

The Church and Each Other

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[0 : 0 0] The passage today is from Acts chapter 2 verses 42 to 47. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number, day by day, those who were being saved. This is the word of the Lord. Okay, great. Thank you, Hannah. Let me pray for us briefly, and then we'll dive in.

And Father God, this morning, as we come to this passage that we've been looking at for the last few weeks, a very, very wonderful and challenging passage, we pray that you'll speak to us.

[1 : 0 8] God, we pray that you open the eyes of our hearts to see you and the way that you have welcomed and loved us. That we'll see, God, the way that you've brought us into the community of the Trinity.

And God, that that'll transform us. It'll change us. And Lord, we pray that Watermark will really be a community that reflects something of the book of Acts, what we see here. But we need your grace, God.

We can't manufacture or generate this. We need you to work in our hearts. And so we pray, God, come and have your way. Come and help us and open our eyes and change us. Make us more like you, Lord Jesus, we pray.

In your great name. Amen. Amen. It's great to be back with you. Last week, obviously, we had our Typhoon Sunday. And so we missed you.

And I hope you were able to do the home service that we put together. I hope that it was encouraging and good. But the week before that, our family was in Singapore. We were at a church called Redemption Heal Church, RHC, which is a very, very wonderful church.

[2 : 1 0] It's a partner church of ours in Resound. So we do things together as churches. And in all three of their services, they were praying for us at Watermark. They love us as a church.

They gave us some funds towards our building fund at Viva Place. Their church, they really carry us very deeply in their hearts. And it was wonderful to be with them. And their leaders are going to come to Watermark at the end of August and be with us for a weekend.

So that's where we were a few weeks ago. But it's great to be back here. Now, as you will know if you've been coming for a while, we are spending a couple of weeks in this passage that Hannah read to us.

Acts 2, verse 42 to 47. And it's a great picture of one of the very first Christian communities. And, of course, the book of Acts is more about what God was doing than what the apostles were doing.

The book of Acts is not so much, hey, this is what the Christians were doing, therefore just copy them. The book of Acts should give us great confidence, but not so much because the apostles were amazing, but because God is amazing.

[3 : 10] And he was doing great things through the church. But as we look at the book of Acts, it should give us some kind of picture, a vision for what we should hope or expect or pray that God can do amongst us as Christians in 21st century Hong Kong.

Now, talking about church communities, I wonder what is your experience or expectation of Christian community? I wonder how you found church community over the years.

What do you think of when you hear people talking about the Christian community? What has your experience been like? Have you experienced the joys of knowing others and being known?

Has Christian community been hard for you? Maybe you're someone who's happy to come along to church on Sundays and sing the songs and generally be part of the crowd. But to really open up your life, to open up your heart, to really let people in feels a bit scary, a little bit difficult.

What has your experience of Christian community been like? Maybe somebody's heard or read or maybe even experienced one-to-many church scandals. Leaders running away with money or somebody else.

[4 : 24] A church community gone wrong. Friends, maybe you're new to church or you're looking into Christianity and you're interested in the claims of Christ, but wary of Christian church.

Wary of really opening yourself up and letting others know you deeply. Maybe you've read or experienced these scandals and it's scarred you a bit. And we can think that I'm being overly negative or critical, but I think we must wrestle with the fact that sometimes even the church community can experience a lot of the heartache and the problems that society itself experiences.

And so I wonder, when you think of church, what picture or word picture comes to your mind? Maybe for some of us, we think it's like when you go to the cinema, right? And you've got to squeeze past somebody and you politely smile and say, excuse me, excuse me, but you're not actually going to get to know them.

And you just squeeze past each other, you squeeze out, and that's the last you get to know them. Or maybe coming to church is a bit like going to a sports game or maybe a Coldplay concert. Okay, we don't have any cameras up, don't worry.

But going to a sports game and there's 15,000 spectators or maybe 200 spectators and all the 10 people on stage are doing the real work, right?

[5 : 35] And we just come and we spectate and watch what's going on. Friends, maybe coming to church is a bit like going to Starbucks. It's functional and it's transactional. I pay my fees and I get a level of service or goods in exchange.

Friends, maybe coming to church is a bit like going to a dentist. Not something you really want to do, but you just have to do it from time to time, right? What is your experience? Sorry for all the dentists out there, Jasmine and others, Karen and stealing.

What is your experience of going to church? What is the church community like? What should it be like? Now, as I mentioned, we're slowing down and we're spending a couple of weeks looking at this passage in Acts 2 verse 42.

And the reason is not so much because this passage gives us, you know, five tips on how to be the perfect community. But this passage shows us something of what happens to a community when God intervenes and God gets a hold of them.

And this passage shows us what is a community that's formed around Christ and the gospel really look like. Now, if you've been here for a couple of weeks, you should notice the logic and the progression. A couple of weeks ago, I think it was three weeks ago, Neil spoke about inputs and outputs.

[6 : 47] And he said that certain inputs should produce certain outputs. And there's one great input in this passage. What is that input? It's the scriptures. It's the word of God.

Our passage starts off and says, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. And that teaching is the teaching about the scriptures. It's the apostles were opening up the scriptures and teaching people.

But specifically, it was the teaching about Jesus Christ and the gospel. Who Christ is and what he's done. And so throughout the book of Acts, the apostles are teaching from the scriptures about Jesus and the good news of the gospel.

That God himself has come into our world to put right all that is wrong and broken with our world. To reconcile us with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And that message goes out and it has an impact.

One example, Acts 17, I just want to show you. Throughout Acts, this is what the apostles are teaching. Acts 17 says, Paul reasoned with them from the scriptures.

[7 : 48] Explaining and proving it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead. Saying, this Jesus whom I proclaim to you, this is the Christ. So the apostles are going everywhere and they're proclaiming the wonder of Jesus.

And remember that there's a phrase that repeats itself throughout Acts. It says, the word of God multiplied and increased. Multiplied and increased. That doesn't mean that Bibles were multiplying and suddenly popping up everywhere.

It means the message of Jesus. The good news. The wonderful news of Jesus. Spread to all the known world. And multiplied and increased. And more people are coming to believe in and experience it.

And this good news about Jesus, it does something. Remember Niels reminded us. God's word is living and active. It's not philosophical. It's not theoretical. It's not static.

It's living and active. It actually does something. It has an effect. And what is the effect that God's word has? It creates a community. God doesn't just save individuals. Me and you.

[8 : 47] Us. He creates a community. And a community that does what? That love God. Serve God in worship. That love and serve one another in community. In fellowship.

That witness to the world. In evangelism. And so that's what we've been speaking about. Niels showed us how the scriptures come in and change us. And then two weeks ago, Alan spoke about how that causes a community that worships God.

This morning, I want us to look at how that gospel changes us and causes us to form a community that love and serve one another. Now, we were going to get to witness. But the typhoon knocked that out. So we'll have to do that some other time.

But this morning, I want us to think about how is it that the community of the saints fellowship and do community together. So let's look at this passage together and see what it says.

And verse 42 says this. The word of God came to them and changed them. And Peter was preaching the gospel, the wonder about Jesus. And he died and he rose again.

[9 : 47] Verse 42 says, And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. Okay, that's the word, the message of Jesus. To the fellowship. That's community. To the breaking of bread.

That's also the gospel. And to the prayers. That's worship. Fellowship. So we've looked at the gospel. We've looked at the worship. Today, I want us to think about fellowship. Fellowship and community.

Now, many years ago, when I was growing up in South Africa, almost every church, and I think this was very common in the Western world. I'm not so sure about Hong Kong. But every church had what they called a fellowship hall.

Does anyone know what a fellowship hall was? Okay. What you'd have is you'd have the main sanctuary and auditorium like this. And then next door, there'd be another hall, maybe a little bit smaller. And you'd all go there afterwards and drink tea and talk about the weather.

Okay. Or like the sports or maybe the latest TV show. And now, I don't know. Hong Kong property is a little bit tighter, so maybe it didn't work so well here. But most countries where churches were on big properties, you'd have the main hall, auditorium.

[10 : 50] And then you'd go to the fellowship hall. And the fellowship hall is where you talk about kind of meaningless, superficial stuff. And you'd just be nice and polite and drink tea together. Okay. Does that make sense?

Luke says here that the Christians devoted themselves to the fellowship. Now, why am I telling you the story? That word fellowship is not what Luke means here.

Right? When Luke says they devoted themselves to fellowship, he doesn't mean polite but meaningless conversation about the weather or politics or sport or TV. He's talking about something much deeper.

The word fellowship in the Bible actually means a deep, deep partnership or a participation in one another's lives. It means your lives are kind of intertwined or intertangled together such that your life affects me and my life affects you.

Fellowship. They devoted themselves to this kind of fellowship. They devoted themselves to this kind of fellowship. The picture is not so much going to the hall and drinking tea outside. It's more a picture of soldiers that are locked in together.

[11 : 52] Or if you think of a sports team, right? Football team. Before they start a match, they huddle in the middle. They're locked in shoulder to shoulder. And they say, okay, we're in this together. That's the idea of fellowship here.

More than just drinking tea and talking about the weather. Okay? Or think about, it's talking about partnership. It's talking about mutual participation in one another's lives. Or think about the word partnership.

Maybe some of you are partners at a firm. A law firm or an auditing firm or something. What does it mean to be a partner? It means that you're not just an employee. You've got real responsibility at the firm.

You've got maybe ownership. Maybe a stake in the shares. But you've got real responsibility for the well-being of the firm. The well-being of the other members. Their interests and your interests are aligned and mutually intertangled.

If the firm goes down, that's not good for you. And it means that you can't just leave or bail when things get tough. You're committed. You're in. You're involved. Partnership. Participation. And that's what the word fellowship means.

[12 : 52] And here Luke says that these disciples, these new Christians, they devoted themselves to this kind of relationship. Listen to how elsewhere the New Testament uses it.

This is in 2 Corinthians chapter 6. And this is an amazing passage. Paul writes this. He says, Here Paul uses six or seven different words.

Yoke together. Bound together. Partnership. Fellowship. Sharing one accord. Share agreement. All to describe this idea of the Christian community as yoked together.

As joined together. And one of those words is fellowship. Kononia is the Greek word. Elsewhere in the New Testament, when one Christian community takes up a financial offering, a love offering, for another community that's maybe gone through famine or drought or something, that word, that contribution is called a fellowship.

It's the same word. They're saying, Your struggles, your difficulties are our difficulties. Your joys are our joys. But we end this thing together. You're not just on the distance. You're doing your life and me doing me.

[14 : 15] No, no. Our lives are interconnected. And so Luke says here, That as a result of the good news of Jesus, These early Christians, Devoted themselves, Committed themselves, To Jesus and the gospel, To worshiping God and loving him, But also to the fellowship, To the community, The partnership and the mutual participation of one another.

And that's, I don't know what you think about that. That's a very high calling for the church, right? When you join the church, Part of what you're saying is, You need me and I need you. And we're in this together.

Now, how do we get that? What does this kind of fellowship involve? Well, there's four kind of ingredients that we must have, That any genuine community must have. It must be sacrificial, It must be vulnerable, It must involve forgiveness, And covenantal.

Okay? So, let's look at those things together. Let's read the scripture together. From verse 44, Luke writes this, So, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, Fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.

Verse 44, And all who believed were together, And had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions, And belongings, And distributing the proceeds to all, As any had need.

[15 : 31] And day by day, Attending the temple together, Breaking bread in their homes, They received their food with glad and generous hearts, Praising God, And having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number, Day by day, Those who were being saved.

Okay? Okay, these four things. Firstly, sacrificial. Look at the extravagant, Sacrificial generosity, And care of this community.

Verse 44 says, Those who believed were together, And they had all things in common. They were even selling their possessions, And belongings, And distributing the proceeds to all, As any had need.

Now, some people have looked at this passage, And thought, Okay, here's a basis for kind of, A Marxist socialist political ideology. But actually, This is very different, From a socialist ideology.

And there's a couple of reasons for it. One is, This is bottom up, Initiated, Not top down imposed. Okay? Secondly, This is voluntary.

[16 : 32] It's not imposed from anybody else. They're not told what to do. They don't say, If you're going to join this church, You all must sell your possessions, And put in a common pot. This is voluntary giving up, That the people had, As they saw the needs, And the concerns for one another.

But the other reason is, This is confined to the church community. It's not statewide, Or nationwide, Or citywide. They weren't giving to anybody in the city, That had need. This is really within the family, The community, That they saw the needs of one another, They voluntarily gave of their, Possessions to one another.

Some of them sold some things, And gave of the needs. But, Here we see, Sorry, To be in true partnership with one another, Always involves some kind of cost.

Some kind of cost. Some kind of sacrifice involved. Because what it means, To be in partnership, To be in fellowship, Is shouldering the burdens, And the concerns of one another.

As you look to the other people, In the church family, And you see their needs, You see their concerns, Their interests. As you see how you can meet their needs, You say, Your burdens, Your fears, Your concerns in life, Actually, I'm going to take those on upon myself.

[17 : 44] And that always, Involves a radical cost. Your troubles, Are not disconnected from my troubles. And my troubles, Are not disconnected from your troubles. And so that's what they have here. Look what it says, It says, They were selling their possessions, And belongings, And giving to one another, As any had need.

Now as we said, On the one hand, Some people have taken this to think, Okay, Here's a, You know, This espouses a socialist political ideology. I don't think that's true, What the teachers are scripting. What the scriptures are teaching.

But on the other hand, It's also not saying, Well my possessions are mine, And your possessions are yours. In some ways, The New Testament is telling us, That when you come into partnership, Into fellowship with one another, My things, Which may involve my time, My energy, My talents, Maybe even my finances, Maybe even my house, To some degree, They don't belong exclusively to me, But actually they are gifts, That God has given me, To steward for the well-being, Of those that are in my, Nuclear family, But also church family.

And that's what we're seeing here. Here they are, They're seeing their things, And they're saying, These things are ours, But they don't belong to me exclusively, They are there for the common good. And that's what it means, Being genuinely enmeshed in community, Is always going to be costly.

It's always going to be sacrificial. It's going to be sharing our things. It's going to mean, Giving our time, Giving our energy, Pursuing the interests of others, Above just my own. Sometimes doing things, That I wouldn't actually want to do, For the sake of loving others.

[19 : 15] Because partnership, Fellowship, Always means that our lives are intertwined. Okay, So sacrificial. Secondly, Vulnerable. Now notice here, These are, These, Look at what it says in verse 46.

It says, Day by day, Attending the temple together, And breaking bread in their homes, They received their food, With glad and generous hearts, Praising God, And having faith with all the people.

Luke tells us here, That they had this daily habit, Of a couple of things. Every day, They would attend the temple, They would pray, They would worship, They would do these things, But they would also do two things in particular, They would break bread, And they would open up their homes.

Okay, What's significant about that? Breaking bread, Here, Probably refers to taking communion together, Which is what we're going to do a little later. And taking communion together, Is always a profoundly vulnerable experience.

Because part of taking communion together, Is always preceded by a time of examination, Of confession, And of repentance. Repentance of dishonesty, Repentance of hypocrisy, Repentance of sin in my life.

[20 : 22] And so when we break bread together, When we take communion together, It's always a time of looking at our hearts, Looking at our lives and saying, What inside of me, Doesn't correspond with the gospel, And God, How do I need to repent of that?

And that's always challenging. But the other thing that the Bible says, Is that when we take communion together, We should never do that, If there's relational awkwardness, Or tension, With others in the church community.

So let's say, Oscar and I are not getting along. Actually, The scripture says, It's hypocritical, For me to go and take communion, And say, God, I'm so glad that I'm fine with you, All our things have been dealt with, But actually, I'm not going to forgive Oscar.

That guy, I can't believe it. When there's hardness and bitterness of heart, In my heart towards someone else, Actually, The Bible says, We should go and resolve that, And work through that, And talk through that, Before taking communion, Before God.

So breaking bread in each other's homes, Is always an extremely vulnerable situation, Because it means, You have to go put right, The relationships that are involved in your life. Here's a community, Who are coming together, Who are marked by short accounts.

[21 : 27] And it suggests that every day, They're meeting together, They're praying, They're confessing their sins, They're repenting, They're repairing relationships, They're remembering Christ's death and resurrection. That's an extremely vulnerable situation.

But the other thing that they're doing, Is they're opening up their homes. Friends, How do you feel about opening up your home to people? You know, In Hong Kong, One of the things I've found is that, Hong Kongers are very good at hosting people, Taking people out for meals, Having people, Paying for people, Treating people.

But one thing that we as Hong Kongers, Aren't so good at, Is opening up our homes. We love to treat people, Going out to restaurants, But our homes is another story. And why is that? Because your home is a very sacred space.

It's probably one of the most personal spaces, Right? When you open up your home, And you let others in, What you're doing is you're saying, I'm removing the mask, I'm letting you see my real life, I'm letting you see the mess, I'm letting you see what it's like, When my kids are misbehaving, I'm letting you come into our lives, When it's not all neat, And well ordered, And I'm letting you see the real me.

And here they are, They're opening up their homes daily, They're letting people in, And they're saying, There's no mask, I'm taking off the mask. Come and see the real me. Friends, Genuine community is always vulnerable.

[22 : 44] It always involves you taking off the mask, And allowing people to see the real you. Who you really are, And the good times and the bad times. When your kids are well behaved, And when they're not so well behaved, Right? When you're on top of the world, And when you're not on top of the world.

Being a part of community, Says, Come and see the real me. And C.S. Lewis says this very, It always requires vulnerability. And C.S. Lewis says this amazingly, In one of his books, The Four Loves.

Listen to what he says here. I think I got up there. He says, To love at all, Is to be vulnerable. Love anything, And your heart will be wrung, Possibly broken. If you want to make sure, Of keeping your heart intact, You must give it to no one.

Wrap it up carefully, In hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglement. Lock it up safe, In the casket, Or the coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, Safe, Dark, Motionless, Airless, It will change.

It will not be broken, But it will become unbreakable, Impenetrable, Irredeemable. To love at all, Is to be vulnerable. Friends, If you don't want to be disappointed by anybody, Don't want to feel the pain, Don't want to cry, There's an easy way.

[23 : 53] Turn yourself into a rock, Into an island. Become unbreakable, Impenetrable, Unvulnerable, To nobody, Let nobody in.

And you won't be hurt, But you'll become unhurt, Become unbreakable. You may not cry, But when life gets hard, There'll be nobody there to cry with you, And to stand with you.

Friends, Who knows the real you? Who knows your deepest longings? Who knows your deepest joys? Your fears? Your temptations? Your struggles?

Your anger? Proverbs says, Better is an open rebuke, Than hidden love. Better to be real, And honest, And to drop the mask, And to say, This is who I am, And these are my struggles.

And the community might not be able to solve it, Or fix it, But the community will promise to walk through it with you, To be there for you. Friends, Does anybody know you well enough to rebuke you, And love you?

[24 : 55] To lovingly challenge you? This is what it means to be in fellowship with one another. So, Sacrificial, Vulnerable. Third thing is forgiving. Now, We don't actually see this in Acts chapter 2, But in the rest of the New Testament, Whenever the apostles speak about genuine community, There's always this injunction, There must be forgiveness and grace at the heart of the Christian community.

It must be there. And listen to what Paul writes in Colossians chapter 3. He says, Put on then, As God's chosen ones, Compassionate hearts, Kindness, Humility, Meekness, And patience, Bearing with one another, And, If one has a complaint against another, Forgiving each other, As the Lord has forgiven you, So you must forgive.

Sorry. Again, Paul says the same thing in Ephesians. He says, Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and slander be put away from you, Along with all malice. That means anger. Be kind to one another, Tenderhearted, Forgiving one another, As God in Christ has forgiven you.

Friends, The New Testament is absolutely clear. If there's going to be any semblance of genuine relationship, Genuine community, Genuine friendship, At the heart of that must be the idea, Of forgiveness and grace.

And why is that? Well the reason is, Because, If you're going to have any depth of relationship, Any openness, Any vulnerability, Any honesty, There are a thousand ways, To hurt, To misunderstand, To disappoint, To let one another down.

[26 : 30] If you're going to get below the cliches, And the platitudes, If you're going to get real, And honest with each other, You're going to find things about one another, That maybe you don't like. And Jesus says that, There's two options, You can either build up a wall, Put on a mask, Stay superficial and thin, Or you can get real, But you must embrace the junction, To forgive, And to be gracious and merciful to one another.

Genuine community, Always, Always, Involves, Opening up, Not only your home, Not only your hands, But also your heart. And that means, That there must be, The openness, To being misunderstood, To being disappointed, To being, Hurt.

I don't know if you've ever, I don't know if you've ever, I don't know if you've ever gone hiking, In the mountains or somewhere, And you're walking, And you stand on a log, That looks pretty good, And the bark is all fine, And you stand, And as you stand, Your foot just goes straight through the log, And you realize, It's completely rotten inside, Okay?

In some ways, It can look very neat, And all, Have perfections on the outside, But inside it's completely rotten. Friends, The Bible says, That if we, Don't know how to forgive, If we don't know how to, Be, Not only vulnerable, But also merciful to one another, It's very easy, For the outside, To look very, Sturdy, And strong, And stable, But inside will be rotten, And the bitterness, And the hardness of heart, Will eat the community alive, And as soon as anybody, Puts pressure on it, As soon as, The first difficult thing comes away, It'll just give way, And fall apart completely.

Have you ever experienced that? Maybe in your CG, Yeah, We all find, Get them well, Get them well, And as soon as the first, Difficulty comes your way, It just collapses. The Bible says, Unless you're able to forgive, Unless you're able to go, To those hard places, Have those hard conversations, Unless you're able to embrace, The cost, Of the moral debt, To somebody else, And forgive them, That community cannot last, It's going to give way, As soon as hardship comes.

[28 : 31] Friends, I wonder if there's anybody, You feel like you need to forgive, Anyone you need to, Decide in your heart, To release them, Or friends, Is there anybody you need to forgive? Anybody you need to move towards?

Anybody you need to release, The moral debt, That somebody, That you hold against somebody? Anybody, Any hardness of heart, You need to move away from? Genuine community, Is always, Sacrificial, Vulnerable, Forgiving, Thirdly, It's covenantal, Fourthly, It's covenantal, Now covenantal, Is just a big Bible word, That means deeply committed, Think of marriage covenant, Right, What is a marriage covenant?

A marriage covenant, Is a deep commitment, A relationship you commit to, Through thick or thin, In the good times, In the bad times, When things are going well, Or they're not going well, And the point of a covenant, Is that you say, We are locking the back door, And we're throwing away the key, And we are committed, To this relationship, When things get hard, We're not going to run away, We're going to deal with it, We're going to talk about it, Right, And so look at verse 42 again, And what it says here, It says here, They devoted themselves, They gave themselves, They committed themselves, To these things, To the scriptures, To worshiping God, But also to fellowship, To one another, Devotion means making, A conviction based decision, Not a comfort based decision, It means making a deep commitment, Based on the conviction, That this is right, We're going to see this thing through, And yet we see in the early church, This church community, Was committed to each other, Not just when things were going well, But through thick or thin, Imagine I said to my wife, On our wedding day, Right,

We've got a couple of people, Getting married later on this year, With all that I am, With all that I have, I give myself to you, As long as things go well, As long as things don't get boring, Right, As long as there's no difficulty, All that I am, I give myself to you, But the first instance, Of things getting hard, Hey, I'm out of here, What kind of covenant is that, What kind of commitment is that, A covenant says, When things are good, Or things are bad, We are in this thing, We're going to work through it, We're going to talk through it, We're going to discuss it, We're going to make sure, We get through to the other side, Together, Friends, Any human relationship, That has the possibility, Of hurting one another, Letting one another down, Disappointing one another, The only way to get through, Is if you're mature enough to say, We've got to work through this thing, We've got to talk through it, We've got to discuss it, We are committed, Through not just the tough times, Not just the good times, But the tough times as well, And in a sense, That's what church community, That's what church membership is about,

It's not, Church membership is not about, Getting a grave spot, Or getting your kids into school, It's about saying, I need you, And you need me, I'm committed to you, And you're committed to me, We're going to see this thing through, And I need you to help me grow, And you need me, And we are committed to this relationship, Through to the other side, So, How do we find fellowship?

[31 : 30] Four things, Sacrificial, Sacrificial, Vulnerable, Forgiving, Committed, Now friends, How do you feel about this? If you're new to church, You may be surprised, At the very high bar, The high calling, That God has on his church community, If you're going to be part of the church, You've got to reckon with these four things, If you're going to have any depth of relationship, Any transformative experience, If the church is going to have any impact in your life, You've got to wrestle and reckon, With these four things, Sacrificial, Vulnerable, Opening up the real self, Forgiving one another, Committed through thick and thin, And these are things, That any genuine relationship, Any genuine community, Must aim for, If it's going to be deep and transformative, Otherwise relationships, Are just going to be superficial, Cliched, Thin and meaningless, And the church as a spiritual family, Is no different, It may surprise you, But it's true, You've got to reckon, With these four things, But actually,

As we think about it, Should it surprise us? Actually, If you're familiar, With the Christian gospel, It actually shouldn't surprise us that much, Because, Jesus Christ, Embraced all four of these things, To bring us, Into his community, Think about it, Think about how sacrificial, And costly Jesus was, To bring us into relationship, With the Father, The Son, And the Holy Spirit, Jesus cost him everything, When Jesus, What Jesus cost, Or embraced, To bring us into his family, Jesus didn't just give up, A second home, You know, Here it says that they, Sold some properties, And distributed the proceeds, To the poor, Jesus didn't give up, A second home, Jesus gave up heaven, To bring you and I, Into his family, Jesus didn't just, Pay a marginal price, Jesus paid with his blood, With everything that he had, That he was, His honor, His reputation, His very life, Friends, To bring us into his family, Jesus didn't just, Open up his hands, And say, Yeah, I'll share my things with you,

Jesus had his hands, Nailed to the cross, Wide, Wide open, To say, Come, I'll let you in, Come and be part of my family, Friends, Jesus didn't just do this, For those who were already, His friends, Already in his community, Jesus did this for us, Who were his enemies, Who had betrayed him, Who shook our fists at him, Who had given him, The middle finger, Who said, Stuff you got, I'm going to go things my own way, Jesus gave up his life, For his enemies, To bring us into the community, Of the father, The son, The spirit, Into his partnership, His community, His fellowship, Jesus embraced, The sacrificial cost, Friends, Just think about how vulnerable, Jesus Christ, Jesus made himself for us, Think of the way, That Jesus opened up, Himself, To those who would betray him, Those who would deny him, Those who would, Sell him out, For thirty silver coins, Jesus knew about, Judas' betrayal, And knew about, Peter's denial, And knew about, The sins of the world, And Jesus vulnerably, Opened up his heart,

To those that would, Deny him, And betray him, And let him down, And say, Come, Come be part of my family, I welcome myself, I throw myself on, My arms open wide to you, Friends, Jesus didn't just, You know, I recently, A little while ago, I had to go to the bank, And sign all these documents, Right, And there's a pile of papers like this, Indemnifying the bank, Against any and all responsibility, Of anything, In any particular situation, That you could even imagine, In any way, Right, Friends, And Jesus welcomed us, Into partnership, Into fellowship, Into relationship, He doesn't say, Okay, I'll let you in, But here's the terms and conditions, Here's all the contracts, Why I'm not responsible for anything, Jesus made himself vulnerable, Knowing that we would betray him, Knowing we'd let him down, Knowing that we would, Mess up and go against, Everything he's asked us to, And he said, Come, I'll let you in, Why?

Because he loves us, Friends, Think about how forgiving Jesus is, Towards sinners like us, At one point in the gospel, One of Jesus' disciples, Come to him and says, Jesus, Master, How many times, Must I forgive, Those that betray me, Those that hurt me, Should I forgive, Up to seven times, I mean seven times, You want me to forgive somebody, And Jesus says, Not seven times, But seventy times seven, In other words, Infinite number of times, Right, Friends, When we think of sin, As not just doing wrong things, But having a wrong attitude, A wrong heart, Things like selfishness, Things like pride, Things like bitterness of heart, Things like self-centeredness, Things like living for our own glory, Seventy times seven, Doesn't even scratch the surface, Of one day, Of my days, And how many times, Does Jesus forgive me?

[36 : 18] Again, And again, And again, And again, Friends, You remember Jesus, Almost his final words, As he's been nailed to the cross, He's been flogged, He's been unfairly condemned, He's been beaten, He's been mocked, And he's now, He's on the cross, Nails smashed to his hands, And what are his final words?

Father forgive them, They know not what they do, The forgiveness of Christ, To bring us into his relationship, Into relationship with him, Friends, How can that forgiveness, Not change us?

We look at that and we say, Oh that's very nice, No it's not nice, It's scandalous, It's terrible, It's awful, Friends it's love, And that's what Jesus did, To bring us into relationship with him, Friends look at the face of Christ, Look at what Jesus did for us, And let that melt our hearts, And forgive those, That we struggle with, In the church family, Friends think about how committed Jesus is, The word the Bible uses is covenant, His rock solid agreement, To let us in, And to never let us down, To never cast us out, To never drive us away, Jesus doesn't say, Hey I'll let you into my family, Until things get boring, Until things get tough, Jesus says through thick and thin, You sin against me, I'm committed to you, You let me down, I'm committed to you, Friends your heart gets hard, Things get tough, You don't feel very close to Jesus, I'm committed to you, I'm committed to you, Through thick and thin, Christ's covenant commitment to us, Amazing,

Think about what Jesus has done for us, Psalm 103 says this, As high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is his steadfast love, His covenant faithfulness, As far as the east is from the west, So far does he remove his sins for us, Friends this is what Jesus did, To bring us into his community, Into fellowship, Into partnership and participation, With the community, To try you in God, Jesus says come, You can be part of my family in heaven, Through sacrificial, Vulnerable, Gracious commitment to us, Not because we are worthy, Not because we deserve it, Not because we are like him, Or made to feel good, But simply because he is good, He's oh so good, Friends what does this mean, It means that ultimately, You and I, We actually can't create community, Christian community, Is something that no leaders, No elders, No pastors can generate, Manufacture, It's something that we walk into, Something that the God of the Bible, Has created and formed, And we get to walk into it,

As we drop our God, As we embrace the forgiveness of Christ, As we allow Christ to love us, As we embrace what he has done for us, We walk into community, And we experience it, And as we experience it, We find that our hearts are changed, And we're able to welcome others, And open ourselves up to others, But friends in order to do that, You must know, You must experience, You must encounter, Not a theology, Not a theory, Not a doctrine, But a person, The person of Jesus, You must encounter Christ, And as you encounter Christ, And as you encounter his grace, And his forgiveness, And his vulnerability, And his sacrifice, And his care, As he changes our hearts, We will open up our hearts, To one another, And we'll find ourselves, Experiencing amazing community, Ourselves, Here they devoted themselves, The apostles teaching, To fellowship, To the breaking of bread, And to prayers, And all who believed, Were all together, And had all things in common, And they were selling their possessions,

[39 : 52] And belongs, And distributing the proceeds, To all as any had need, And day by day, Attending the temple courts, And breaking bread in their homes, They received their food, With glad and generous hearts, Praising God, Having faith with all the people, And the Lord added to their number, Day by day, Those who were being saved, Let's pray together, Lord Jesus, As we look at this community, In the book of Acts, It astounds us, And amazes us, What they did for one another, God how sacrificial they were, Radical, Radical, Sacrificial, Love and care, How vulnerable, And open they were to one another, Letting in people, That were so different from them, Jews and Gentiles alike, People from different, Socioeconomic, And cultures, And backgrounds, And all different cultures, God opening themselves up, To one another, God we think about, How forgiving they were, Forgiving as you Christ, Have forgiven them, God we see their, Amazing commitment to one another,

Through thick and thin, God we, We, We ponder your amazing commitment to us, And we ask you God, To change us, And to make us more like you, God come open up our own hearts, Our own lives, Help us God, To walk into what you have created, And then to become part of that, Most amazing and beautiful, And honest and vulnerable story, And to love others the same way, Lord we need your spirit, We need your grace, Come and help us I pray, In your awesome and gracious name, Amen.