

Growing a Healthy Community

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 September 2013

Preacher: Tobin Miller

[0 : 0 0] How's everybody doing? Okay, so we have a, we're trying something for the first time that we've never tried before, so it's one of the things I love about being a part of this church is we get to try new things and fail and then see God do amazing things, and so we'll see what God does here.

If you're here for the first time, I want to welcome you to Watermark Community Church. Um, my name is Tobin Miller. I'm one of the pastors here, teaching pastor, and uh, welcome back to the students in school. Now, I don't know how you feel when I say that. There was a part of me as an adult that felt like, well, once my kids get to school, then everything's good. But what I didn't realize is that when they get to school, I have to help them get to school. I have to help them get off, and I have to get their clothes ready, and I have to get every of these things done, and I need to push them out the door and get them to the bus. And sometimes by the time I start my day, I'm just out of control in my mind, and I have to spend 15 minutes praying. And then when they come home, I have to help them with homework and make sure they're doing their homework and making sure they have homework.

And sometimes they say you have homework and they don't have homework. And it's just this kind of crazy world. And in the midst of this crazy world, one of the things that has helped us as a family is to come together at night to have dinner together. And so we try to imperfectly come together for dinner at night and just to kind of have a debriefing time with our kids. Again, we don't get to do it every night, and sometimes it's an amazing thing that we can do it. But we feel like it's really important for our kids because we come down and we kind of debrief their day. It's a day that we, time that we ask them questions and we get feedback. We try to understand their perspective. And so coming back just from the States, they have a lot of questions they're asking us about what they experienced in the States and why don't they experience it here in Hong Kong. And so one of my kids is always asking me, how come drinks are so expensive in Hong Kong? Because in the States, drinks are for free or almost for free. And we did this terrible thing this summer. We took our kids to this restaurant called Chili's. If you have a lot of kids and you go to the States, never take your kids to Chili's because it will haunt you the rest of your life.

It is amazing food, but they just keep bringing the chips out and the salsa out and the free drinks out. And my kids are just kind of going crazy. So the chips and salsa and drinks and refills and refills and it doesn't cost hardly anything. You know, you take them to 7-Eleven and it costs \$1 for a Diet Coke this big and it costs \$1.10 for a Diet Coke that big. So what do you do? How do you choose? And so as we're leaving Chili's and they've had like 15 drinks of soda and they're jumping off the walls, the stewardess, the waitress looks at one of my kids and goes, do you want a to-go cup? And my kid goes, a to-go cup? What is that? And she goes, well, we'll give you this cup full of drink and you can take it with you as you go. And my kid goes, I love this place. How come Hong Kong doesn't have a to-go cup? It's amazing. And so we have to debrief about those things. We have to debrief when my kid comes back last night and they're talking and they said, you know, when I was at, in America and I was talking to people, we went to camp and they were asking where

I was from and we had to ask, you know, they said, well, we're from Hong Kong. And then the next question was, do you speak Japanese? My kids don't understand why people think that when they're from Hong Kong, you have to speak Japanese. And I kept it explaining to them that Americans are geographically challenged and that we think there's America and everybody speaks English and then the rest of the world speaks Japanese. And so we have these debriefing times, but one of the things that's been helpful is it helps us to understand where they're coming, what they're thinking. And a lot of times we just talk about what does it mean to be a family? We talk about our values. We talk about the things that are important to us. We talk about things that we want to be about and how we should act and how we don't want to act. And a lot of times they ask questions like, these people did these things and yeah, we're like, yeah, that's how they do it in their family, but maybe we shouldn't do it in our family. What do you think about that?

[4 : 13] And maybe as Christians, maybe we should do things differently. And so we have a lot of those conversations at our dinner table. And you know, the Bible is full of those type of conversations. That's what the Bible's purpose is. The Bible's purpose has two purposes. It gets us to God. And it tells us then how we act and how we walk as the family of God.

And today we're looking at a passage in Acts 2. We've actually, the last three weeks, we've looked at this theme. And this theme is, how do we act or how should we react or how do we live in this in-between time? That Jesus came, he lived, he died, he rose, and then he went into heaven and he left his disciples there. And then we had this in-between time, this time of we don't know what to do and if he's coming back and when he's coming back. And two weeks ago we talked about stewardship and we said that the Bible says that everything that God gives you, every little jot, your intellect, your ability, your health, your unhealth, your family, your kids, your wealth, your cars, all these things, all these things are God's. And he gave them to you and he just wants to bless you with them and you can do whatever you want with them. But in the end he's going to come back and he's going to ask you what you did with those things. And we said the theme that he does when he gives us these things is he wants us to use them for his kingdom. He wants us to make his name great. He wants us to do business for him. He wants to set up shop so that more people understand about Jesus. But he gives us all these incredible blessings.

Last week we talked about prayer. We said that Jesus told his disciples that when I go away you're going to be lonely and you're going to be discouraged and the world hates you and it's going to crucify me and it's going to try to crucify you sometimes. Sometimes you feel like that in your office place as you try to walk with the Lord. You feel crucified. You feel alone. You feel outnumbered.

And Jesus says that's what's going to happen. And I want you to pray to me because I will be there. I will meet you in a very special supernatural way. I will come in and I'll be with you and you need to trust me on this. And so we talked about how some of us have a hard time trusting him on this.

Some of us when we look at God we see him more as an unjust God. An unjust judge. Someone who doesn't want our best at heart. But Jesus kept reminding us that yes he loves us. That God is good. That he's going to make all things right. All the injustices you feel. All the things bad done to you. Everything that's happened to you and you're like wow how could that happen if God were really good and he was here. Jesus said that when God comes back. When Christ comes back. He's going to make all those things okay. And we have to trust him. He loves us. Today we look at this passage and I think it's kind of like this seminal passage for us as a church for all churches throughout the history of Christendom. It's a story of Pentecost. And in Pentecost it's a Jewish holiday. The similarities are amazing. When you study the Bible it's kind of like stacked on top of each other. So Pentecost means 50. And so if you go to Israel today on Pentecost they celebrate Pentecost. And it is the celebration of God sending Moses to come and grab the people out of bondage and out of slavery. He takes them through the desert. He gets to this hill. This mountain. And he gives them the law. That's Pentecost.

[7 : 34] Now 2,000 years ago the story says that we're at Pentecost. And in the temple mound there's over 500,000 Jews crammed into his place. It's been 50 days since Jesus died. He rose again. And he went into heaven. The church has been praying. What do we do? There's only 100 people there. 120 people.

And all of a sudden the same thing happens. God took his people out of bondage, out of slavery. He takes them to this mountain called Golgotha. He dies to free us from our sin and our bondage.

And on Pentecost instead of giving us the law he gives us God's spirit, the Holy Spirit. He gives us grace. And this spirit comes in and it rushes in. And it changes and transforms everybody.

And so in the passage what you see is that Peter has gone to the temple mound. The Holy Spirit is in these 120 people. And Peter starts to share. And he shares the very first sermon of the very first New Testament. Of the very first some people would say church. Though the church had been around forever. But this different type of church. The Holy Spirit indwelt church.

And Peter shares the gospel. And he says that Jesus came. He is God's only provision for your sin. It doesn't matter how good you are. It doesn't matter how great you do. It doesn't matter that you don't hurt people. It doesn't matter that you have this great score list. He says the only thing that brings you right to God is Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross. Because our sin is so horrendous it separates us from God. And the minute that people hear that they say what do we need to do then?

[9 : 13] Repent. And he says repent and be saved. And the Holy Spirit comes in and we see from 120 people to 3,000 people come to Christ.

Can you imagine what it would be like in our staff team if we all of a sudden we had 3,000 people we had to disciple? It would be out of control. We wouldn't know what to do. And that's what the early church was like. They were out of control.

They had 3,000 hungry new Christians teach us, show us, teach us. And in Acts 2 it says this is what they did. It said they devoted themselves to four things.

The word devotion is a very deep Greek word. It means to be all in. It means to plant yourself. It means to give everything. It means to be about it, to be focused on it, to be thinking about it all the time.

It just means, it means just to be all in. And in the passage it says in verse 24 it says that they're all in on this focus of God's word.

[10 : 10] That they're just hungry. Teach us about the Lord. Teach us. And all they have is the Old Testament, right? They have the Old Testament and they have three years of walking with Jesus. And so the Bible says that these 3,000 hungry Christians just want to know about God.

And the apostles and disciples are teaching them. They're teaching them the Old Testament. They're teaching them three years of Jesus. And the people go, tell us more, tell us more. And it says there was a hunger. There was a thirst. They hungered for the word of God. They couldn't get God's word enough.

I wonder sometimes if we have that hunger. If we have that devotion. What would it look like for us to be a church that would be devoted to God's word?

What would it look like for us to be people who are devoted to God's word that we're hungry for it. We want to be about it. We want to be all in. We want to just suck it into our life because we know it's words of life.

What would that look like? The second thing we see is they come in there. And in the next verse, they say basically they become devoted to worship. They start to worship the Lord.

[11 : 15] They understand who he is. And they just focus on what does it mean to worship God? The passages are verse 42 and 43. And he basically says they come in and they desire this deep relationship with Jesus.

They have this hunger for Christ. And they fulfill that hunger in the Lord's Supper. They take communion together. And as they take communion, they focus on the cross. They focus on what Jesus has done.

And this hunger is being satiated. They have this deep hunger for prayer. And they're praying all the time. They're praying wherever they're going. They're praying in the temple. They're praying in their houses.

They're always meeting. They don't just meet on Sunday. They meet all the time. Every time they run into each other, they pray. And they have this deep awe and hunger and wonder for what God has done. And I wonder sometimes, if we do, when was the last time we had an awe and wonder of God's mercy and grace?

When was the last time that we just felt this amazement that God came to us and that he sacrificed his own son for us? When was the last time that we devoted ourselves to worship, to communion, and to prayer?

[12 : 31] The next thing the passage says in verse 47 is that when people came, they knew Christ. The Holy Spirit filled them. Their lives were out of control. It says they had an outward focus. They focused on the world around them.

They thought about what they could do to fix the things that were broken in the world. Sometimes we call this evangelism. Sometimes we call this justice. But what you see in the passage in verse 47 is that as they did this, as they shared, as they did about God's kingdom, the church continued to grow and it continued to grow and it started to change society.

And within about 150 years, the Roman Empire went from a pagan empire to a Christian empire because 55% of the people had faith. Because the people who came to know Christ were indwelt by his spirit and they had a hunger and they wanted to devote themselves to fixing things, to making things right.

And the last thing that we see in this passage is that in verse 42 is that when they came to know Christ, they had a hunger and a devotion for fellowship. The word there is a new word.

It's never been used in the New Testament or the Bible before. The word in Greek is koinonia. Koinonia. Can you say it with me? Koinonia. So this koinonia came in and what it means is it means other focus.

[13 : 50] It means to be focused on other people. It means to be doing things for other people. It means to be sharing. It means to be giving. It means to be living your life with other people. It means actually to be in partnership.

Koinonia means to be in partnership with God and to be in partnership with each other. It means to be working together. It means to be depending on each other. It means to be thinking of others first.

I wonder what it would be like if we were a church and people came in and instead of saying the very first thing maybe, what does this church have to offer me? How are my needs going to get met? Yeah, I need to go to another church because it didn't really meet all my needs.

I know I'm going to offend some people, but we want to speak truth here. What would it be like if we came in and instead of saying those things, we said, how can I serve here? What has God called me to do here?

What are the gifts that God has given me? How can I make this a better church? How can I make this a better fellowship? How can I make this a better community? What am I going to be devoted to? What if our attitude was like that of the early church?

[14 : 55] And we thought of others instead of ourselves. As a church, we are on this mission, and this mission is to pursue this devotion, to pursue this idea of being all in, to pursue this thought of we're here to worship, to make God's name great, to create fellowship, and to be outwardly focused.

And as we've done it, God has brought some amazing staff to us, some amazing staff. And so you're going to get a chance to hear from some of them about what does it look like for us to pursue this devotion to the Lord.

So I'm going to ask Natalie and Eric to come up first. Hello, Mark. It's so good to be here with you this morning, and this is a really exciting day. So if any of you went to church growing up, do you remember going from kids to youth?

Does anybody remember that? Alfie does. Rick does. Eric does. Okay. It's a big deal. So that's what's happening today. Some Watermark kids in our surf class are transitioning to youth.

So we're handing them over to Eric. And Eric will need your prayers. So we are going to do a little ceremony right now.

[16 : 11] And could I have any surf kid that is going to transition to youth come up here right now? Awesome. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. So before I get started. So before I get started. Before we actually talk about this transition and recognize the kids, I wanted to talk about appreciation.

So without our volunteer leaders, these kids would not have grown how they have in the past two years. And so we want to thank you for the investment that our leaders have made in these kids' lives.

And these kids today stand up in front of you as leaders, as the church's leaders today, and are growing as the church's leaders. So if you can see, if you look around our church, they do contribute.

So they hand out snacks, and they hand out pamphlets. And so they are your leaders today. So we want to recognize them as that. And as they transition to youth, they are going to become even stronger leaders.

[17 : 18] So we're excited about that, and we're excited about how they love Christ and how they're growing in their relationship with Christ. I also want to charge any of you and encourage you that if you haven't volunteered yet in our kids' program, that we would love for you to just give it a try and come take a look at a class.

Because we do need more leaders. We pray every week for more leaders. And it's an amazing investment. You plant seeds in these kids' lives in order so they can grow to love Jesus and grow to teach others about Jesus.

So we want to just take some time to thank you guys for that. Eric, do you have a few words? Yeah. In terms of the youth ministry, we're super excited to have this many new kids joining us.

Also super terrified. And I think, yeah, as a church, we have a huge responsibility towards this group of kids. You know, in terms of the youth ministry, we meet on Friday nights, and we have stuff on Sunday mornings.

And if any of you are interested, there are a lot of kids, so we need lots of help. But I think even if you're not free to help on those times because you have other ministry commitments and stuff, we as a church family can definitely invest in the lives of these kids.

[18 : 34] Traditionally, youth ministry models said that you want to have one volunteer for every five kids. But more recent research has actually shown if you really want to impact teenagers for Christ, you actually want to have five adults investing in every one kid's life.

And it doesn't have to be in terms of like, oh, we have 20 kids at youth groups, so we need 100 adults there. But just simple things like saying hi to them before and after church, getting to know them, you know, while we're standing around having coffee, small things like that can make a huge difference in these kids' lives.

So my challenge to you as a church is to welcome these kids and the rest of the youth that are already in the youth group, to make them feel like part of the family, and not to think of them.

And I think often we say that they're the future of the church. And so we say we don't really need to worry about them today. But if you think about it, they're in the church today. They're very strategically placed in their schools, in their families, among their friends, on sports teams, to have a huge impact for Christ today.

And the things that we can invest in them today aren't just things that are going to bear fruit 20 years down the road, but they're things that can impact today or tomorrow in schools and in families around Hong Kong.

[19 : 48] So I challenge you as a church family, get to know these kids, invest in them, find out what they love to do, find out what their family life and school life is like. Just be a friend to them and welcome them as part of your family.

And so, Eric, would you like to pray for our kids and youth? And then kids and youth, you will be dismissed after this. Thank you, church. All right, let's pray. Dear Father, we thank you for all of the kids and youth that you have brought to Watermark.

We thank you, especially today, for this group of kids that's moving up into youth. We thank you for the ways that you've been teaching them and working through the church to help them to know you.

And we pray that for all of our kids and youth that as we continue into the new school year and as we start up new programs and have kids in new classes, that it would be a time for them to grow in their knowledge of you and their love for you.

And that we as a church family would come around them and support them and love them and help them in their journey as they continue to grow. In Jesus' name, amen. Good morning. Good morning, Watermark.

[20 : 53] Relationships are the key to a healthy life. We were made for relationships. And relationships are the key to what we were really meant to be in our lives.

And for Christians, when Jesus died, he died for people whose relationships had broken down because of sin had turned us in on ourselves, in on our own desires, needs, and not towards others and towards God.

When Jesus died, what he did, he broke down and he began a restoration project. A restoration of relationship between us and God and relationships between each other.

And what you see when we're looking in the book of Acts is this. You begin to see a glimpse of what Jesus' restoration project, Jesus' death has accomplished.

You begin to see what it was always meant to be. A glimpse of the way our lives were meant to be in restored relationships. These relationships which are not just centered on ourselves, but are outward focused.

[22 : 05] And as you look in Acts, maybe you think, as I do, wow, that looks amazing. You see how they're devoted to one another, how they just seem to be sharing everything.

And it sounds like, I wish that could be true. I would really long to see a community that was like that. But then you walk out of the door and the reality of Hong Kong life just hits you.

And you settle for the same old way of doing church that you've always done. And yet, why are we like this?

Why, when Jesus' death is meant to change everything, is life sometimes so like that? In Hong Kong, life can often be so busy because what you're doing is, and what I'm doing, and what we're all doing is, we're filled up with so many different things.

We have, if you're a Christian, there are so many meetings to go to. There are Bible studies to go to. There are ministries to be involved with. And on top of that, you have social gatherings. You have kids' classes.

[23 : 10] You have X, Y, and Z. There are so many different things. And then when you hear us talking about community group, and what it means to be involved in a community like you see in Acts, it feels like, okay, maybe I have to go to community group.

But community group becomes just a meeting you go to. Maybe just you attend it for a couple of hours. It's nice. Maybe you have a couple of social gatherings outside. But we don't necessarily invest our lives in each other.

No one really knows my issues. No one really knows what's really going on in my heart. No one knows me deeply. And I'm not investing deeply in other relationships.

And so what we see is the community that Jesus died to create, which was meant to be a glimpse to the rest of the world of how amazing Jesus' death has been in restoring us, what we see is sometimes we can be just like everybody else in Hong Kong, just busy, and not investing in those deep relationships like we see in Acts.

But imagine, imagine if we stop seeing church as simply a meeting we go to for a couple of hours a week, or even a community group meeting where we just go, we talk about Jesus for a couple of hours, and then we go and live the rest of our lives the way we do.

[24 : 35] Imagine if we saw church as people and relationships. Think about your family. Imagine if you in your family, you said, okay, 3pm till 5pm Sunday we're going to be family.

Now maybe that happens in your family, but that's not a healthy family. But often that's the way we view church. And yet God's vision is far bigger.

So sometimes we make that division between our lives and church, and we say, church is asking me to do a lot of things at the moment. Because we haven't understood that actually church is people and relationships.

And when we become a Christian, we become part of God's family. And that means we have family responsibilities to one another. Responsibilities to invest in each other's lives.

At Watermark, how are we going to grow these deep relationships like we see in Acts? Well, our vehicle for doing that in Watermark is our community groups. This is where you can invest in people's lives.

[25 : 40] Not just go to take, but go to invest. And Alistair's going to just share something about what it could look like to be investing in relationships. Yeah, so Chris has shared with us about how we can see what happens in Acts, that people are devoted to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer, how we can see that come into our church life.

So as he said, we want to take the responsibility not just to turn up, but to invest in each other's lives. And so I'm going to talk a little bit about what that might look like, how we could do that.

So you know that in investing, there's a cost that's involved. You actually have to put something in to invest, and then you seed it there, and it germinates, and it grows, and then you get a reward out of it.

You reap something from what you sow. And so with investment in people, we also need to spend the time that there is for us, what seems like a cost that's involved.

And indeed that was the case for God as well. As he came and invested in us, it cost him the life of his own son. But as we invest in relationships, we will begin to reap the gospel community, a beautiful community that will arise out of that.

[27 : 08] A community like we see in the book of Acts. If you're not already in a community group, then let me encourage you to have a look around and find one and join one.

At the back, each Sunday, Chris is there with a list of community groups that are all arranged by location, and you can find one that is close to you that you can come to.

And if you really struggle to make one of the meeting nights, then don't just give up at that point and say, well, it's obviously not for me. Think about it as people, not just an event that you go to.

You can meet up with people, one or two people from within that particular community group, and get to know people from there at different times. Arrange to have lunch with them on Sundays. Remember, it is the relationship that we're looking for, and not just a meeting.

You can so seed by joining a community group. But if you join with just a transactional mindset, an attitude that says, I'm coming to take what I can from this group, and then I can discard it, then that's not investing.

[28 : 30] Join it. Join a community group. But join it with a view to wanting to invest in relationships with people that are there. And even if it seems like the group is too big for you to get to know everyone at once, well, get to know one or two people in it, and spend the time there, and then let the relationship spread out.

For those of you who are already in community groups, community group members, or ICF members, for you guys in university, are you actively engaged in inviting other people to join your community?

Whether they're a member of this church, and yet not part of community, or whether they don't come to this church at all. They don't know Jesus. People are more likely to feel welcome if they have a personal invitation from somebody to come along to join them.

And so if you meet someone at church over lunch, or someone you know who is not yet part of community, then take the opportunity to invite them along to one of your gatherings, or one of your social outings, with no strings attached.

People can come, and if they like it, they can keep coming. I want to talk a little bit about listening as well. How often do we spend so much time speaking that we actually don't get a chance to listen to one another?

[29 : 56] How well do you know the stories of people in your community group? The stories of those around you, those you know at church. You might know them on a superficial basis, but do you know what they struggle with?

Do you know what drives them? What they fear? What they really enjoy? Take an opportunity to invite somebody out for a meal and get to know them in this way. Ask them these things.

What do they enjoy, and what do they struggle with? What can you pray for for them? Sow a seed by taking the time to listen and to get to know people? In these things, what we often find is that everybody's waiting for somebody else to ask, right?

And so let's break that cycle where everybody's waiting for everybody else by you taking the initiative to ask. And while we're at it, we don't just listen to one another's stories.

As a church community that is centered around Christ and what he's done, we listen to God's story and find ourselves as part of his story. So when we meet up with each other, then why don't we take the opportunity also to share and to listen to God's story and our experience of being part of that story.

[31 : 16] In Sydney, we used to do something called the One Minute Bible Study. I'll explain it. So we used to have groups that would meet before work or during lunchtime with people kind of in our building or close by, and we would meet to share to encourage one another to pray for our colleagues who didn't yet know Jesus.

And what we would also do is we would have this One Minute Bible Study where everybody would bring to the group something to share for one minute on one verse that had touched them during the week that they might have read or heard somewhere.

And it was just something easy and simple that we could do. So yeah, that's something that you could try. I also want to talk about leisure because everybody needs to eat and everybody has time kind of they spend with friends, family and so on.

And this is time that we can actually invite other people in. It really struck Chris and I as we were looking at that Bible verse that the early Christians were devoted to the breaking of bread.

They were devoted to eating with one another. It sounds a bit like kind of what we do in Hong Kong, right? Devoted to eating. Well, why don't we take the opportunity to invite people along as we share in it together?

[32 : 36] Not just the same people all the time but different people that we might not have met yet or might not know as well. People from within the church, from within the community group, from a neighbouring community group, from those who are not part of our church.

Or invite them to enjoy the things that you enjoy. Invite them into the craziness of your family time. If you go to the beach, if you go swimming, if you play badminton or squash, feel free to invite people along.

Another family or another person from church, a community group or neighbouring community group. Our own group is planning to kind of reorganise ourselves around these things.

Breaking bread, sharing and fellowship, teaching and so on. And one of the things we're going to do is we're going to spend time each month gathering socially together, doing something around Hong Kong so that we can invite people along to it.

Keep sowing those seeds of investing in relationships. As we do, we will reap a beautiful and genuine community life here at Watermark in Hong Kong.

[33 : 46] And it's that genuine community that adorns the gospel and it attracts outsiders. Because as Jesus himself said, this is how everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

Thank you, Alistair. A large part of being the church is not only to worship in these weekly worship services, not even just to be in community, but to actually worship God and serve God by being a community that serves the broader community around us.

The community you see in Hong Kong outside of the walls of your home, your workplace, and all of that. And that is a big part of Watermark's vision. You know, for many of us, our daily lives don't really involve brushing shoulders and engaging those who are poor, those who are hungry, the homeless.

The abandoned, the outcast, the marginalized, the lowest rungs of the social ladder, so to speak. But God tells us that religion that he accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress.

And in the early church, those people represented the most vulnerable groups of society. You know, we may not see it regularly, but there actually are genuine physical needs in Hong Kong, even in a relatively wealthy area like the West Island area.

[35 : 21] In the Central and Western District alone, over 26,000 people have a monthly income of less than \$10,000. Hong Kong.

Over 14,000 households have a monthly household income of less than \$10,000. So an entire household. There are nearly 7,000 single-parent households.

And as we should know, the reality is that whether you're rich materially or you're poor materially, the underlying poverty is spiritual. There's an emptiness in the human heart that only God's love can fill.

And so one of the community groups in Watermark saw this reality, and they've been responding by supporting an organization called St. Barnabas Society. And it's a Christian non-profit that serves the poor and the needy all across the Western District and Central as well.

And out of the dedication of this one community group, we, as the body at large, now have an amazing opportunity to begin planting seeds in something so much greater than any of us could imagine.

[36 : 29] So basically, we want to help St. Barnabas expand beyond serving the elderly and the homeless. As important as that is, we want to begin reaching out to disadvantaged children as well as their families.

Their community center actually has an upper floor that isn't really being used right now. It's a bit dilapidated. It's kind of unrenovated. And we want to take that place and turn it into a dedicated space where kids can come get tutored, they can come learn and hang out, and even have their parents join in so that they can actually be served a family meal together and be united around that.

And in other words, this is a huge opportunity for us as Watermark to bring children, at-risk children, into a safe, nurturing environment. You know, to give disadvantaged kids actually a chance of better education, to unite parents and children together, even if it's over one meal.

And really, ultimately, to speak and show God's love to every vulnerable group and individual in that group, the kids. And nuts and bolts, you can find out more about how you can get involved by going to the church website, pens, iPads, paper, whatever.

Please just write down watermarkchurch.hk slash community service. watermarkchurch.hk slash community service. And of course, you can speak to myself or Mike Rivalin from the Kennedy Town community group.

[37 : 57] And as you walk on this journey with us, as you look into this, this idea of community service, I really want to encourage you, don't, please don't just serve because, you know, you're presented directly with opportunities.

We really encourage you to pray and be sensitive to the things that God is also burdening your hearts with, things that he's speaking to you. Talk within your community groups.

About things you can explore as a family. You know, what might it look like for you to plant a seed in your community? You know, what might it look like for an entire church of community groups on a mission together all across Hong Kong?

I want to close with this. Matthew 5, Jesus says, you are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it on a basket, under a basket.

But they light the lamp and put it on a stand so that it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[39 : 04] And what this means to me is ultimately, community service is not ultimately about doing good or alleviating poverty. It's not even about just taking care of the vulnerable.

It's really about worshiping God. God. I know that for every homeless person you and I feed, every lonely grandmother you and I spend time with, every disadvantaged child that I tutor, whatever it is that you and I can do, our God is a God who loves them infinitely more than we do.

And so we just need to serve our God. We just need to give him everything that he's given to us so that he may be glorified. God is the same God over all people, rich and poor, those who are content and those who feel unworthy.

So may we give freely, may we give without fear or discrimination. And as we worship in here this morning, my prayer is that this worship would really overflow into the poorest and darkest corners of Hong Kong.

So you've heard a little bit about the old in the New Testament church. You've heard a little bit about what it means for them to be devoted to what God is doing. You've heard a little bit about what God is, we feel like God's doing in Watermark here, what we feel like he's called us to be about, what we're praying that everyone will be about here as we walk with the Lord.

[40 : 30] Let me ask you a question. And this isn't in the sermon at the beginning this morning as I was praying through it, I just feel like I need to ask this because I need to ask myself this question. I hope that you listen to what I say very carefully because I know that it will be misunderstood maybe.

But what if you're in here right now and you're listening to this passage about how the church was going to come together and they came to Christ and the Spirit filled them and all of a sudden they started to worship the Word and worship the Lord and to serve each other and to give and to be outwardly focused.

What if you've heard these passages right now and you're hitting here right now but you have no desire to do that? I mean, what if you prayed the prayer long ago and you invited Jesus into your life or maybe your mom prayed it with you or maybe you went to a youth group and you were baptized or your parents told you you were always raised up in a Methodist or a Catholic or a Protestant or a Lutheran church and so that's who you are but what if you don't have a desire for that?

I mean, what if you have no desire and no push to devote yourself to serve? What if you have no desire to devote yourself to hear God's Word and to devour it and to understand what it means to be a follower of Christ?

What if you have no desire to worship the Lord? What if you're sitting here and you're saying, yeah, I've heard these things, I see these things but you know, I just, I have no desire to do that. I don't want to do that and I've never done that.

[42 : 07] I don't want to be other focused. I don't want to be a steward of the resources. What if I've never tithed? What if I never realized that all the money that I have isn't really my money but it's really God's money?

And I hear these messages and I say, so what? I'm going to keep it to myself because God isn't good and He won't take care of me. What if you're here right now and you feel that way?

What if you're listening to this passage and you realize that you used to do these things? I mean, you came to Christ one time in your life and you were all hungry for God's word and you used to hunger for His word.

You used to love to come to worship. You used to pray unceasingly. You used to look at ways that you could serve in the church. You used to be other focused. You used to use your money because you knew it wasn't your money but it was God's money and you used to be a steward of that.

You used to pray for other people. You used to be concerned about the world around you but now you're not. What about us?

[43 : 14] The passage here says really clearly that the walk with the Lord, the Christian life is about a relationship with God. It's not about doing or being but it's about knowing the risen Lord.

And the scripture is really clear that if we know God and His spirit is in us that our life will start to manifest these things. We'll start to be other focused.

We start to be other thinking. We will start to serve. We start to give. We start to realize that our money isn't our money but it's God's money. We start to worship Him. We start to know and read His word because that's where He meets us and that's where He changes our hearts.

And if we're not doing that the Bible basically says that you and I we have a heart problem. And we need to come back to the Lord and see do we really understand what it means to walk with the Lord?

Do we really understand what it means to be called a child of God? Do we really understand that everything that He's given us is an amazing blessing especially His Son?

[44 : 25] But we're not to hoard it or to give it to other people. And if we don't understand that and if we don't do that this passage and all the rest of the Bible says you have a heart problem.

And you probably don't have the relationship with God that you think you do. And we don't want you to leave here thinking that everything is alright when God's word says but it's probably not.

And you need to do some serious thinking and coming before the Lord and praying. Our prayer is that you wouldn't leave this time you wouldn't leave the meal that we're about to go into without doing that.

There's going to be elders and there's going to be leaders and there's going to be staff who would love to talk to you and they'd love to talk to you about what it means to come to know the Lord and what it talks about what it means to trust Him and go on a journey with Him. What it talks about what it means to talk about planting the seed.

You know we place these things these bookmarks in your chair because this is a verse that's meant a lot to us as a staff because the very fact that you're here right now when we started this church 43 people came over from another church now about 30 of them aren't here anymore they've been shipped out to London and other countries but the very fact that you're here right now is because they invested their lives they invested their finances they invested their gifting for that little time that God had them here and this church is here now that you're taking part of and our prayer is that you would think and pray and think about what it means for you to go on a journey with the Lord what does it mean for you to be all in what it means for you to give everything that He's given you for His service and for those who don't know Him and for this world that's lost and needs to be redeemed what would it look like for you to go all in and to plant a seed these next four months just for four months I'm going to get in a Bible study we're going to start some studies right now my wife and other people are doing these Bible studies for new beginners and for old beginners and they're going to be being rolled out here again it's not a program but we just want to get people deep what if you decide hey we want to serve what if we want to get into a community group what if you just do that for four months and you trust in the Lord for that would your life be different we think it would be because the Bible says that as the church did these things as they worshipped as they prayed as they gave as they served as they sacrificially went to other people as they did these things society and the world changed and it changed mostly because of a relationship the relationship was what they had with Christ and the relationship was what they had with each other and when people saw that it changed everything and so we're praying for all of us as a church family that we would be all in that we would realize that God is good that we can trust him that he gave the most precious thing to us his son and that the life he wants for us is so much greater and far beyond anything that we are experiencing right now

[47 : 26] Father we thank you for this day and we come before you and we worship you we desire a relationship with you because we know that if that relationship is not there no matter how much we try to perform no matter how much we try to do no matter how much we try to create it is just cosmetics because our heart stays the same and so we thank you that you gave your son to deal with the true problem of the universe it's not poverty and it's not corruption and it's not unfairness and it's not unequal distribution of resources the true problem of the universe is sin in our broken hearts because if that was fixed then all the other things would be taken care of as it was in your early church and so we pray Lord that you would meet us and change us and convict us and heal us and we're so thankful that you are merciful for your grace and your mercy and that you never give up on us you always come towards us you are the God of second chances and so we worship you this day we pray all these things in your son Jesus name

Amen