

Kingdom Centered Prayer

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[0 : 00] Today's scripture reading comes from the book of Acts, chapter 1, verses 1 through 3. In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all Jesus began to do and to teach until the day that he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God. Please join us in prayer.

Heavenly Father, as we stare our eyes and minds in heavens, we realize that everything in the universe, everything undersea, everything that's on earth, all the people that's around, it's all about you, Lord.

It's all about us. Father, as we come together as a church, please help us focus in you, focus on Jesus. Fix our eyes upon you, Lord, and cast all our worries, fear, and pride behind us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. God, we lift up our community, God. We lift up our church. Father, we just ask that you will just grow the relationships among our community groups, Lord.

[1 : 24] And we pray that those who are not in community will find it, God. We pray that we will always project and exude the image, Lord, the life of you that is a welcoming, caring heart.

Father, I pray that we would love each other well. Lord, I pray that where there are walls or hurts between us, God, that we would restore those and reconcile those in your name, Jesus. Lord, we just ask that this inward relationship among our church members, God, would just be something so beautiful that would draw others to you, Father.

May we just continue to trust you, God. May we continue to find unity as we walk towards you and rely on you, Jesus. God, just make us into your bride to shine brightly, to shine purely, God, and to love you so much, God, that we can't help but love those around us, Father.

We pray all this in your name. Father, God, I also want to pray for our church as a whole, collectively, that we will be a blessing to our communities, Lord.

Father, whether it be in our workplace or at home or in the place that we socialize, Lord, we want to ask that you would walk with us and you be there with us as we shine for you.

[2 : 42] And we want to pray specially for Sible Port, Lord. You have placed us in a very strategic place. We believe that you have a special plan for this area. And we pray, Father, for you to lead us step by step to guide us so that we can be a blessing to those who are here and be a light to them.

Lord, I also want to pray for the upcoming outreaches for all the community groups during the Easter time, Lord, as they're planning that you will plan with them. And then you will prepare the places and prepare the people to do the work that you have sent so that we can truly be, you know, the center of good news that is extended beyond Jerusalem but into Samaria and all the world.

We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Stand and join us for another song. Just let's remain in that spirit of prayer. Behold the throne of God above.

Before the throne that we can approach God. We can share our honest thoughts with him. And he hears us. That's amazing.

It's so encouraging. Just as we sing this, make it your prayer. We're just taking communion together. The presence of God is here.

[4 : 00] He's in us. And so let's just engage with him. Good morning, Watermark. How y'all doing? If you walked in the church this morning or if you're new and you saw like people dress up, when I walk in and I actually see our youth pastor in suit and tie, I know this is not, don't feel underdressed if you are new.

Like we have a wedding coming up afterwards. So some people will wear suit and tie today. So don't feel you underdressed. Watermark has been meeting a year and a half. And I have not seen the youth pastor in suit and tie at worship.

We've been looking for the year and a half that we have been here. We've been looking at the gospel of Luke. And now we will take a little break after a year and a half. And we're actually about halfway through, Tobin, right? So we have at least another year coming up to continue to really look at the life of Christ.

So I'm really excited to kickstart a new series today for the next three, four weeks. We'll be looking at the topic of prayer and what prayer really means. So I've mentioned that we have been meeting for a year and a half.

But many of you here today probably have not even been with us for that long. We are pretty diverse and a pretty new community. So when we look around the people that we see here, there are people that may have come to Watermark because you have just moved here to Hong Kong within the last year and a half.

[5 : 29] And so you have made Watermark your church home or you have moved to Watermark because there wasn't a church in this area before. And you have decided to change your church membership to a church that's more in the proximity of your neighborhood.

Maybe you're just here to explore Christianity and find out more about what God is like and what it's all about. But even if you're here and you've been in the founding team, the first 41 that decided to venture out and then start this church, even those 41 came from very different places.

So with that diversity and we look at the topic of prayer, we see that we will probably have a lot of diversity even in our prayer life. There may be people here that have never really prayed at all. Or when you look in your prayer life, it's more like a ritual or tradition and prayers you have learned in your upbringing.

And for others, it may be that the prayer is more something that you turn to in times of need. When things go wrong and then you realize, maybe I really have to turn back to God and seek his guidance.

But you may also be here and prayer is like a part of the structure every day for you and you have a consistent prayer life. But wherever you are in this, we just want to acknowledge that we come from all the kinds of different places in the way that we view prayer and in the way that we practice prayer.

[6 : 51] So as we're starting the series on prayer, I just want to point out that this is just to lay a foundation, no matter where you are in this journey, that we have a starting point for a dialogue about prayer.

And before we start to look at the first scripture passage that the worship team read, I just want to share a story with you and ask you a question.

Have you ever been in that place where someone close to you passed away and then you were feeling like, I really would like to have another day talking and sharing and just asking some questions because I just really missed out on having this chance?

In my life, there have been several of these moments, but one in particular has been when I was 18, my father suddenly died from a heart attack. And so the years coming after that, I wrestled a lot. And I remember after he passed away, there were moments where a door would open or a car would come and I would look and see whether it was his car or I would walk through the streets and I saw someone and I thought I saw him.

[7 : 58] And sometimes in my dreams, I would wake up and felt, oh, you know, I just talked with him. Like, isn't he still alive? And it took me many years to really walk through that experience and to really reconcile that experience that he had passed away and that this time is not really coming in this lifetime.

And so I was wondering, like, what would be the things that I would ask him? Because I would love to have this moment where I just share with him that I found a passion to leave the banking business where I was before and become a pastor or to just share with him about getting married and just share with him about Christ.

And so the passage that you heard in the beginning, I find it really striking because this is the passage where that exact same thing happens. In Acts 1, and you can follow along in your bulletin again if you want to look at these verses.

In Acts 1, it says, In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

[9 : 24] What an amazing passage if we really see what's happening there. And let me just first put that passage in context of what we have been looking at as a church. So it says here that this is the second volume of a book.

So the author is Luke. And he writes Acts, but the first one was the Gospel of Luke, which we have been studying all along. So all the events that we have been looking at over the past year and a half take place and then there are still the chapters that are still to come and then we have Acts coming. And that's where we see these first few verses starting out right away. This is the second volume he's talking about. So the events that are still coming, Jesus will continue his ministry and then he will return to Jerusalem and in Jerusalem he will be betrayed, he will be sentenced to death and he will go to the cross, nailed to the cross and he'll die.

And he'll be buried. But then three days after his burial, he will rise again from the dead and appear to his disciples. And so right here in Acts 1, we find these verses where it talks about this time where Jesus rises from the dead and he appears to his disciples alive in many different settings over a period of 40 days.

And I think that's remarkable. It's not like a short little encounter where you could say, was it really Jesus that I saw there? Did someone just pretend to be Jesus or did I just imagine that?

[10 : 53] It's in many different settings over a period of 40 days he appears and it's face-to-face meetings in which he talked to them about things concerning the kingdom of God.

So this is, again, it's not that quick encounter. It's more like an extended dim sum meeting with Jesus or hours of talking and there's no way to get this wrong.

And then it ends with that he was talking about the kingdom of God. And I think we can read over that and actually not see what he's really saying.

Like, get this. Like, if I had one more day with my dead and I would sit with him, I would want to talk to him about the most important things because I don't know how long I have. I would want to make sure that, you know, I talk about all these things that have taken place and the questions that are on my heart.

And here it says, Jesus decided to teach about the kingdom of God. So that's significant. It's the last teaching topic, the last instructional topic.

[11 : 54] For 40 days straight are lessons on the kingdom of God. Now, I think there's another interesting thing. When you continue reading, it doesn't say anything that he says there.

Like, wouldn't you as a disciple say, oh, now he instructs us for 40 days on the kingdom of God. We have to, like, add a couple of chapters and giving you, like, discipleship manual one, two, and three on the kingdom of God because you need to know everything he talks about, right?

And I think the answer is pretty simple. What Jesus is teaching to his disciples over the extended meetings, over 40 days, is nothing new.

He has been teaching on the kingdom of God for three years, over and over again. And so here we find Christ just referring back to everything that he has been teaching.

And now in the light of his death and resurrection, many things in the light of the kingdom of God start to make sense. And so he goes back and explains all these things again. If you have never read the Gospels in the light of the kingdom of God, let me just point out a few things that happen in the Gospels about the kingdom of God.

[12 : 58] In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, verse 15, so the moment Jesus begins his ministry, the first chapter, it's actually the first thing that Jesus says in the Gospel of Mark.

It says, The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news. The first line that we hear is, the kingdom of God has come. Or if we look at other passages, like in Matthew, there it says that, that in chapter 13, that the kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field.

The kingdom of God is like a merchant searching for a pearl. It is like yeast. It's like a mustard seed. It's like a large net thrown into the sea and all these stories that explain the character of the kingdom of God.

But I wonder, why does Jesus not say, the kingdom of God? And now here's the definition. Like write it down because you need to know what the kingdom of God is because I'll talk about it all along. So let me just give a definition about the kingdom of God.

But instead, we have all these stories that talk about it. And I just wonder, what is that? This kingdom of God thing? It doesn't make sense to me. So how can we explain it and understand this? [14:11] So in my enlightened modern mindset, I just want to have a definition that makes sense, that rationalizes what is the kingdom of God and give me a definition. Let me give you an analogy about it.

If someone asked me, can you explain and define your wife, Katie? And then I would say, okay, the human body is made 99% of six elements, oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus.

And if you want to get in a little bit more detail, another 0.85%, so altogether 99, 8.85% of every human being, the other 5% are potassium, sulfur, sodium, chlorine, and magnesium.

So now, you have about a 99.85% definition, right? The reality is, it doesn't, the slightest bit, say anything about who Katie is and who she is to me.

But I can tell you how she is like. I can tell and share stories with you about her steadfastness. I can share with you stories about her passion and her kindness and her love for people.

[15:13] And then you'll get a picture that is so much more than 99.85% of what we would hear as this definition. And I think that's exactly the kind of stories that Jesus is talking about in the kingdom of God.

In Jesus, we see the kingdom of God and its reality breaking into this world. And in Jesus, we see what the kingdom of God is like.

So when Jesus meets his disciples for the 40 days, he reminds them again about everything that he has been taught and he teaches them what it means in the light of the kingdom of God.

Now what does that have to do with prayer? Now when everything that he has taught is now explained in the kingdom of God, if we truly gain an understanding of what the kingdom of God is like and how Christ shows in his life what the kingdom of God is like, we also will understand prayer. Let me go to Matthew 5-7. It's the Sermon on the Mount and most of you will probably be familiar with you, but let me just set the framework for those who are not. The Sermon on the Mount is the longest instructional or teaching time that we find in any of the Gospels where Jesus teaches his disciples.

[16:30] And so in the first verse it says, now when Jesus saw the crowd and there are like thousands of people gathered, he went up to a mountainside and he sat down and his disciples came to him and then he began to teach.

And as he begins to teach, he starts out and he talks about about murder and adultery and what adultery really means and what divorce is about and what it means to love your enemies and what it means to give to the poor.

And after all that, he comes to the passage in chapter 6, verse 7, and when you pray, so now he begins to teach on prayer as well, do not keep on babbling like pagans for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

Do not be like them for your father knows what you need before you ask him. This then is how you should pray. Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

You will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And then you know how the prayer continues if you have heard the Lord's Prayer and you had to recite it before. But then after that prayer lesson, he continues and then he teaches on fasting, he teaches on money, he teaches on worry, and then after all these things he teaches about sitting on that mountain in front of this big crowd, he says, for the pagans run after all these things and your heavenly father knows that you need them.

[17:51] But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Now I think there are two things that really stick out to me when I relate prayer and the kingdom because it says when Jesus teaches on prayer that he instructs his followers to pray for his kingdom to come on earth and it is already in heaven.

And he points out that we should first seek his kingdom and all these things will be given to us. So this is a big concept to grasp and it's so difficult for us to really gain an understanding of what this kingdom of God is like and what it really means to pray for the kingdom to break into this reality.

Before I came to Hong Kong, I lived in Germany and England and the US but I had never been to Asia. And so when I first heard my call to come to Asia to Hong Kong and I had never been here I had no clue what this country would be like.

I did not know anything about really the culture and the people. I did not know about the suffering and the problems and the challenges people face. So it's like when people ask me like so why are you going to Asia?

Like what is it that you would tell people? I have no clue. I have never been there. There's a passage in 2 Corinthians 5 that talks about being an ambassador of the kingdom of God.

[19 : 16] So if I think that I would be sent as an ambassador from the kingdom of God the first thing that comes to mind is I have never been there. Like how can I be an ambassador of this kingdom that I have never been to I have never seen it and then I'm coming here to this world to be an ambassador for the kingdom of God.

Like I can be an ambassador for Germany. I can tell you all hey dim sum is great but you need to eat like pork knuckle and bratwurst and sauerkraut and you're driving actually on the wrong side of the street because the right side is the one that you should drive on because that's what we do and I can try to tell you about everything that we do in Germany and how we organize stuff and engineering and whatever but ultimately what can I tell you about the kingdom of God?

What can any one of us tell anybody else about the kingdom of God? And the amazing thing for me is that the kingdom of God becomes a reality in this life because God humbled himself and stepped into this world to be the ambassador for God coming to this world and in him he says in the first line the kingdom of God has come.

The kingdom of God has been breaking into the world in Christ and everything that the kingdom of God is like we have seen in the person of Jesus Christ. So as we turn through the Bible and we look at the gospels we see what the kingdom of God is like and as we continue to explore it even we have not seen the kingdom come fully yet it's come partially breaking in through Christ and here as Christ dwells in us and the kingdom dwells in us as we receive Christ we are empowered to speak as ambassadors for the kingdom of God proclaiming this very kingdom.

Now I think there's a lot of theoretical concepts that we're trying to wrap our minds around but how does this practically look like? and so I want to share two stories with you about how that became true in my life after I became a Christian.

[21 : 18] It was about three months after turning my life to Christ I was 23 in the year 2000 and I was studying business at the time and I had been growing a lot in my faith but there were still some things in my life that I really hadn't reconciled with the kingdom of God.

When I was sitting in my classroom I was heavily investing into emerging markets and very risky stocks so I would sit in my classroom and check what the stock exchange was doing and I would sometimes walk out of the classroom just making a quick deal and calling back to the bank and that was just my day.

When I woke up I would check the stock markets when I would go back I would check the stock markets make sure that I know what's happening not just in Germany but in America and in Japan and so you just had to be up to date and that's just what you had to do in the role that I had before. Now I'd become a Christian and then one morning I woke up and as I usually did I would get on the computer and I would check what the markets had done while I was asleep and I spent about an hour and after I was caught up in making sure that I didn't have to sell something real quick or buy something real quick I went to my Bible and sat down and started my prayer time with God.

And as I was praying and trying to just really see what my life was like with God it just hit me that I felt very distant from Him in that morning.

[22 : 51] And I realized that there was a kingdom that I was serving and I'd been serving from the moment that I got up that had nothing to do with the kingdom of God. But that my mind was wrapped up in serving the finances my reputation my status that came out of being connected with the financial world.

As I was praying that morning and I really seek God's heart I realized it was somewhat like a gambling addiction to me and that day I made a decision I went to the bank I sold all my investments and don't ask me what my colleagues said that had seen me for three years day trading basically.

I sold everything and put all my money in a savings account. Don't hear me say that I'm saying that you cannot invest and don't feel like you need to run off and sell everything that you have and put it

in something secure because I think even the illusion of security in a savings account you all know about it in the current market situation.

That's not what it is about. I think it is about that as you're seeking in your heart what it means for the kingdom of God to become true in your life you will see where you're serving your idols where you are serving kingdoms that have nothing to do with the values of God.

Now I want to tell you a second story that happened about two years later in my journey through business school I actually took another turn and God called me into ministry and so I went to seminary in the US and in my first year in seminary I started to do some work in an internet ministry so I would write articles about the Christian faith for this internet forum on a German website and after a few weeks of doing that I noticed this one guy his name was Simon he was posting these things and he was really rude he called himself a Satanist and basically told everybody that they are stupid to believe in God and he used a lot of other words so he said Christians are stupid basically and somehow I began praying for him and I prayed for him to see the kingdom of God to break into his life and a few weeks into this time we started to meet in a chat room and we started talking and step by step I learned his story and he shared his story of how when he was two years his father had left the family that his mom is extremely abusive to him that his first childhood memory was to be taken and thrown on the wall by his mom and so as we were talking and sharing and wrestling and arguing after a few weeks there was this one moment where we talked about prayer and in his very provocative way he just said why do you pray to dust it's so ridiculous like all this praying thing it's so stupid it's scientifically disproven and as he was talking and talking

[25 : 42] I just kind of lost my patience after all that and I said who are you to tell me that you have no experience about prayer if you would go and say okay for the next months I would pray I would honestly like sincerely seek out God and every day I would look for God and then after months you would say nothing happened then you could tell me out of your experience prayer doesn't work there's no power in prayer at all and God doesn't exist but if you have never even tried it so don't talk to me like you know anything and I took a breath and he says okay what do you mean okay I'll do it and so he began to pray and the following months completely turned around his life one day when he was at home and his mom came back and he was praying God if you're real then change my life and somehow he found the confidence and he said to his mom mom for 15 years you have been beating me all the time and I don't understand it why do you do this his mom breaks down in tears and says when your father left me

I felt so overwhelmed I want to be a good mom I just don't know what I can do I really don't want to beat you I just don't know what else to do up to this point he actually never referred to his mom as mom he referred to her as it he said I don't think she is a person so I'm just using it for her that day he called me and he said I think I reconciled my relationship with my mom I've never understood her struggles in the time also his depression started to lift and he started to find more hope in his life and then finally he decided okay I'll go to church and I see what all this whole Christian thing is about so I connected him with the church I just looked about on the internet and so he went and he sat down so this guy sits next to him and says oh hey I've never seen you here are you new here and in his direct way he says yes I'm new I'm a satanist but he was not prepared for the response because the guy said cool

I was a satanist too but now I'm leading a bible study you want to come this week to make this story short a month later Simon gave his life to Christ the same summer I flew to Bavaria to baptize him in the Donjub River and a year later I flew back to Bavaria to see him baptize his best friend and brother the kingdom of God breaking into our lives restoring lives everything being made new and whole this is what the kingdom of God is like so what does it mean for our prayer life what is your prayer life centered on do you pray with the kingdom centeredness that the kingdom of God would break break into your life I think there are prayers that we can pray where we have to identify the motive behind how we pray and why we pray like let's think about prayers that have to do with your job or your money or your studies in Hong Kong U or the universities around here how do you pray do you pray like God this exam is really important and this job

I really need it or this job is really bad can you just change my boss now there's nothing wrong with praying for jobs and for your exams but we want to look into the motives what are the motives behind why we pray and what we pray for you can pray for your job or your exam saying God I actually have stepped in right into serving the idols of this world so I want you to give me this job or help me succeed in this exam because when I have success in this exam and in this studies then I

will get a good job and when I have this good job then I'll have a lot of money and when I have a lot of money then I can actually provide security for myself and you suddenly realize that every step of the way has been serving your idols from the beginning or you can pray God I'm laying it all down to you you have given me gifts you have given me the character you have given me this life and I want to use it in the best way to glorify you and whether it's this job or this exam my studies

I just want to do my best to glorify you and bring honor to you and as you begin to pray for your jobs and for your studies I think the way that it is about bringing glory to God and bringing the kingdom about in this world is a completely different mindset so as you pray about these things where are you with that where are the idols that have been crawling into your prayer life and dominated like think about your relationships your marriages the people that you're looking for as you want to get married your sexuality do you have a kingdom centeredness in your prayers or do you pray serving your idols if you're struggling with your marriages are you looking for the kingdom centeredness that God wants to restore and heal and reconcile or again are you saying just change my spouse or get me out of this what is really the motive behind the things we pray for do you pray for trustworthiness integrity faithfulness in your sexuality do you pray for righteousness in your relationships because this is what we hear

[31 : 25] Christ talk about in the values of the kingdom so as we look into the motives and kingdom centeredness as a guide to identify what the motives are in our prayer lives there's another story that comes to my mind that I want to close with the story is about Ashley and many of you know her and have been to the funeral just a short while ago if you don't know who Ashley is she is a young girl of 26 in our sister church at Island ECC and she just passed away and I have never known her but what I've heard about her amazed me everybody that has talked to me over the last weeks about her pointed me to the reality that she had hope in the kingdom that is to come that she didn't complain but even in her suffering that she was pointing people to the hope that she had in restoration and redemption that everything would one day be made new so people that came in touch with her that did not know Christ and that did not know the hope of that kingdom that is breaking into this reality they would see it in her life now I didn't know her but there's another guy that when I heard the stories about her that came to my mind about my life someone that was really close to me his name was Kyle Lake and Kyle was the pastor of University Baptist Church in Waco when I studied in the US

I went there some people know it because that's David Crowder's church in Waco and so Kyle was 32 and he had three little kids and he had an extraordinary gift just bringing the kingdom of God about UBC was a melting pot of about 800 to 1,000 college students most of them very broken and hurt in their lives and they found a lot of restoration finding this community there and when they got in touch with Kyle's life they were infected by his passion for the kingdom and the way that he longed for lives to be restored and one day in a church service Kyle got ready to baptize the young girl and baptism being that sign of new life and restoration in Christ as well he steps into the baptistry and as he steps into the baptistry he reaches for the microphone and the microphone shoots to his breast and he's electrocuted in front of 1,000 college students and as we were seeing what is happening and the drummer jumps out and pulls him out of the baptistry but on the way to the hospital

Kyle died Jesus said that he would make this world new and that he came so that we would experience life in all its fullness God became flesh and lived among us so that we could taste and see how he is like and in Christ we see the kingdom break into the here and now but not everything that we will experience in this life will make sense not everything will be a reflection of this kingdom that is still to come so much around us and in us is shattered and broken and hurting but in Christ we find peace we find peace about his grace and his forgiveness and we find hope in the kingdom that is beginning to become a reality more and more in this world but one day will restore it in his coming again so I want to close today and I want to share a few lines of a sermon it was Kyle's last sermon that he never was able to preach it was the papers that were laying on the pulpit when he died and I hope today even his words will bring you hope about what it means to live life to the fullest to live a life that would be a symbol of the kingdom of God coming about in your lives and in the lives around you so here's how his sermon ended live live and live well breathe breathe in and breathe deeply be present do not be past do not be future be now on a crystal clear breathy 70 degree day roll down the window and feel the wind against your skin feel the warmth of the sun if you run then allow these first few breaths of a cool autumn day to freeze your lungs and do not just

be alarmed be alive get knee deep in a novel and lose track of time and if you bike then pedal hard and if you crash then crash well feel the satisfaction of a job well done a paper well written a project thoroughly completed a play well performed and if you have recently experienced loss then grieve and grieve well at the table with friends and family laugh if you are eating and laughing at the same time then might might well then might as well laugh until you puke and if you eat then smell and taste taste every ounce of flavor taste every ounce of friendship taste every ounce of life because it is most definitely a gift let's pray father today as we come before you we pray that every ounce of the kingdom would break into this world and into our lives that every ounce of Christ is what we would taste as we share life together father as we think about our own prayer life we confess that so many times we are centered on our idols and we just want you to serve them and we just lose you in it all so we just pray that you would again center us on your kingdom of wholeness and perfectness and restoration and beauty and grace and love and all the things that you are like father and in it all we realize that so many times we fall short of this and so we're just also grateful for the peace we have that if we don't have our prayer life right that you are the father that is not so concerned about us having the questions wrong and saying stupid things but that you care so much more about a relationship with us so that wherever we are in our prayer life that you love us deeply and that you care more about that relationship with us than anything else and we thank you that 2,000 years ago you stepped into this world dying on the cross as a symbol of your kingdom breaking into this reality that the forgiveness for our sins that comes to the cross restores us and points us to redemption in you and we pray that in this community and in every life here today that that would be a reality and we pray this in Christ's name Amen