

How the Gospel Destroys Hostility

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[0 : 00] Starting in verse 11, we read, Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision, by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh this dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one, spirit to the Father.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

[1 : 30] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. This is the word of God. Great. Annalise, thank you so much for reading.

If you are new to Watermark and you don't know me, my name is Kevin, one of the leaders here. Great to have you. Why don't we pray together as we come to this passage and ask God to speak to us. So, Father God, once again, we come to your word this morning.

As we do weekly, God, we come because we want to hear you speaking. Lord, I pray by your Spirit, won't you come and speak to our hearts, Lord, won't you help me to make this passage clear.

Lord, we haven't come just to find out interesting ideas or new ideas. We've come to hear the living God speak to us, to encounter you in your word. And Lord, I pray, won't you both challenge us but also encourage us.

Won't you flood our hearts with the good news of Jesus. Lord, we pray this in your wonderful and your gracious name. Amen. Well, 28th of August, 1963, very famous day, a man by the name of Martin Luther King Jr.

[2 : 40] delivered one of the most famous speeches of the last century, his famous I Have a Dream speech. And at the speech in Washington, he declares his desire for unity across the United States, across the races.

And he famously says at the end of his speech, I have a dream that one day, my four children will be able to sit together at the table of humanity, little black girls and little black boys, little white boys and little white girls, sitting together at the table of humanity.

It was a very famous speech that caused a whole uproar. And 50 years later, 60 years later, he's still reverberating around the world. But Martin Luther King Jr., where did he get that conviction from?

Well, if you know his story, he was a Christian. He was a flawed man. He wasn't a perfect man at all. But he was a Christian that was committed to the gospel, and it was his gospel conviction that drove his desire and drove his conviction for unity across a very broken nation.

Well, that's the same thing that Paul wants to say to us this morning in Ephesians chapter 2. Paul is going to tell us that the gospel has the power to destroy division and to unite diverse people together for God's glory.

[4 : 09] Over the last couple of weeks, we've been working through Ephesians, and we've seen how the gospel is not just individualistic, me and Jesus. It's cosmic. God has this amazing plan to unite all things together under Christ.

And it's been wonderful. And the implications of that are amazing. The implications are all eternity, we are seated with Christ, safe and secure.

Nobody can take that from us. For all eternity, we are co-heirs with Christ. Amazing. Amazing. But what does that actually mean for our day-to-day lives?

What does that mean for a city like Hong Kong? What does that mean for a church like Watermark? You know, one of the things I love about Watermark is the diversity of people here. I mean, I would be fascinated to know how many countries we've got represented in this church.

People from all over the world. Well, what does that gospel message mean for a diversity of people with different backgrounds and cultures and styles and lifestyles?

[5 : 13] How does the gospel actually speak to that? Or what implications does it have? Well, one of the things we're going to continue to see throughout Ephesians is that Paul is going to spell out in very clear terms, but today he lays the foundation for the fact that the gospel has the power to destroy division and to unite diverse people together for God's glory.

And we're going to see three things in our passage today. Firstly, what you were. Secondly, what Christ has done. And thirdly, what God is doing in the world. What you were, what Christ has done, what God is doing actually in the church.

So firstly, what you were. Let's dive in. So the world is a very broken and hostile place, full of division, right? Sometimes I wonder whether the world could possibly become any more diverse or conflicted than it is at the moment.

I mean, we've got geopolitical conflict and national conflict. We've got political divisions in every country on a more micro level. We've got family division and conflict.

There's ethnic division and conflict. There's conflict between races and genders and all sorts of conflict. And sometimes I look at the world and I think, could things ever be more conflicted than they were at the moment?

[6 : 33] Well, we may think that the world has never been this divided, but actually in the ancient world, things weren't that different. Thousands of years ago, you had the Babylonians and the Persians that were at each other.

The Egyptians were all the time. At the time of Jesus, you had the Greeks and the Romans and they didn't quite see eye to eye. But one of the greatest conflicts in the time of the Bible is between the Jews and the Gentiles.

The Jews are God's people. The Gentiles are non-Jews. And these two just could not see eye to eye. The Jews looked down at the Gentiles as these defiled, unclean people.

They saw them as a threat for everything they believed in, everything they stood for. And the Gentiles considered the Jews as these stack-up, elitist kind of people, right? And we see that in our passage today.

Look at verse 11. He says, You Gentiles, and then he breaks off, says, You who are called those dirty and circumcised by those who consider themselves the circumcised.

[7 : 37] Now, circumcision isn't a very big deal in our day. But in those days, for the Jews, that was the sign that you were part of the people of God. It was like those that were committed and faithful were the circumcised and everyone else was unclean, dirty, rejected, outsiders.

The insiders, and the outsiders. Jews would talk about non-Jews as those uncircumcised pagans, those filthy Gentiles. In fact, they would even call them those dogs.

And the Gentiles felt much the same towards the Jews. William Barclay, a biblical scholar, says, The Jews had immense contempt for the Gentiles. The Jews said that the Gentiles, their only job in the world was to be fuel for the fires of hell that awaited them.

In fact, some people said it was morally and ethically unacceptable to help a Gentile lady in labor because all you're doing is bringing another Gentile into the world.

And in fact, in some cultures, some villages, if your child married a Gentile, if you were a Jew and married a Gentile, rather than throwing you a wedding, they'd throw a funeral because to them, you were dead to them.

[8 : 51] That is the end of the relationship. Such is the hostility, the immensity of the hostility between these two groups of people. Now, on the one hand, there actually was a legitimate

distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles.

The Jews really were God's chosen people. I mean, look at verse 12. Paul writes it here. He says, Remember, you Gentiles, he's writing to Gentiles, were separated at that time from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

So the Jews knew that they are God's chosen people. God has got something special for them. He's got a plan for them. There is something distinct for them. His blessing rests upon them. But the Gentiles, they had none of it. Okay? They had none of it. And the reason why God did this was He chose this group of people called the Jews to be like a billboard of His grace, to be an invitation to the nations around them to say, Look at this group of people.

Look at what it looks like when my favor is on a group of people. When I blessed them. Look at what it looks like to walk with God, Yahweh, the one true God. So the Jews, in some way, were an invitation to the nations around them to say, If you come and serve the one true God, look at all the blessings that are poured out on us.

[10:17] Okay? There we go. Israel was a billboard, an invitation, to come and experience the favor and the blessing of God. You could think of it like this way.

Imagine the Hong Kong government has this plan. We want everyone to switch to electric vehicles. Okay? No more fossil fuels. Everyone, we want to switch to electric vehicles. Now, one way they could do it is just say, Next year, all fossil vehicles are outlawed.

Okay? They could do it that way. Or they could come up with an innovative plan. They could say, We're going to give 100,000 people the top of the range electric vehicles.

And we're going to give them free charging. And we're going to give them free parking. And there's going to be all sorts of perks that they are going to be given. And everyone at Hong Kong is going to see how amazing it is to do that and they're going to make the switch themselves.

Okay? And so, they set aside this group of people almost as an invitation, a billboard, to say, Come and see what it looks like. Enjoy the benefits of making the switch.

[11:23] Well, in some way, that's what God was doing with Israel. He chose them. He loved them. He lavished them with His favor so that they would be a billboard of His grace, an invitation to come and follow this God, the one true God.

Leave your gods. Leave your idols. Leave Baal aside and come and worship Yahweh. Well, the problem, of course, is this, that rather than being an invitation to come be part of God's plan, it led to self-righteousness, to a sense of superiority, a sense of division.

You see, Israel had forgotten what we spoke about last week, that they were saved by grace, through faith. This is not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not by your own works so that no one can boast.

They forgot about that and they thought, yeah, we're pretty good. Actually, we are, we may be better than everybody else. It wasn't that they were more special or holy in and of themselves. They were pretty rotten. Israel needed God's grace just as much as anyone else. They were still sinners in need of forgiveness. But God's grace to them should have humbled them.

[12:33] It should have brought them to their knees. But rather, it led to self-righteousness and superiority. You know, in Jerusalem, at the time of the Bible, the way the temple was structured, it was up on a hill.

It was called the Temple Mount. And you had the sanctuary where worship was taking place. And outside the sanctuary, you had the court of the priests where the priests would do their worship and altars and that kind of stuff.

Outside of that, you had the court of Israel where only men could go. Outside of that, you had the court of the women where Jewish women could go. But then beyond that, there was a stone wall, 1.5 meters high, a stone wall around the temple.

And beyond that was the limits to which the Gentiles could go. So Gentiles could come to the area, but they couldn't go beyond the stone wall anywhere near the temple.

They could look up the hill and see the worship. They could see the community life. They could see the sense of community there. But they could not go beyond the stone wall into anywhere near the temple.

[13:39] Gentiles were outsiders excluded. In fact, there was a stone, there were signs all along the stone wall. I think we got a picture of one that said, no foreigner is allowed beyond the wall

surrounding the temple.

Whoever enters invites death upon himself. Enter beyond this stone wall at your own risk. You will die. And so Paul says, these Gentiles and believers in Ephesus, remember what you were.

Last week he says, remember you were dead in your sins. This week he says the same thing. Remember you were outsiders, excluded, foreigners. Verse 12, remember you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of God's promise, without God and without hope in the world.

Excluded from God's grace, excluded from his blessings, his word, excluded from his covenant people. What you were, you were outsiders.

But then, something happened. Something changed. Look at verse 13. He says, now, but now, in Christ Jesus, you Gentiles who were once far off, alienated, have been brought near.

[14:59] Last week we saw, you were once dead, but now you've been made alive in Christ. He says, now you once were far off, but now you've been brought near. At that time, you were far off, you've been brought in, you were once alienated, you've been brought home.

Once you were outsiders, now you're insiders. verse 14, once there was a dividing wall of hostility that kept you out, but now that wall has been broken down, there is peace.

Paul's saying, something's happened. What's happened? Reconciliation has happened. Now, here's the question I've been wrestling with all week. You're going to look at your Bibles with me. Is Paul talking here, when he talks about this reconciliation, reconciliation, this once alienation, and now there's a reconciliation. Is Paul talking vertically between humanity and God, or is he talking horizontally between Jews and Gentiles?

Because sometimes it looks like he's talking vertically, verse 12, right, he says, you were excluded without God, without hope in the world, you were cut off from God's promises, but in verse 11, it looks like he's talking about horizontally between Jews and Gentiles.

[16:09] He says, there's this division that took place. So, so which one is he talking about? When Paul says, God has brought peace, is he saying peace with God, or peace with one another?

And the answer is, both. Both. The answer is, part of the complexity of this passage, is that these two relationships are so interconnected, it's like a, it's like a piece of twine, or rope, that's been interconnected.

It's like DNA, right? The vertical relationship, and the horizontal relationship, the divine, and the human, are so interconnected, that the one, affects the other.

In the gospel, God is taking this group of people, called Jews, who are lost, and sinners, and need grace, and he's taking another group of people, called Gentiles, who are lost, and sinners, and need God's grace, and he's bringing them together, reconciling them to God, but also to one another.

And as he brings them together, he makes a new humanity, one new people, under Christ, which both bridges the gap between us and God, but also bridges the gap between one another.

[17:18] Look at how he says it in verse 14. For Christ himself is our peace, who has made us both, Jews and Gentiles, one, breaking down this wall of division between us.

Verse 15. He created himself one new man, in place of the two, thus making peace. Verse 16. He has reconciled us both to God, in one new body, thereby killing the hostility.

You following the logic here? Paul is saying that as God in the gospel reconciles people to him, he's reconciling us one to another. And that actually makes complete sense, doesn't it, right?

If you've got two people that are bashing heads, they're kind of at odds with one another, but suddenly they find a common goal, a common interest, a common purpose, rather than clashing heads, they can stand shoulder to shoulder and pursue that goal.

We actually see a funny example of this in the gospels. I don't know if you remember this. When Jesus is on trial to be crucified, it says, Herod and Pontius Pilate became friends that day, where previously they had been enemies.

[18:26] Here are two people, they don't like each other, they're power hungry, they both want each other's territory and the throne, but suddenly they've got a common opponent, Jesus. And so they've become friends that day, in their pursuit of persecuting Jesus.

But the same thing happens in a positive sense. Here are Jew and Gentile, who previously had nothing in common. Outsiders, outcasts, you dogs, you uptight elitists.

And suddenly, in Christ, a common love, that brings them together. Friends, what Paul is saying is, Jesus isn't just establishing equality, he's establishing unity.

And that's a very important difference. You're going to have Jews who say, Okay, fine, I recognize that you're equal. You're my equal, but I still don't like you. Right? You do your equality over there, and I'm going to do my equality over here.

But Paul says, actually, he's bringing these two, and not only making them equal, he's making them one. There's a unity. And how does, how does Jesus do this? I mean, does Jesus say, Okay, let's just, you know, let's bring peace on earth, or let's flick a switch, and suddenly people that have been enemies, will like each other.

[19 : 39] Or maybe, maybe he, he sends a prophet, to come and say, Okay, listen, it didn't work in the Old Testament, let's try something new. Or maybe a re-education program, the problem in the world is education, so let's establish re-education.

How is Jesus going to bring unity, between these two groups of people, that haven't got along at all? Well, look at what he says in verse 13. It says, Now in Christ Jesus, you who are once far off, have been brought near.

How? By the blood of Christ. Verse 14. He himself is our peace, having broken down the wall of hostility, in his flesh. That means, when he died on the cross.

Verse 16. He has reconciled us to God, through the cross. Friends, you see what Paul is saying here? The answer to the division, and the animosity, in our world, and the bitterness, and the brokenness in our world, is not just greater education.

And it's not just political action. And it's not just social justice, and becoming woke. And it's not just Gentiles' lives matter, even though Gentiles' lives do matter.

[20 : 47] That's not the answer. The answer is what he says, the cross of Christ. In his death on the cross, Jesus did something, accomplished something, which dismantled and broke down the barriers that separated people.

The answer is in the power of the cross. The answer is the power of Jesus' death, and Christ crucified. The answer is that old rugged cross, that we sang about this morning.

Look at verse 14 and 15. He himself is at peace, making us both one, and broken down in his flesh, this dividing wall of hostility. Verse 15.

I know that sounds very wordy.

Okay? So let's try and understand what he's saying there. So here's the question. How does Jesus' death on the cross accomplish this unity?

[21 : 50] I mean, what does that actually do to bring enemies together? How does he bring Jew and Gentiles together? Well, he tells us. He says, by abolishing the law and the commandments.

So think about this. Israel has, in the Old Testament, the first five books of the Bible, has like 600 laws, okay? Rules that Israelites, good Jews, need to obey.

600 rules that for you to obey, for you to be an insider, for you to be accepted, for you to be clean, and welcomed, and able to worship, right? And the problem, of course, is that this law, these rules, became a measuring stick by which to compare one with another.

And so the Jews were pretty good at keeping the rules, but the Gentiles didn't know the rules, and so they didn't keep any of the rules, and so they were considered outsiders. And so if this physical 1.5 meter stone wall around the temple wasn't enough of a barrier, here are 600 rules that are in an invisible wall, a barrier separating insiders and outsiders.

And so let's say you want to come worship God. You've heard, you've seen the billboard, you've heard that God, Yahweh is the one true God, you've heard of His amazing grace, and you say, here I am, I want to come worship Him, I want to know Him.

[23 : 12] And so someone says, oh, okay, well, that's great. Oh, you're not circumcised. I'm so sorry, you're out. Oh, your dad wasn't an Israelite? Oh, I'm so sorry, you can't worship here.

Oh, you cut your beard this week? Sorry, you're out. Oh, you ate pork for dinner last night? Sorry, you can't worship with us. Oh, you're a foreigner?

You weren't born here? Oh, I'm sorry, you can't worship with us. And so he has this long list of rules, 600 ways to be excluded from the people of God in the covenant of grace.

But what happens if those rules were torn in two? What happens if someone destroyed the rules? What happens if somebody took those rules and laid it aside?

And so those rules don't apply anymore. You see, the whole legal system was a temporary arrangement meant to help Israel until such time as the Messiah came.

[24 : 10] And then the Messiah did come and He perfectly obeyed all the rules. The one person that obeyed them all. And He said that anybody who trusts me or follows me, I will credit to them my perfect track record.

So it's as if you've kept all the rules. And so now the question is not have you kept the rules, is are you in Jesus? That's the one equation. Are you in Christ?

Because if you're in Christ, then His perfect track record is your perfect track record. And so the only thing that is, is are you in Jesus, saved by grace, through faith, not by works.

Are you putting all your hope in Jesus' finished work on the cross? And so friends, are you a Jew today? Well, that doesn't matter. The question is, are you in Christ? Are you a Gentile? Well, that doesn't matter.

Are you in Christ? Friends, are you a billionaire here today? Well, that doesn't matter. The question is, are you in Christ? Friends, are you a street sweeper today? That doesn't matter.

[25 : 10] Are you in Christ? Friends, have you grown up in the church and know all the answers and know how to say all the right Christian things? That doesn't matter. Are you in Jesus? Friends, maybe it's your first time you've ever stepped inside a church and you don't know what's going on.

And who's this crazy guy talking and I don't know what he's saying. That doesn't matter. The question is, are you in Jesus? Friends, are you a mainlander or Hong Konger? Are you from Ethiopia or Canada?

It doesn't matter. The question is, are you in Christ? The ground is level at the foot of the cross. And because the gospel is true, what is also true is that all people, both the preacher in the front and the person that works in the red light district at the back, the billionaire and the foreign domestic worker, all of us are equally sinners in need of God's grace, men and women for whom Jesus Christ died on the cross saying, it is finished.

The ground at the foot of the cross is level. And so look at verse 17. It says, Jesus came and preached peace to you who are far away and peace to those who are near.

Well, the question is this, how did Jesus go and preach to the Ephesians? I mean, Jesus never left Israel other than when he was a baby and they fled to Egypt. Jesus never stepped outside of Israel in his ministry.

[26 : 45] Ephesus is thousands of miles away. So how did Jesus go and preach this good news of acceptance to the Ephesians? Jesus never went there, right? And the answer is this, as the gospel message rang out through those first Christians, as it penetrated their hearts and changed them, as they were born again and saved, they were given peace with God, but also peace with one another.

It wasn't that Paul was saying, come on, you Christians now, act better, pull your socks up, be nicer people. The word Christian hadn't even been invented. As the gospel message went out, it penetrated their hearts and it brought peace.

Friends, the question is this, who might you, who might we as a church want to treat as outsiders? Who might we be tempted to look at and secretly think, do they really belong here?

I think I've told you this story before, quick story. One of my very best friends in Cape Town, he was a heroin addict, he became a Christian and he comes to church with us.

He'd been a Christian about 10 days, brand new Christian, didn't know a single thing, right? He couldn't put four words together without swearing. He comes to church and he says to me, he pulls me aside, he says, yo, Kevin, there's some people here that I knew, I didn't think I'd ever see them inside a church.

[28 : 12] And I said, hey, Gordy, I think they might be thinking the same thing about you. All right? Friends, who might we think that they don't belong here?

No, no, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. And so, Paul writes, Christ himself is our peace, who has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law and his commandments expressed in the ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, thus making peace and might reconcile both of us to God in one body through the cross, thereby destroying the humility.

What has Christ done? He's created a new humanity, a new people of God. Well, very quickly, let's go to the third thing. What is God doing? Verse 11 said, at one time you were strangers and aliens.

Verse 13, but now Christ has created a new humanity. We'll look at verse 19. So then, so then, brothers and sisters, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

The word household there could also mean the family. I mean, that is astounding, right? Just think about this. Jews and Gentiles, these two people who previously hated each other, they wouldn't have a meal together, right?

[29 : 35] Your son marries a Gentile, you have a funeral for them because they're dead to you. He says, now you are combined family members in the household of God. I mean, that's incredible.

Think Ukrainian soldier, Russian soldier, you now are brothers and sisters in the family of God. Remember that old Christmas carol? The slave is no longer, how's it going?

Neil, I'm going to need your help here. Something about the slave has now become your brother.

Man, that's amazing. But then, verse 20 says, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus himself as being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by his spirit. It's a bit confusing here because Paul is mixing his metaphors, right? Somebody should have taught him not to do this in high school.

But anyway, he's talking about you're citizens of a country, you're also family members of a new household. But the one metaphor he really wants us to get is this, you are members or stones of a temple.

[30 : 47] What is God doing now? He's building a new temple. Well, what was the temple? The temple was the place where God's glory dwelt. It was the holy of holies.

It was the centerpiece amongst the people of God. It was the place where people brought their worship and encountered God and his grace. It was the closest thing to heaven on earth. It was the display of God's glory.

But look what Paul says. God is building a new kind of temple, not made of bricks and gold and silver and wood. It's made of a new kind of material.

What kind of material? It's made up of sinners who have been reconciled to God and reconciled to one another. God is making a new temple and in that temple he's going to put his glory and he's going to put his Holy Spirit and it's going to be a display of his majesty.

It's going to be the place where people encounter God and can worship God. It's going to be the place where people encounter God's grace. But it's going to consist of people, reconciled sinners, of every nationality and ethnicity and people group.

[31 : 55] It's not going to be located in one place in Jerusalem or Israel or the Holy Land. It's going to be found in some tree in the Sahara Desert in Africa. It's going to be found in some school hall in Poc Paloma in Hong Kong.

It's going to be found in some majestic cathedral in Europe. It's going to be found wherever God's people gather together. There I will put my spirit and I'll build a new temple.

What once, and amazingly, the Gentiles are going to be included. Once there was a sign saying stay out on the threat of death. Now these very people that were once outsiders are going to be the materials, the building blocks of this new temple.

Amazing. What once was rejected and regarded as outcasts are now the very stones that God is going to use to build His temple. The place where God causes His glory to dwell.

Friends, as Paul's writing this letter to the Ephesians, right outside the city of Ephesus is another temple. It's called the temple of Artemis. It is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

[33 : 03] It is this majestic, beautiful temple. Well friends, today that temple lies in ruins and all that stands is one single solitary column as a testimony to its futility and the fact that it couldn't stand.

And as Paul writes this letter, there in Jerusalem is this majestic temple full of gold and lavish materials. Friends, today the temple is nothing.

But 2,000 years later all across the world this temple that God is still building is growing and expanding. One by one, one life at a time as people like you and I, broken sinners that encounter God's grace are being included into God's plan to display His glory in our world.

And what is the basis of this temple? He says, the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.

What did the apostles and prophets do? They told us the gospel. And he says, the foundation, the chief cornerstone is Jesus, Christ Himself.

And so, Watermark, if we are to become the kind of church that Paul envisages here in Ephesians, a church which exists to the praise of His glory, a church which displays His majesty, a church which pursues peace and reconciliation, we must be a church which is built on the gospel and centered on Jesus Christ.

[34 : 24] Because as John Stott says, the unity and the strength of the church go hand in hand and both of them are based on Jesus. Friends, this passage is greatly challenging but also encouraging.

It challenges us because it says, who might we want to consider outsiders? Let's bring them in. But it also encourages us because it says, once we were outsiders, but Jesus went to the cross for people like you, people like me, to bring us in.

This is what God is doing with this church. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, we praise you for your amazing, amazing grace.

God, as we sang this morning, how majestic is your name. God, we want to just fall on our knees and say, unbelievable, astounding, that God, you would reconcile sinners like me.

God, broken people like us and bring us into your family and not just wipe away our debt and say, it's done, you've forgiven, but include us in your plans. Use people like us as your stones to build a new temple.

[35 : 31] God, thank you for what you've done. God, I pray for us as a church, Lord, may what we read in Ephesians be true of us. God, may we be a church that pursues reconciliation and unity.

May we be, God, a billboard of grace to our city. May we declare to our city, this is what God is doing and is able to do. May we, God, be a picture of heaven on earth as people from every tribe and ethnicity and language and culture and background come together, unified and united as we worship you, Christ our King.

Jesus, thank you for your grace. Thank you for your mercy. Come and work in us, God. In our church, we pray. Amen.