

Beginnings, New Beginnings, Do-Overs and Second Chances

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[0 : 01] The scripture today is found in the book of Ezra, chapter 3. Please follow along in your bulletin. Now, when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

Then Yeshua, the son of Yosedach, and his brothers the priests, and Serebabel, the son of Shatiel, and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it.

As it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands. And they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings, morning and evening.

They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required. And afterward there was a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons, and for all the fixed festivals of the Lord that were consecrated.

And from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the Lord. From the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not been laid.

[1 : 15] Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus, king of Persia.

Now in the second year of their coming to the house of the God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Serbabel the son of Shatel, and Yeshua the son of Yosedach, and the rest of their brothers, and the priests, and the Levites.

And all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work, and appointed the Levites from twenty years and older, to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. Then Yeshua, with his sons and brothers, stood united with Catmiel, and his sons, the sons of Judah, and the sons of Hanadad, with their sons and brothers, the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God.

Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their peril with trumpets. And the Levites, the son of Esra, with symbols to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel.

They sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, For he is good, for his loving kindness is upon Israel forever. And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

[2 : 40] Yet many of the priests and Levites, and heads of fathers' households, the old man who has seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes.

While many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people. For the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.

This is the reading of God's Word. Thank you. Okay, we wanted to see who would be daring enough to come down up front, you know, and hit these chairs right here instead of kind of hitting back there.

Guys, it's an incredible honor to be here. Let's really pray for us. The kids, when we started the church, we dreamed about a church that had all the family involved, not in worship and in as many things as possible, not just the adults, but the kids, because Scripture says very clearly that kids see what we do, and we model for them as singles, as married, wherever God has you, you're modeling Christ for the younger generation.

And so let me pray for those kiddos and for the teachers who are about to handle them. They need a lot of prayers, and then they will be dismissed. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for these children here.

[3 : 57] They are a blessing to us. They cause chaos and craziness, but that's what your kingdom is like, and I know that's what you feel when you see us.

We cause chaos and craziness even as adults. And so we pray for them. We pray that they would come to know you. We pray that they would do mighty things for your kingdom. We pray that you'd open their eyes to your son Christ.

We pray for the leaders as they lead and love and care for them, that they would see Jesus in words and actions and deeds, and that maybe not even just through the message of the time in the class, but through the caring and the love and just the gentleness that they would see within this family, they would see your son, and they would come to know him.

So we pray for these kiddos and for these teachers, for these many blessings you've given us. We pray these things in your son Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you. Watermark kids, you're dismissed down these stairs right here.

Find your teacher in what classroom you're in, and they'll tell you where to go, okay? How you guys doing? This is the birthday. You can say, Happy birthday.

[5 : 02] Great. We're doing well. How you guys doing? Hey, I woke up this morning, and my wife's going to kill me. She always kills me when I use her as an illustration.

But I said to her, you know, Happy birthday. We've made it two years. And she's like, I can't believe we've made it this long. So you can always pray for us and in our marriage and things like that.

But as we've learned in a marriage video last week, but isn't it amazing to be here on this journey to see what God's doing in the church and in the lives and the community of people here on this side of the island?

And we have a very special, where we're heading is, I'm going to share a little bit about the sermon, and then I want to introduce three people that are going to share their stories about how God's been changing their life.

We realize that as you hear their stories, that every one of us has a story. Every one of us, God has come into our life. He's speaking to us. He's changing us. And so our hope is, as you hear these stories, that you would reflect back on your story and that you would just praise the Lord and you would thank Him for what He's doing in your life because it's all about Him and it's about giving Him glory and honor.

[6 : 14] In my house, birthdays and celebrations are huge. They're massive. They're very important. You're terrible if you ever forget a birthday or anybody's birthday. There are certain members of our household who will let you know a month in advance when their birthday is, and they continue to let you know every day up until the day of that birthday.

I don't know if you have a wife like that. I mean, I don't know if you have anybody like that. But there's somebody in our family like that because birthdays are very, very important.

Celebrations are important. New beginnings are important. It was 1979, May 14th. It was my birthday. I will never forget it. My parents threw my birthday party at a video arcade in Montgomery, Alabama.

The place is no longer there, and none of you want to go to Montgomery, Alabama. Trust me. But I remember this birthday because on this birthday, I got my first album ever.

It was my first album. No, Ed, it wasn't one of these big albums. They actually had cassettes back then, and so I'm not that old. But I got a cassette, and I remember the cassette. It was a Michael Jackson cassette, Jackson 5 and Michael Jackson, and I played it till it wore out.

[7 : 29] On that day, I also met this person who changed my life and in some ways molds me even today. His name is Jerry.

Jerry was the owner of the video arcade. Jerry was about this tall. He looked Arab or Israeli. He was an alcoholic. He often came to work drunk.

He was a drug user. I think pretty sure that he actually sold drugs out of the arcade. It's why the cops were always at the front of the arcade checking people in as they came in and out.

He was married at least one time that I know of. I kind of think that Jerry worked for organized crime. I'm not sure because I was only 16 years old. I didn't have the guts enough to ask him that.

But over the next couple years, I took a chance and started to develop a relationship with Jerry. And I got to play a lot of video games. So there was kind of different motives there and all those things.

[8 : 28] And as I started to pray for Jerry because I was a young believer and I didn't know any better, I started to share with him about what God was doing in my life, how God was changing me.

And over a period of time, I kept coming to the video arcade on Saturdays and sharing with Jerry what God was doing and teaching in my life. I always remember those times because Jerry's response disarmed me and it freaked me out.

He answered in such a way about the gospel and Jesus Christ that me as a 17-year-old had no idea how to answer him back. As I shared my story, Jerry would say things like, God would not want me.

I'm too bad. I'm too dirty. I'm unredeemable. I have made too many mistakes in my life.

My life is rubbish. The one that always stuck to me is he would say, God would never give me a second chance. And you know, I tried everything I could to share with him as a young Christian, but I just could not get past that response.

[9 : 43] And I would walk away so frustrated and praying and not knowing how to answer him because no one taught me how to do those things. And I would walk away not knowing what to do.

And then one day I came to that arcade and Jerry was gone. I asked the owner who was his father, said that Jerry went to Florida and I never saw Jerry again.

And I think about that time a lot. And as I think about Jerry and talking to him and about life change and people being in a rubbish heap and making mistakes that they can never feel like they can get out of and never feel like God's going to give them a second chance.

As I think about that, I think about passages like today. Because passages like today take people who are in the middle of the rubbish and God changes their life.

God gives them new beginnings. God gives them do-overs. God gives them second chances that Jerry never thought that God would give him. The passage that we read, you heard here today, is from the book of Ezra.

[10 : 43] It's in the Old Testament. It's almost at the lowest point of the people of God in a transition from the lowest point to the highest point. In Exodus 27, God commands his people, the followers of Christ, to build an altar.

This altar was about five meters by five meters by three meters tall. And on this altar, sacrifices were made to God. One of the things you're going to learn as you walk with the Lord is that true worship almost always demands a sacrifice in our life.

I think some of the times we get in trouble as a church is we think that worship demands no sacrifice from us. But the Bible is pretty clear that worship always demands some kind of sacrifice in our life.

And so you see altars throughout the Old Testament. And in Exodus 29, we are told that as you come to the altar to lay your sacrifice, there God meets his people.

In Exodus 29, it says, as you come and you worship at the altar, there God meets you. At the altar, you're supposed to get right with God. At the altar, you're supposed to get clean with God.

[11 : 49] At the altar, you're supposed to worship the Lord. At the altar, God gives you second chances and he gives you do-overs. And the people of God listened and they built that altar really quickly.

And they started to worship and they met God and they changed and their lives were changed at that altar. Hundreds of years later, King Solomon builds this big temple in Jerusalem.

And so he decides to take that altar and he moves the altar into the temple so that people can worship there. And it goes pretty well until this king, King Ahaz, comes along. The Bible tells us that he's this wicked, evil king.

And Ahaz comes and he's on vacation one day and he says he's vacationing in Damascus. He walks into the temple there in this foreign land and he sees this altar and this altar looks really cool.

And he says, well, that's a really cool altar. And he took some designs and he went back to Israel and as he went back to Israel, he basically changed the altar of the God, of Yahweh, the God of people, our God.

[12 : 50] He changes the altar there. He shapes it a little differently. He makes it look sexier and cooler. And as he does that, he changes how people worship. He changes how people see God people from that point on worship and see God differently because the place that they meet God is very, very, very different.

The Bible tells us that it's not too long afterwards that more and more cool altars to different idols and different gods start getting put into the temple. And these new altars get put into the temple and the scripture tells us that so many new altars to idols get put into the temple into the temple that people don't have time to worship at the altar of the true God because they have so many other altars and idols in their life that they're so busy worshipping and serving at those altars that they don't have time for God.

And as I think about that story, I think that that story relates a lot to our life. That every one of us on our journeys, we have these idols and these altars that we put into our life and sometimes they take up so much space in our life that we don't eventually have time to worship the true God.

And the Bible says that it became so bad that the people of God finally took the altar of the Lord and they moved it out of the temple and they put it in a rubbish heap. And instead of worshipping God at the altar that he commanded, they worshiped idols and other gods there.

The scripture goes on and it tells us that in 587 B.C. the Babylonian king, he comes in and he destroys Jerusalem. He wipes it out. There's not a stone left on it and we're told that he takes all of the people of God and he takes them in chains and he moves them to captivity to Babylon.

[14 : 38] Time passes and Babylon is taken over by Persia. And for two generations, over 70 years, the people of God aren't allowed to worship.

They're not in their land. They're not given access to God. They're not given access to the altar of the Lord. They're just wandering, much like many of us are today. And then we're told in this passage that you just read that a foreign king, King Cyrus, one day has a prophecy that is 200 years old read to him and in this prophecy he's told that there's going to be a king named Cyrus who rules over Persia and he's going to release God's people and allow them a new start, a new beginning, a fresh start.

And so Elijah hears those words and he wants to realize that prophecy and so he takes all of God's people and he gives them a fresh start back into Israel.

He gives them all the things needed to build the temple. He gives them all the things needed for worship. He sends them back and he gives them a second chance. This is a pagan king doing that for God's people.

And I realize as I think of this passage I realize that this passage speaks a lot to our lives today. I think that many of us in our whole life or in certain areas of our life are living in rubble and living in rubbish heaps.

[16 : 08] I mean often we come to church and we come to people and we realize that there are things that we've made mistakes in that we've failed that we've been disappointed that we've had all these trials in our family and in our life and in our friendship and in our work and even sometimes in our relationship with God.

But this passage says that no matter where we are no matter what we've done no matter how bad we are no matter how dirty or unclean even after we've decided to walk with the Lord and we've made mistakes and we've fallen back this passage says that in the end God does something amazing.

He speaks to us he brings us back to him. The Bible says that God has two purposes and it's the purpose that we're here as a church the first purpose in God's plan of creation is to glorify himself.

His purpose is to make his name great to make his name above every other name because he's God he's the creator. the second purpose we see in scripture and I don't understand how and why I'm going to ask God if I ever get a chance to see him in person in heaven I don't know what that's going to look like that's another sermon another time but for some reason God has chosen to also glorify himself by coming into your and my life.

He's chosen to glorify himself by coming into your life today and giving you second and third and fourth chances and I think sometimes we don't realize how amazing it is the fresh starts and the new beginning God wants to give us but he's doing it all the time and so what I thought we would do in this sermon time is I wanted to bring a couple people up to share their testimonies of what God has been doing in their life and how God has been changing them and the things they've been learning from him in this process some of them have had bad experiences some of them have had great experiences and they're all just like you here so I wanted to ask Graham and Irina to come on up Graham and Irina you guys you're on the hot seat first so so Graham you preached last Sunday and people went who was that guy I don't know if it's good or bad but I thought we just used this time you guys can you share a little bit about yourselves would you guys well first of all

[18 : 42] Millen didn't say that to me this morning he had quite a few things to me to say about last week but anyway we're Graham and Irina and we've got this little guy Elijah who keeps us on our toes I became a Christian like I said when I was at university God just had mercy on my life and yeah we've been walking with him then since then and I met Irina when she was studying in Korea and I chased her like God chased me and but it took a long time but eventually my charm won through and yes I got her I convinced her to move and come to Hong Kong and we got we got married and yeah that's our story so far and what as we think about you know coming here what brought you to Watermark this church this community this family well I mean we heard about a church that has free

Starbucks coffee so how can we not come but seriously Irina she was part of the moms group at ECC and she got to meet Christina and a couple of the other moms and she heard about the idea of Watermark and what it's about and we we actually went along to the first service the 10-10-10 one just merely to support right the moms that Irina knew and it deeply impacted us and after the service we sat down together and we asked God is this a place you want us to be a part of and a lot of time and we spoke to the elders and leaders of the church we were involved in and they said yes this is right for you to go I don't know if they were just keen to get rid of us but it was really right and we felt God speaking to us and that's what brought us to Watermark we've been part of the family ever since Irina you have anything to so as you think about what God's been doing in your life as you've been here would you like to share something that he's been changing in you or something that you've been learning in this move well I think for all these two years that I've been going to

Watermark Church I was really struck by humility of leadership and not only leadership but also serving people and I think it really talks to my heart it encourages me it convicts me it changes my heart and also makes me also want to serve and be humble and I think this is a great thing in Watermark Church great so as you guys have been here for two years now and sorry we don't have Starbucks this morning so we'll try to get you next week so what would you say are some of the things because we're talking about we've always talked about we're on this journey and we're going with the Lord what would be some of the things that you feel like you've been learning about God during this time or what are some of things that he's been showing you about himself and his journey and that process I'll go first ladies first I think it's that word you just used the word journey I think for me it's been a real picture of being part of the body of

Christ and exactly what that means and that's a journey we're on and we're on it together as a family and just like any journey there's people on different paths of that journey and at different times but the most amazing thing and we keep on hearing it again and again is the words journey and family and I think those two things anyone who's been part of a family and anyone who's been on a journey know that that can be the most exhilarating thing and it can also be the most challenging thing but with family you really draw alongside people who support you and who you have the chance to support and I think through it all the message that we keep on getting is that Jesus is walking with us and I think that's something I often forget that he's actually not even just walking with us he's walking ahead of us and yeah so it's a lesson I've been learning and I think it's definitely something Watermark has been teaching me and for me I think where's who and

I think for me I've been getting a great message that Lord is a provider he's a provider not only for our family needs but also how he provided us with the community and I think in the beginning like two years ago we specifically prayed that God would provide us with the community and he did and it's not only in residential area where we live but also in church with the community group and I think also how God provided for the church that we come to with all the people which sacrifice their time their resources and it's been just great to know how God provides and you don't have to worry about anything Amen so I'm going to pray I'm not going to ask you an extra question like what your greatest sin is everybody is worried when we interview them please stick to the script I would never do something like that maybe later Albert Michelle you're next

[24 : 05] Albert Michelle is next but I want to know how can we pray for you I'm going to pray for you right now but prayer is always something we do as you guys look at your journey as a family what is something we as a family can be praying for you for in that process that our son will behave no but but seriously I think a lot of what we've been experiencing and being part of is a lot of thankfulness but like a family Irina and I both our family members are not believers and it's something that breaks our heart we've been praying and we've been trying to witness but I think it's something that always comes back to us right there's okay go to Gasha yeah there really is nothing that we wouldn't give to see them to know the

Lord and that's on both our family side so there's a lot of gratefulness in our hearts for what God has been doing but the one thing that we would really pray for is that God would have mercy upon them and bring them to know himself okay can I pray for you guys is that good let's pray we thank you for this day we thank you for this dear couple we thank you for Graham and Irina and Elijah my kids love Elijah and so Lord we thank you for their heart we thank you for what you're doing in their life and Lord we pray I think I can pray this for almost everyone in here for our families we pray beautiful and wonderful and they would fall in love with him and come into your family and so we pray for this dear couple that you would be with them as they raise their son and try to be salt and light in Discovery Bay where you have them and so we pray Lord that you would be with them we thank you and we pray all these things in

Jesus name Amen thanks I've asked Lincoln to come up and share Lincoln as we think about changes and beginnings and new beginnings and you guys you coming to Watermark and someone following you and things like that what brought you here how did God bring you here I didn't give you Starbucks too did I no no but I came to Watermark because I think I was introduced to the vision of what everyone had planting this church and I was part of Island ECC before this and it really seemed like it was something that God convicted my heart with and the vision that you had for this church and to start something new in this area was something that was really close to my heart and so I felt like it was in obedience to

God that I am here what would you say are the things that God has been changing in you or doing in you since this move these two years and this time one thing that when I think about this one thing that's really important that I realized was that I think when we were planning this church and when we met together in your living room to pray we had all these different expectations and without realizing it I had a lot of expectations for this church and you know in some ways we started with a blank slate about what church was going to be and we got to choose what traditions we like and what we wanted to keep but then what ended up happening was I think I had my own expectations and I wanted without realizing this is the church I wanted and over the course of a year probably God really showed me that it's about planting his church and not about planting the church that I want and that was really humbling and that was really difficult but I firmly believe that we are all here for his church and not for ours that's good

I think that's one of the hugest lessons for Christine and I we read a billion books and we went to all the seminars about planting churches and this is how you should do it this is what it should look like and this is the right way and from family I think as families do as kids grow up and kids are added you change and some of those things as you think about some of the things God has been teaching you about himself and what he's been showing you about his character and his nature and who he is what would you say are some of those things in these last couple years in this process that he's been showing you I feel like over these last two years I've learned a lot about his faithfulness and being on the serving with the music we always get to choose what songs we're singing on Sunday morning and a song that we picked a lot in the beginning was a song called Day After Day and

[29 : 15] I don't know how many of you remember the lyrics but it says that day he remains the same else in this world changes that our God stays the same and I think we just sang about that right now so this is a question I had to ask you so when you come in I know you and Stephanie aren't married but when you come in you have like a ton of kids following you right and so I'm trying to figure out if you're like the Pied Piper and you just gathered people on the street and you're bringing them here so can you share I mean I think it's amazing and I think some people here even in our church families like wow there's a lot of children who come to Watermark from the area and all that and their parents just drop them off and so the parents don't even attend church but they want their kids to attend which can you share what's up with that yeah hopefully

I can explain it properly in some sense we do just pick them up on the street and bring them over but there's a story behind all of that about two years ago a group of friends and I started volunteering at an inner city ministry site and there's a center that works like a drop in center mainly we work with the South Asians in Hong Kong and there's a lot of Nepalese families and some Pakistani and some Indian and the background to a lot of these families are really really broken so there's a lot of drug abuse there's a lot of gang violence there's a lot of alcoholism in the neighborhood and so our hearts really broke for this community and we saw the lostness and just the great need that these children had and it was about two years ago as well that I moved into the neighborhood with Kevin Wong and we really believed that God wanted us to be present to be their neighbors to shop where they shopped to walk the streets that they walked and as we started doing that we became really good friends with a lot of the kids and some of my good friends started taking them to

Island ECC and our heart behind that is that we wanted to start bringing them to church and showing them and introducing them to Christ and to God and how important it is to be part of a church and so recently we started bringing them over here to Watermark and I'm just very grateful for how everyone opened their arms and welcomed them we had to talk to Melanie and Natalie they graciously welcomed them as well and so we're really thankful to be here and I think my heart is that we can take these kids from such a broken and dark place and when they come here they will feel like this is their church as well and that they belong here when I first met Lincoln and Kevin we were talking about this burden God put upon their heart to reach out to kids who aren't loved and where they were doing it and I said if you decide ever in the future to come to be a part of what

God's doing at Watermark that we really want you to do the same thing in our church because we believe that there's a lot of kids that need to know Christ and they need family and you whether you know it or not for most of you guys you are the only family they have right so seriously I'm not just saying but you see these little Nepalese kids running around here whether you know it or not you're the only family they have and so I think that's a huge privilege to have as a family and a huge responsibility amazing what God has done so you guys are doing amazing work there and so we really want to be a part of that and continue to be a part of that whether you realize that there's a lot for us to do as a church in this part of the island and the rest of Hong Kong and beyond so a lot of things to pray about so can I pray for you and I'll pray for you in the kiddos here I'm sure they're going to be digging into the food out there like all my kids will be in a couple minutes so

Father we thank you for this day we thank you for Lincoln and Kevin and for all those who have that same burden I know that Eric is there and Amanda and Stephanie giving their time and more importantly just their love they're they're worshipping you with sacrifice as we've talked about and that sacrifice is their time and their schedules and everything else and so protect them that you would guard them I pray for these little kids that are running around here like mad people sometimes help us to be good parents to them to speak truth to encourage to discipline correct all in appropriate ways as we point them to your son and so we pray for this amazing ministry and we thank you for Lincoln and his heart and we pray Lord that you would continue to guard the frontiers of what he's doing in

[34 : 30] Hong Kong and beyond and we love you we pray in your son Jesus name amen thanks Albert and Michelle how are you guys doing come on up I want to this is a couple that's been a part of our family for a long time and they've had some amazing changes happen in their life and I just wanted you guys to share a little bit with the rest of the church family I know this is not too daunting but just share how did you come to Watermark what brought you here so Michelle and I first considered ourselves believers about five years ago and at that time we have been searching for home church and we've tried many church English church Cantonese church and even Catholic church but we didn't attach to any of this church and we didn't find any sense of belonging at that moment because

I think we didn't really understand what's the meaning of going to church so later on we even giving ourselves excuse and we thought that as long as we believe in Jesus then we don't need to follow the tradition and we don't need to go to church or reading Bible so after that we have been giving ourselves excuse not going to church that lasted four years we were walking around in circles around the mountain not really knowing what we were doing and we lost touch with Christ we were just lost and we gave ourselves a lot of excuses excuse after excuse despite many friends had reminded us isn't it time to go back home should you go to church and I had all the excuses in the world and it was no not now probably not even ever who knows there was no there was no click and it wasn't until one day out of the blue a colleague that

I don't even really work very closely with he just came up to me and he said hey Michelle did you know that there is a church really close by where you live it's no matter how well we thought he came and searched us out after four years he came and knocked on our door and he was at our footstep and he was asking us well isn't it time to come home isn't it time to come back to church and when you got God knocking on your door can't exactly say no and so what we did was we tried out watermark we came and we stuck around it must have been the hot chocolate always about food here right so now watermark is our home church that's great so in this process or this journey that you been on what would you say are some of the things that God has been changing in you guys what has been doing in you since your move well

God has been strengthening my faith through the people surrounding me and he continues to remind me that he's the boss and showing me the perspective that my life on earth is very temporal and I'm so blessed that God gave me this church and the community group which is very important for my spiritual growth and we eat together we spend time together we pray together we encourage for each other as for me I definitely feel that God has been growing me spiritually a lot immensely and one way through that was through community group prior to joining community group I was very very hesitant again tons of excuses nah I don't want to commit it's a lot of work once a week nah just wanted to stay anonymous

I didn't want to join but little did I know that it was in community group that a large chunk of my growth happened that's where it happened I knew that community group was a place where I was a very safe environment where I could just go and really be myself be vulnerable talk about how I fail and continue to fail talk about my weaknesses and I know that I have my family there who continues to encourage me lift me up in prayer and disciples me and so for those of you who are not in community group I strongly recommend that you do join because it's so important for you to be accounted for and accountability is what really will grow you and six months after having joined Watermark we felt the desire and were led to take the next step which was to get baptized and so thank you for baptizing us and it's almost been a year it's amazing how quickly it's gone by it's very special thank you so in this journey as we continue talking what would be some of the things you would say that you've been learning about

[40 : 06] God what have you been learning about his character and who he is in your life as you've seen these things live down well I control and I learned to involve God in my daily life and building relationships with people surrounding me and I learned how to live up everything to him through prayers my marriage career in finance and knowing that he is the ultimate provider and as for me God has been teaching me a lot but the one most impactful thing that he's continually teaching me and I'm continuing to learn is love God has been so gracious he has continued to show me his love and how much he loves me just by the people that he surrounded me with and how he's growing me and also through the marriage course so we had taken the marriage course and through that

I've learned and I'm learning how to love my husband with respect rather than the way I think that I should love him or that I think that he deserves to be loved so all you married couples in the audience go for this course you will learn so much not only will it strengthen your relationship with Christ but it will teach you how to love your spouse more and better and the way you were designed to love your spouse and also because they deserve your love too I don't even have to promo any of these things later because you just without even being on the same page you promoted everything community groups and the marriage course which starts next Tuesday so you guys have done it all so I appreciate that how can I pray for you guys we would like for you to pray for us that wherever God places us that we continue to shine very brightly for him and that we are a huge blessing to people that he puts in our path okay let's do that can we pray together thank you for

Albert and Michelle we thank you for the amazing changes you done in their life thank you for bringing them to this family and pray for all of our hearts as we hear their story of your goodness your patience your control that you are the ultimate provider all these things you share over and over to us and we pray as a church family that we would understand that and that we would live that and trust you that you are good so we pray for them more that you show them where you want to serve and how to serve and what the next step in their journey is to honor you in this process and we lift up all these things to you and we thank you for this dear very special couple we pray these things in your Jesus name amen thanks guys thanks thanks you know to me it's amazing I think we could just kind of keep doing little testimonies of what God's been doing in our lives and I realize that as you hear these stories that most of you are at some of these places and stages and things that we can learn and trust the Lord for in that sense

I want to come back to this passage at another date because I think it's a massive passage it has a lot of things to teach us and to show us about God and his character but in closing I just want to share with you a couple things maybe one thing Charles gives me the time and the thing is this if I could talk to Jerry one more time what I would share with him is how God is amazing that he's always at work in the stories in the lives of his children that there's never a time that he's not talking to us and speaking to us and pointing us and going before us I would tell Jerry that sometimes God uses pagan kings to give us second chances and third chances sometimes he uses 200 year old prophecies sometimes he uses 16 year old kids in an arcade who don't know nothing except that Jesus loves them and they want to share that with their good friends sometimes he uses heart attacks sometimes he uses cancer sometimes he uses beautiful sunsets sometimes he uses loving spouses sometimes he uses good food good food and good friends sometimes he uses kind people in workplaces sometimes he uses people in the watermark family at the right place at the right time in people's lives and the question is how what is

God saying to you right now because the scripture is really clear that he's always speaking he's always working he's always doing things in our life and the question is do we hear him and do we want to hear him or are we silent because we're serving too many other idols in our life the question that I would ask would be how is God using you for his glory and how is God using you in other people's lives because there's 95% of the people in Hong Kong don't know him and they're worshiping at different altars if I could talk to Jerry for two seconds more I would tell him that the only altar that he can worship at that will truly change his life is Jesus that he can worship at the altar of drugs and alcohol and business cards in his work in our family in our reputation in our relationships in our sexuality and all these things are going to crowd into our life and all these things are going to try to build altars in our life and all these things are going to invite us and entice us to worship at them but none of these altars are going to change us

[46 : 12] I would tell Jerry that the only altar that's going to change him is Christ and that happens every day not just coming to Christ but every day the passage I think the people in this passage thought that God was sending them back to the land to restore the temple and restore the land and restore the city but what I think he actually sent them back to was to restore their hearts and to restore the relationship with God I would tell Jerry that God's grace is so massive and so good and so sweet that no matter how many mistakes he's done no matter how bad his life is no matter how much he feels like he screwed himself up no matter how terrible he feels like he is and there's no way that God would not want him that that's not true because the scripture in the Bible talks about God as a God of second chances and third chances and he's always pursuing this no matter what we've done I would tell Jerry that it doesn't matter what kind of scars he has on his life for the bad choices and the things that he's done in the lifestyle that he's lived it doesn't matter those scars do not influence his direction in life the only scars that influence his direction in life are the scars on Jesus

Christ and I would tell Jerry that he could trust Christ to give him a new hope and a new beginning I've been praying for our church for a long time many years before there's a group of people been praying for this congregation and you years before you were even here and the things we continue to pray every day are this that we would never forget that it's about God that it's about God's glory it's not about the glory of Tobin the glory of Watermark the glory of the elders the glory of the community group and all those things are going to fade but it's about God and his glory and he's the only one worthy of our praise and worship and we come today not to have our needs met though it's fun to have friends and do all these things all that's amazing but we come to meet God and we come to worship him that's why we're here the second thing I hope we never forget is the reason

God has here's a church he has brought you here to enter into people's lives and to talk to them about the possibility of do-overs God has brought you here to enter into the people in your work and in your family and wherever you are so that as you talk to them you can engage with them and you can talk about the possibility of second chances that's why this church exists for the glory of God and for those not in church on Sunday and my hope and my prayers as we talk to them about this potential of second chances and do-overs centered on a relationship of Jesus that God's spirit will move and change people's lives and no matter what birthday we celebrate in here our second or our fifth or our 25th or our 50th or no matter how long God has us here for his purpose if we have those two focuses it's for the glory of God and it's to point people to Christ and show no matter how much they've screwed up that God wants a relationship with them if we keep those two things the main things

God is going to be honored and he's going to do amazing things and we're going to be on an amazing journey five years from now to see what he does as we plant other churches in Hong Kong but we need to trust him and to glorify him that's what I would share if I could talk to Jerry one more time let me pray for us Father we thank you for this day I thank you for Father I pray for Jerry I don't know where he is I pray that you have brought other people into his life to point him to your son Lord I know that there are many Jerry's in this sanctuary now there are many Jerry's in Hong Kong there are many Jerry's in our workplace and I pray Lord that through all of them that you would change their lives and that you would use us as a church and a community to point them to your son that they would understand the possibility of second chances and new beginnings and how all of those things are centered around you Father I pray for the rest of us in here I think that so quickly for me

I can allow other altars into my area of worship I can allow the altar of popularity I can allow the altar of power and control I can allow the altar of nice things I can allow the altar of kids that obey perfectly because I deserve their respect Lord I can allow all those altars to flood into my life and take my worship off of you because I'm too busy serving at those other altars and Lord I pray for myself and I pray for the rest of us in here who are like that that we would see you as you truly are that we would understand your mercy and your grace and that we would come before you right now and we would just repent of our sin that we would fall in love with you and realize that you're good and that your scars heal us and change us so Father we worship you this second anniversary we thank you that you brought us here we thank you and we lift up all these things to you and pray that you are honored and know that you have to take us the next year and to the next year and to the next week in fact Lord we do not want to go there if you're not taking us help us never to do church and it just becomes so automatic that we forget why we do it that we forget you and so we come and we worship and we praise you this day and we thank you and we love you and we pray these things in your son

[52:13] Jesus name amen yeah how you guys doing are you hungry okay now there's only like five hot dogs and hamburgers for each person so try not to eat more than five okay because we got a lot of food here guys we are so so honored that you're with us today to worship the Lord and what he's doing in the life of this church and the communities here one of the sad things or hard things about being the church in Hong Kong is that people come and go and so I wanted to bring Sydney up here Sydney here come here Sydney okay so what you don't know about this is that Sydney's mom was one of my best friends so every time we look at Sydney we're like wow we could have a kid that old too yeah Sydney's mom is Jill Miller and I'm Tobin Miller and they always got us confused we were in a youth group there was 13 people in our youth group in Fraser Memorial

United Methodist Church Montgomery Alabama and so Sydney is actually an intern and so we have several groups of people in the church we have staff part-time staff and interns and church planners and Sydney raised all of her money to come and serve Watermark so we have paid her we've have we paid you anything we've reimbursed everything that she's used for ministry but she just wanted to be a part of what God is doing here and so she raised a year's worth of support airplane tickets monthly salary we've given her amazing housing in our house and in Sylvia Millen's house we love you and so she's going back right now back to the states our hope is that she'll come back soon she's trying to apply to art school here and so that we hope that she would come back but I just wanted to bring her up here and just say for me this is one of the amazing things of being a staff person at Watermark is get to work with people like you so thank you for being with us and for serving this family so well thank you so if you get a chance during a dinner or lunch just thank her

I had to take good care of her her mom would beat me up right so she looks just like her mom too so I don't know if that's good or bad so it's very good so I'm going to pray for Sydney and I'm going to pray for our meal and then we're going to take a picture so we don't want you to leave we want everybody to scoot in and Charles is going to give directions but I'm going to pray and then we'll take a picture and then we're going to go eat okay pray picture eat pray picture five hamburgers okay okay I'll see you I'll put Kip on you Kip will try to beat you on that okay let me pray yeah I think we've got a lot of good food father we thank you for this day we thank you for what you're doing in the life of this church we thank you for Sydney we thank you just for her willingness to serve and to sacrifice and again we've said that worship doesn't happen without sacrifice and she has sacrificed a lot to be with us to raise support to come serve our kids and our youth and just us and so we thank you for her we pray that you'd go before her smooth the way for her return back to us to study and to continue to grow and be a part of our family so we just thank you for her and Lord we thank you for these kids we thank you for all these family members and we thank you for this food we're about to eat may this fellowship time honor you may we have fun and just rejoice at your goodness in our life and so we thank you for this second year anniversary celebration and we love you we pray these things in your son Jesus name amen amen guys okay

Charles take it so part of our family tradition here at watermark is to take our annual family photograph just like you go to our reunion or whatever so we have our family photo so we took this on our six month anniversary we had a small group and we took it on our one year anniversary last year we got bigger and this year we've gotten even more larger so what we're going to do is kids you're going to stay right where you are for right now if you're in the blue seats you'll stay seated right where you are for right now if you're in the black seats if you will help me stack this very quickly then if you're on that half you're going to go up this aisle and if you're on this half you're going to go up this aisle so let's try to do that in about 60 seconds