continue to change people's hearts as we gather together to worship your son.

[50 : 19] Father, we pray for the finances, we pray for the offering, we pray for all these seeds that we're planting, we pray, Lord, that you would be the one, who would water them and cause them to grow. Help us not to artificially start something that is not of you, and so we come before you as your people, and we worship you, and we thank you for bringing us back to your family, and we pray all these things in your son, Jesus, holy name.

Amen. God bless you. We'll see you, hopefully, in 10 minutes, or back here next week. Take care.