

Our Hope Lived Out: Pentecost

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[0 : 00] Good morning, great to see you all this morning. It's sunny at last. I felt a bit like I was back in the UK these last couple of days with the weather.

We're coming to the end of our series, as Tobin said, of God's story, our story. I don't know if you've been looking around the world, but God is up to something at the moment.

As you look around the world, things seem to be pretty chaotic. There's ISIS, there's terrorism, there's immigration issues, there's corruption.

My wife and I, next week, we're going to Kosomui to a wedding next week. I just found out there's just been a bomb explosion in Kosomui. You think, where in the world can you get away from the chaos and the craziness that's going on in the world?

I wish we'd booked tickets later because they're probably very cheap now. But the issue is, as we look around, we think, what is going on?

[1 : 07] The world seems crazy, it seems out of control, but the Bible tells us something really different. The Bible tells us that God has got a story. God is up to something. God is doing something in the world at the moment, and he has been from the beginning of history to the end of history.

And what is God doing, even in the craziness of everything that you see around? Well, God is actually, he's on a mission. God is on a global mission.

He's doing something in this world, and he always has been. And the Bible's story is a story about what God has been doing from the beginning until now, and then when he comes back again, how he'll complete the story.

And if you remember some of the story, we looked in the Garden of Eden at how God created Adam and Eve's relationship with him, and how he created them in his image to be people united together in community, but who would go out and who would fill the earth and multiply.

We saw that God came to Abraham, and he gave Abraham this promise, and he said, I'm going to give you a land and this people and a blessing which is going to go to all the nations.

[2 : 21] It was global. And then he says to Israel, he calls them to be his distinctive people. He says, you are my people. You are to be the way that you love each other.

You love me. You love those around you. That is to be this light to all the nations so that when they see it, they will come and they will see just how amazing God is. That's what God was up to.

But as you look through, and Tobin said earlier, as you look through the story, and then you think, how did the people respond to what they were called to be? Well, you see that while God was faithful, they were completely unfaithful.

And they didn't want to be God's unique, special people. They wanted to be different. Well, they didn't want to be different. They wanted to be like everybody else. They wanted to have kings like everybody else.

They wanted to follow idols and gods like everybody else. They wanted to do what everybody else did. They chased after money. They chased after power. They chased after pleasure. They chased after comfort.

[3 : 18] They chased after everything else that everybody else chased after. And God kept chasing after them. He kept being faithful, and they kept running away and being unfaithful.

they were adulterers, like in the story of Hosea and Goma, if you remember that story we looked at a few weeks ago. But the story of the Old Testament, in one sense, is quite a depressing story because it's a story of our powerlessness.

Our powerlessness to obey, our powerlessness to be the people that God has called us to be. God is the amazingly faithful God, but we are powerless to be who He's called us to be.

Romans 5 says this, Just when we were completely powerless, while we were still at that point of weakness, Christ came and He died for us.

While we were still ungodly, still couldn't do what God had called us to be, Christ died for us. He died to recreate this people who would be those communities of light which would shine throughout the world in every dark place.

[4 : 34] He died to recreate this people. Now, that's all very nice. That's all very well. The problem is, if you think about the people Jesus chose for this mission, Jesus had been three years with His disciples.

He's given them the best seminary you could ever have, three years of the most amazing teaching with Jesus. And after three years, what are His students like? Are they the brightest of the bright?

Well, no. Let's think about it. After three years, one of them betrays Jesus. One of them denies in front of the lowliest servant girl that He even knew Him. All the others flee and run away. And then even after Jesus has risen from the dead, the disciples, the women come to the disciples and say, Jesus has risen.

And they say, we don't believe you. They're locked themselves inside a room because they're afraid of everybody else finding out that they're followers of Jesus. That's not a very good track record for Jesus. If I was that teacher, I would feel a bit disappointed with my students.

And if that's not enough, Jesus then comes back. For 40 days, He's teaching the disciples. And for 40 days, He's given this kind of top-up class, you know, the kind of revision of everything He's done, all of God's plans and purposes, you know.

[5 : 48] And after this amazing top-up course, the disciples come with a fascinatingly penetrating question. They say, Jesus, that's great.

Love what you're up to. Are you going to bring about kind of a political revolution here in Israel? And when are you going to do it? And I think Jesus probably did laugh.

Or He might have even cried, I think, at that point. Because Jesus is like, you guys, you still haven't got it, have you? You still haven't got it that I'm actually part of something so much bigger.

I've got this global perspective. And all you can think about is your own little politics. And the Bible is really saying to us, up to this point, God's plans and God's purposes for making us the people who we're meant to be don't seem to be looking very good.

And the Bible is telling us this. If you are relying on education or good moral teaching to be able to make you the people that God has made you to be, to sort out the world's problem, to sort out ISIS, to sort out all the terrorism, just educate them a bit more.

[7 : 06] If you think that's what's going to help you, well, the people in the Old Testament had some of the world's greatest teachers. They had Moses. Then the disciples had Jesus, teaching them like nobody else.

And after 2,000 years, do you know the reason why the Old Testament is so long? Is because, you know, it starts off and it's, okay, obey me.

Okay, and they don't. Obey me, they don't. Obey me, they don't. And time and time again, and you have to go through 37 books of it before finally you get the message, oh, maybe they're not able to obey him. That's why the Old Testament is so long, because education is not the thing which is going to save you, which is going to change you.

Teaching is good, but it doesn't deal with your hearts and our powerlessness. Because you can know all the right doctrines, you can know all the right theology, you can know all the right Christian stuff, but actually you can be as disobedient and dead as anybody else.

Because what we need to be able to be the people God has called us to be is power to live as he wants us to. Because of ourselves, we are powerless to obey.

[8 : 23] The disciples knew that very well. And relying on your own willpower can only get you so far. You know, you think about it, you say, I'm not going to eat that chocolate, I'm not going to eat that chocolate, I'm not going to eat that chocolate.

And then five seconds later, it's just, well, maybe just one. Or if you manage to say, and you know, you feel really guilty afterwards, you're, oh, I blew it. And then you do exactly the same thing the next week.

Or even if you manage to succeed with your willpower at thinking you're doing the right thing, what happens is you say, oh, I didn't eat the chocolate.

Aren't I disciplined? Aren't I strong? And then you look down at everybody else who ate the chocolate, and you think, wow, I am so good at being disciplined.

You should be like me. And I'm an expert at this. I've done this so many times, I can assure you. And you know what the Bible calls that? Pride. So if you rely on your willpower solely to obey God, if you succeed, you'll become proud.

[9 : 28] If you fail, you'll become guilty. And so either way, before God, you're basically screwed. Okay? If I can say that. And in Cantonese, there's a phrase which says, which is like, what shall we do?

What do we do? And God has brought the disciples down to this point on their knees, and I think Peter particularly knows this. He's just denied Jesus.

And Peter knows that he is completely powerless to obey and follow God, but he wants to follow him. And it's at the point where God has brought, Jesus brought them to their knees to see, I can't do this by myself.

And as he does that with all of us and the church to bring us to the point of saying, I cannot in my own strength, through my own will path, through my own cleverness, through my own planning, be the person, be the church that God wants us to be.

When you get to that point, that's the beginning, the starting point for gaining true spiritual power. We're powerless without God.

[10 : 48] So let's then look at the, how God says, how Jesus says, I'm going to give you power. So we're going to look at the coming of power, and then we're going to look at plugging into the power.

So in this coming of power, Jesus tells the disciples, okay, I'm not here for politics and political kingdom at this moment. That's not now. Later, yes, not now, but you will receive power to do my mission, power from the Holy Spirit, and you will be witnesses, my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

It's going to start right where you are, and it's going to spread outwards. And I want you to be part of this movement of Christian communities, which are multiplying, and which are testifying to me in every area of the globe.

In a world which is so dark and broken in so many ways, God wants communities of light to shine in every place. That's what we as Watermark want to be about.

That's what when we talk about church planting, that's what we want to be about, because that is the mission that God has called us to be as his people. That's what Jesus tells us to do. And it's interesting, as Jesus gives them this commission, and then he ascends to heaven, and Jesus tells them to wait, and he tells them to wait until the day of Pentecost.

[12 : 19] Now, the day of Pentecost is actually a festival. It's also called the Feast of Firstfruits. And in chapter 2, verse 1, it says, when the day of Pentecost, in your translation, it says arrived, the word actually means when it was fulfilled.

And this festival, people will come from all over to Jerusalem to celebrate the ingathering of the barley harvest, because the barley harvest was the first harvest of the year before the wheat harvest and the olives and the grapes and all the other harvests.

So here is the time of celebrating the incoming of the first harvest and it's no accident that God chooses this time to bring his spirit because God had his human harvest that he was harvesting that day.

3,000 people from around the nations on that global mission that God is doing began to come into his kingdom. That was the first harvest in Jerusalem.

It's going to go out to Judea. The rest of Acts is how it goes out to Judea, Samaria, and then the rest of the earth. But that's what God's up to. Pentecost. And the thing was, for most people, it's an ordinary day.

[13 : 38] You know, it's an ordinary festival day. Everyone was enjoying themselves. But the disciples were gathered there in this room together, praying. We don't know where the room was. It might have been near the temple.

And everywhere around, there's thousands of people gathering. And then suddenly, there's a sound of a violent, rushing wind fills the entire house.

And what appears to be fire comes down and rests on the heads of the people in that room. And it's not a problem with the air conditioning unit. Something comes.

The Holy Spirit comes, and they start speaking in other languages. And 3,000 people that day come to faith in Christ.

And what's going on here in this theme? Because the imagery is a little bit weird, but it comes from the Old Testament as well. Because the word wind is the same word as spirit.

[14 : 38] And the fire in the Old Testament was always a symbol of God's presence. You remember the burning bush, Mount Sinai? It's always a symbol of God coming to be with his people, his presence being there.

And so when the tongues of fire divide and rest on everybody, what is it saying? It's saying everybody, the Spirit, God's presence, comes upon every believer in that room.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit only came upon certain individuals, certain priests could go into God's presence. Certain prophets had the Spirit. But here, it's not just restricted to a few.

Everybody has it. Which means that if you are a Christian, if you are a Christian today, because he says it later on in the verse, he says, you know, the promise of the Spirit is for you and for your children and for all who are far off.

He says, for people like you and me who are powerless, God's power has come upon us and has come inside of us to live with us and to dwell with us.

[15 : 48] God himself has come to dwell with you. Now the Spirit is a person. God is a personal God.

And he wants to come and empower each one of us for his mission to do what we cannot do apart from him. I think it would be a bit like, last week I was trying to, we had a barbecue.

I was trying to light this barbecue with just some newspaper. I am terrible at lighting barbecues. And I spent 40 minutes with this newspaper trying to get some fire going. And every time the fire started, I was hopeful, then suddenly it just disappeared.

And after 40 minutes, I was thinking I was going to be eating raw chicken, which didn't sound fun. And then somebody came up and said, hey, you know you can get some fire lighters, some fire starters from nearby.

So we went and bought one and we came. And then suddenly, the moment we had the fire starter, the whole thing just took off.

[16 : 52] And what I'd been trying frustratingly to do for 40 minutes, suddenly became so much easier, so much better, because there was a new power.

The Holy Spirit is to be that new power to enable us to do what we ourselves cannot do, which is to be the people God has called us to be and to do the things that God has called us to do, to love people, to love Him, to love the world, love the lost.

Now, when you start talking about the Holy Spirit and power, some of us get a little bit nervous. Some of us get a little bit too excited. Because some of us think power is just about miracles, spectacular kind of glory, which flies around the room and does amazing things.

Some of us, the supernatural kind of things, freak us out a little bit. And I'm not really going to talk a lot about the tongues and things, but basically just to see, in the history of the church and in the history of the Bible, we see God does do extraordinary things at specific times.

We have a mighty, extraordinary God. Sometimes in history, they're called revivals, where God does amazing things in people's lives. Healings.

[18 : 17] He does do things where He changes the way that we normally think about the ordinary things that happen. He does touch people's hearts in dramatic ways. And I don't want to be, and I know this is so often what I do, I box God into my little way of, I think He should operate.

And I don't want to be like the people who say, they've simply just had too much wine. But here's the thing, the book of Acts is actually, when it talks about power, it's not primarily talking about miracles and all that kind of stuff.

Because the tongues and the things that are going on here, they're actually the trailer to the movie, they're not the movie itself. It would be very weird if I said to Fiona, hey, let's go down Friday night to the cinema, and let's watch a trailer together.

And then we'll leave before the movie starts. Or if you go to direct to the film and you say, hey, I loved your trailer, it's so good. And he says, have you watched the movie? And you say, no, but the trailer was fantastic.

You've missed the whole point. Because actually here, nobody is actually saved through the tongues in this story. The tongues are actually that trailer which is pointing to something greater.

[19 : 32] They're real languages here in this story which is speaking to people from different nations, speaking their heart language, attracting them to what the main message of what Peter is about to tell them.

And that main message, which Peter then goes and talks about, and we've only got a short section here in your text, is the gospel. That is the main movie that God is about.

Because that's why when Peter gets up, he starts preaching. Do you know what he starts preaching? He starts preaching Jesus. He just says, Jesus is amazing. Jesus died.

Jesus rose again. It's all about Jesus. And conviction of sin comes upon people because he's talking about Jesus. That's what gets people saved. It's the gospel. It's the message of truth which saves and delivers and captivates people.

And that's what they're witnesses to. That's what should excite us the most is that gospel. Pentecost only happened once.

[20 : 35] Pentecost doesn't happen again. So if you're thinking that tongues of fire are going to come down this morning, it may be the AC unit. Okay? But the Holy Spirit's power is for everyone at all times, every believer.

And when that Holy Spirit comes and fills you with his power throughout the Bible and throughout history, there's a number of things which happen. I'm just going to mention three things which happen.

In this story, when the people are filled with the Spirit, they're filled with joy-filled praise at the gospel.

Because you see, they're declaring, when the Spirit fills them, they start declaring the wonders of God. They burst forth in praise at how amazing God is.

And as we've said, Peter's sermon, as Peter gets up, what is he full of? He's just full of Jesus. And he can only talk about Jesus because it's so amazing. God's word has just become alive in his heart and it just bursts forth in praise.

[21 : 48] It's a bit like, somebody once said, when the Spirit's power comes on you and you're filled with him, it's like you're a child walking with your father and you know your father loves you, but then your father picks you up, hugs you, kisses you, and embraces you.

And now it's not just you know in your head you know theoretically that God loves you. You experience right deep in your soul just how much he loves you. You know it.

And it's not just that the gospel kind of is some thing, yeah, I know Jesus died, he forgave my sins, la la la la la, great, thank you. It's, wow, he died for my sins.

He died for what I did yesterday. He's freed me from all of that stuff that I've been trying to do, all that shame and that fear in the past. He's freed me and that's just so liberating.

That's the gospel. That's what the Spirit is doing. It's always pointing to Jesus and getting you excited about what his death, what his resurrection has done. Because you see what they do, even as a community later on, you see they're constantly praising God.

[23 : 05] And it's not they're having to tell them, you've got to praise God now. It's because it's just erupting inside of them. Because Jesus is that amazing for them.

And I wonder, as I just think about this, when did you, and this is the question I ask myself, have I experienced the presence of God in a real way, a tangible way, in this last week?

Has the gospel and that assurance that I'm his child, that I'm loved by him, has it thrilled my heart in this last week? So I just want to release in thanksgiving and praise.

Because often when I look at my own life, I would say, yep, sometimes, but often a lot of the time I just go through the motions. And what the passage calls us to do is we're powerless to change by ourselves.

We need to get on our knees and start praying and asking God to give us that his spirit's filling so that we just are just full of Jesus.

[24 : 21] but it's not just that the gospel becomes beautiful so that we praise, it's also that the spirit makes you bold and boldly proclaiming this gospel.

So it doesn't just stay, you know, the disciples don't just stay in the upper room having a little Holy Spirit moment together. You know, they actually, it releases them out to proclaim Jesus.

You know, some people are naturally braver than other people, right? Some people are more cowardly than other people. Peter thought he was brave but God showed him that he was a coward when he denied Jesus in front of the servant girl.

But what the spirit does in our lives is he turns a chicken into a lion. He turns someone who denied Jesus into someone who wanted to proclaim him. And Peter stands up in the midst of all the people and he proclaims to them.

If you look in verse 23 he says to them, you, with the help of wicked men, put Jesus to death. It was you who did it.

[25 : 30] And if he hasn't offended people enough by that, because that's not very politically correct, he then, in verse 36, he repeats it. He says, this Jesus whom you crucified has been made Lord and Messiah because he's risen from the dead.

Now that's bold because you think about where he is. He's right in the temple where seven weeks earlier Jesus was also teaching and what happened, the priests and all the people around, they were plotting to kill him.

And from cowards who locked themselves in a room fearful just a few weeks earlier, afraid of these priests again and these people who might attack them and kill them to unashamed boldness, that's the Holy Spirit.

That's nothing you can work up. And it's the right word at the right time because 3,000 people are cut to the heart and say, what should we do to be saved?

And they also experience that joy of the gospel. And I don't know about you, do you want that kind of boldness? Because I do.

[26 : 40] And if you think about it, if you think, well, they're just the disciples, you know, they had a bit of Jesus, they saw Jesus, it was different from them. Well, you see, two chapters later they're arrested and they're told not to speak and when they're released they come out and the first thing they start doing is they start praying.

And what do they start praying? They say, pray, God, please give us boldness to keep praying. Why do they have to pray that? Because they're afraid. Because they can't do it. And they know they can't.

They know they're weak. And I know that I'm naturally not bold in many situations. And sometimes sharing the gospel for me is a bit more like burping.

Okay? You know, because burping is something that's unpleasant but you know it's got to come out at some point. And you just hope you can kind of release it silently with nobody else noticing if possible.

or you try and you try and work for an appropriate moment to be able to release but then sometimes that moment never really comes. Or if you're in Hong Kong then you can just feel it rising.

[27 : 48] It's like, you know, you've got to share it, you know, you've got to say it, you know, you feel it rising. It's like, you just kind of splurge it all out. And you feel great about it but everyone else feels terrible. They're like, what hit me? And so often because I'm relying on my own strength that's what sharing the gospel is like for me.

And yet it's when I realize that I'm weak that I, that's what I'm like and I say, God, I cannot do this. I cannot obey you unless you come and give me your power and your ability and your strength because I'm just going to be burping the gospel.

I'm not going to be sharing it. And when you do that, you see, I've seen it in my life so many times where I start praying and I say, I don't know what to say.

I don't know how to say it. And God just gives you the words. He promises you will. So do you dare to get on your knees today and ask God to give you the courage and the opportunities this week to be able to share that gospel with the people around you?

And not just pray one, but just keep praying again and again and again. Because the Spirit delights you in the gospel. The Spirit makes you bold.

[29 : 07] And the Spirit also leads you to be devoted to Christian community. Because the Holy Spirit's power, you see what this happens and I won't spend a long time on this, but it leads to a desire to meet with God's people.

Do you see what happens in verses 42 to 47? Suddenly, they're just all the time, they're just spending all the time together with each other. They can't get enough of each other. You see that? They're in the temple, so they've got the formal meetings together, but then afterwards, they're in each other's homes.

They just can't get enough of each other. And it's not as if they're all the same kind of people, because they're people from every kind of background. And you know, so often we're preoccupied with, well, they're not my kind of person.

They're just different personality. They don't lead the Bible study as well as I'd like them to. But those are not the issues that they're struggling with, because there's a spontaneity, and the Spirit is exciting them about Christian community.

And so often, I know, my tendency and our tendency can be when people are different from you, when things are difficult, when things are not quite the way we want them to be, what our tendency can often be is to withdraw from Christian community.

[30 : 24] And when we begin to hold back, when we begin to withdraw, what you see is actually, that's a sign that you're not relying on the Spirit, but you're relying on your own strength to be able to do and be who you think you should be.

The Spirit always pushes you into Christian community. It never pushes you away. So you see what the Spirit does? Gospel. It thrills you with the gospel.

Mission. It gives you a heart and a desire to reach out to those around you. Community. It pushes you back into community. Do you see, that's why these are our values, because they're right at the heart of what it means to be God's people.

And we can't do it by ourselves. We need God to come and give us grace. So if this is what we are called to be, and I don't know if you think about this, but as I think about some of those things and I look at my own life, I see this gap.

I see I'm not always what I'm meant to be. I'm not always bold. I'm not always passionate about the gospel. I'm not always passionate about community. So how do we plug in to that power?

[31 : 39] Because if the Holy Spirit lives, I mean, if you thought about it, if the Holy Spirit really lives inside of me, why do I not experience that thrill all the time?

Why do I have to be filled again? Because Ephesians tells us keep being filled with the Spirit. So if I've already got it, why do I have to keep being filled? Well, Spurgeon, who was a 19th century preacher, he once said, the reason we need to constantly be filled with the Spirit is because we leak.

Now, what he meant by that, the Spirit's not this kind of liquid that you need to top up like the oil in your car or something.

That's not what he's talking about. The analogy is we stop, we leak because we stop looking to the person of the Spirit for our power to live as God wants us to be and we start relying on another power source and we just leak away.

And how do you depend on the Spirit? Well, I think one of the main ways is through prayer. Regular, persistent prayer which knows your need of God.

[32 : 52] Because if you see in between Jesus' ascension and resurrection, what are the disciples doing? Praying. In the communities, from house to house, what's one of the things they're doing?

Praying. When they are persecuted, what do they start doing? Praying. When they're about to, before they ever think about sending people off the mission and Paul, what do they start doing?

They're praying. All the time because they know that they are powerless and they know that they need God. And so often I know in my life, what I do is I do all my planning, all my preparations, all the things that I think I should do and then I say a little quick prayer at the end, oh please bless this, Lord, amen.

And then I go off and do what I want to do. But if we as a church want to be about church planting, want to be about reaching this city, want to be about encouraging people to go into all the nations, if we want to be that kind of people, we cannot be that kind of people unless we're a prayerful people.

You know, you get desperate in prayer when you know you need it. like before a job interview, before an exam, yes, before a difficult conversation, before preaching a sermon.

[34 : 10] You know, it does amazing things for your prayer life and then you forget about it. Because why do we sometimes not pray with that sense of desperation? It's because the rest of the time we think we don't need it. And because I'm self-reliant and what keeps me self-reliant is often I'm fueled by distraction.

I'm distracted. Because prayer is communication with God. If we want to have that His power and His presence experienced in our life, prayer is that communication with God and yet we spend like more than any other time in the whole of history, we are communicating more than any other time.

You know, like 24-7, right? You know, we're on Facebook, we're tweeting, we're emailing, we're Whatsapping, we're Instagramming, we're doing all kinds of things all the time.

And you know, you take your phone away from somebody and it's like taking drugs away from an addict. I mean, suddenly you're so insecure, but what if I miss that message?

You know? And I think sometimes what we're like is, we're like, you know, you've been to those restaurants where you see a couple opposite each other, you know, it's a nice romantic restaurant, beautiful scene, and what is the couple, you know, a great time just to spend time with each other and just enjoy that intimate fellowship with each other and what are they doing?

[35 : 38] And both of them seem to be having some kind of connection through cyberspace. I don't know what they're doing, but it must be a really healthy relationship. And I think that's a little bit about how we treat God often.

God is like the spouse on the other side saying, hey, I want you to enjoy my presence. I want you to empower for you to just delight myself in me. And what we're doing, we're saying, hold on, I've just got one message.

Give us a second. Sorry, this is important. Okay. Or, I've just got to get this one. And God is there saying, you've forgotten that I am the source of the power to be who you and we as a church are called to be.

Because I am that source and you're so distracted and every other thing you think is what's going to make you, make your life successful. And we say, and we are, we're so busy.

And we say, because we're so busy, we don't have time to pray. But, Kathy Keller, who is Tim Keller's wife, puts it like this.

[36 : 53] He said, if the doctor told you that you had a fatal condition, and unless you take this medicine every night from 11 to 11.15 and swallow these pills, you'll be dead by morning.

If that was the case, she says, you would never miss. You would never say, I was too tired or I didn't get it or I was watching a movie and I didn't have time. you wouldn't do that.

But we say, I don't have time to pray because the Bible would say and I think Kathy Keller would say, maybe it's not we don't have time to pray, it's we don't feel the need to pray.

Because we rely on everything else to satisfy and fill our lives and we stop running to the one who says, I am the source of your power to live and to be who you're meant to be.

And that's what God calls us as his people to be. Because when you pray, when you reach that point of saying, I need you, God.

[37 : 56] I need to be the people you have called us to be, we need you. Then you will start to pray. And not just once, but again and again and again until you see God doing this work in our lives.

When you pray, it's not just that you begin to get direct answers, although I believe you do.

When you pray, God changes your perspective and you begin to get God's story, God's picture, God's vision of the world. I remember once, I had a boss once, not now, but in the past.

Got to make that clear. God's vision and I used to want to hang her from the gallows and torture her mercilessly.

Just being real. And I would be outwardly polite to her but inwardly cold. And I would tell everybody else how mean she was but I would never pray for her.

[39 : 07] And one day, God kind of convicted me of this and just said, because I realized I just didn't want to love her. I couldn't care less about her, if I'm honest. And God convicted me and said, I want you to start praying for her.

Not praying for her agonizing death but praying for her to come to know the beauty of the gospel. Come to know her to know just how amazing Jesus is.

And for me to have a boldness to be able to reach out to her with the gospel, with a love, with that sense of mission to her. And do you know what began to happen as I prayed over time? It didn't happen instantly but over time, I began to see her differently.

She was no longer Godzilla in my mind. She began to, I began to see her as a hurting, fearful, insecure woman who needed the gospel of grace in her life.

And that began to change the way I responded to her and I started to look for ways that I could bless her and that I might be able to share something of the love of God with her. Because that's what the Holy Spirit does.

[40 : 15] We can't be the people we're called to be unless we're relying on a power source other than the things that we rely on by ourselves. And if we as a church want to be this church of gospel, community, and mission, we're never going to be that unless we start getting on our knees saying, God, unless you do it, we cannot be that people.

We're powerless but God has given us His power. It's not a weird, wacky thing in the air. It's His personal presence to excite us about Himself, to excite us about His Christian community, to give us boldness to reach out where we have no idea how to reach out to the people in us, people around us.

That's where God's story has got to. That's why we're here in Hong Kong as His people. We have opportunities, Toby mentioned them, to begin to pray together.

Tonight, there's a chance to pray together at the community center. There's a class afterwards on learning how to pray using the Psalms. In your CGs, why don't you start making prayer something which is not just about getting what I want but a start about us being who we were made to be because that is where God's story is.

We're not the perfect people. That's the end of the story. We will keep messing up. That's why the grace of the gospel has got to thrill us again because we will keep messing up but then we come back again and again and again to saying, God, we need you and you will begin to see God do amazing things because that's the kind of God He is.

[41 : 56] Let's pray. Father, I just I'm just so aware of the gap between who you have called me, who you've called us as a church to be and where I am and where we are and I know that it's not by trying harder that I'm going to close that gap, that we're going to close that gap.

It's not by lots of great planning and all those other things, good those are, Lord. Please give me, please give us that sense of just how much we need you.

Please give us that desperation for you that unless you come, unless you change us, unless you work in our church, in our lives, in our families, in our colleagues, in every area of this city, Lord.

We cannot be the people you call us to be. But thank you, you have not left us alone as orphans. You have given us your spirit because you want to be beside us.

You want us to enjoy you. And I pray, Lord, that your gospel, that your word would become living in our lives. I pray that we would get excited about you.

[43 : 30] I can't work up excitement, Lord, but give us that passion to pray, that passion to be people who just keep coming back to you, knowing that you are our hope, you're our salvation, you're our joy, you are the one who is our only one who can make us the people we're made to be.

Thank you so much that you're so good to us. May you get the glory through this. in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Come on. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.