

# How the Gospel Advances

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. Today's scripture reading is taken from Acts chapter 8 verses 4 to 25.! Please follow along in your Bible or the church Bible. Our passage can be found on page 862 in the church Bible.

Acts chapter 8 starting in verse 4 we read Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits crying out with a loud voice came out of many who had them.

And many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city. But there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria saying that he himself was somebody great.

They all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest saying this man is the power of God that is called great. And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.

[ 1 : 15 ] But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women. Even Simon himself believed and after being baptized he continued with Philip.

And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

But Peter said to him, May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money. You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.

Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.

[ 2 : 47 ] And Simon answered, Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me. Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

This is the word of God. Thank you, Kristen. You guys hear me okay? Is that good? All right. Hello, good morning.

Good morning. My name is Oscar. I serve here at Watermark as one of the elders, and it is a great joy to be spending this time worshipping God together, and it's my great privilege to be sharing God's word.

Come join me. Let's pray as we look at God's word. Father, we give this time to you, Lord. We ask that your spirit would open up the eyes of our hearts to see the beauty of Christ.

Help us, God, to see where we perhaps are turning away from you, and bring us back to you, Lord. May the beauty of our great Savior, Jesus, come through this message.

[ 3 : 53 ] I pray that I would speak clearly and articulately, Lord. I pray that my heart would come through. But I pray that ultimately, Lord, your message will come through, not mine. May this message be an arrow pointing all of us to Jesus.

In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. So today we're continuing the book of Acts, this marvelous book which paints a very detailed picture of how the ministry of Jesus continued after his ascension into heaven, which is through his church, by the power of his spirit.

Last week, Niels took us through Acts 6 and 7. 6-7? A big turning point. No youth here, unfortunately. With the killing, a big turning point. With the killing of Stephen and the subsequent violent persecution, acting not as a deterrent, but actually as a key catalyst for something new.

For the first time, the gospel was to go outside of Jerusalem into the rest of the world according to God's plan. And this is good news.

This was good news for the people back then, and it is good news for us here in Hong Kong because it means that we too can receive the good news of Jesus. And today now we're looking at Acts chapter 8, the first part of it, and we'll see how the gospel advances in more detail.

[ 5 : 22 ] We'll start at a high level, and then we will slowly drill down, and we'll get personal. Think of today's message as you're looking through a satellite telescope from space at the earth. You first see an entire country, and then you zoom in, and then you see a city, and then you zoom in yet again, and you'll see a neighborhood, and people actually having conversations.

That is sort of hopefully how this message will flow. So how does the gospel advance? Well, we'll look at that in initially two ways. First, through God's people sharing Jesus, and second, through the unity of the church.

Now, as we read, as the result of this persecution in Jerusalem, these early followers of Jesus, except the apostles, were scattered to Judea and Samaria.

The apostles stayed in Jerusalem, but incredibly, the rest of the church members, in the face of persecution and in a foreign land, they didn't hide away nor simply focus on self-preservation.

[ 6 : 31 ] No, they boldly shared the gospel of Jesus wherever they went. Not the apostles, not the senior leadership, but regular church members. Verse 4, those who were scattered, i.e. church members, not the apostles.

Next slide, please. Not the apostles went about preaching the word. By the way, the word preaching here doesn't mean that everyone gave 30-minute sermons on Sunday morning.

It reflects a general rhythm of sharing Jesus, the good news, in daily life. And there is one church member in particular, Philip, who went to Samaria.

By the way, this is not Philip the apostle. This is Philip, one of the seven deacons, from Acts chapter 6, similar to Stephen, who we saw last week. And here, in Samaria, Philip the deacon, he finds himself in this foreign land.

But because of his personal conviction in the good news of Jesus, because of his great belief in the power of Jesus, not to just change lives, but to save lives, and because of his view that the gospel wasn't just to the Jews, but to all people, including Samaritans, and because of his desire to help save souls, Philip boldly proclaimed to them the Christ.

[ 7 : 56 ] And along with proclaiming Jesus, Philip prayed for healing and deliverance from unclean spirits, and many unbelievable things happened in those days. And so in Samaria, through Philip, by the power of God's spirit, the gospel of our Lord Jesus expanded to this foreign people.

Many people believed, were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, just like we do here at Watermark, and there was much joy in that city. This is how the gospel advances through God's people sharing Jesus.

Was Philip anyone particularly special? What we don't know is educational background, although he wasn't an apostle. He was a deacon. He was a godly man.

But his main role back in Jerusalem probably wasn't teaching and preaching on a daily basis. It was likely serving the church community in tangible ways, like serving food.

But always proclaiming Christ. It wasn't simply social justice. It was caring for the marginalized. But his overarching message was always Jesus first.

[ 9 : 05 ] And then after Stephen's death, when the great persecution happened, Philip went to Samaria. He didn't hide away. He didn't fear for his life. He goes out and he proclaimed to them the Christ.

So the question here is for us, how is God calling you? In your own life, through your relationships, at work, at school, or with your family and friends, how is God calling you, like Philip, to share his good news of himself?

For this is how the gospel advances, through God's people sharing Jesus. The second way the gospel advances is through the unity of God's people, his church.

Due to the persecution in Jerusalem, we saw that Philip went to Samaria. There's a map again. Samaria was 15 kilometers north of Jerusalem. But Jews and Samaritans were not besties.

Far from it. The Jews thought of Samaritans as half-breeds, half-Jew, and half-infidel. If you recall the story in the book of John, chapter 4, Jesus meets the woman at the well, a Samaritan woman.

[ 10 : 23 ] He approaches her and asks her for a drink, to which she responds, how is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?

And then the writer John says, for Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. The animosity between Jews and Samaritans went back hundreds of years. And so although Jesus, back in Acts chapter 1, if you recall, Jesus said the gospel was spread far and wide, outside Jerusalem, to the ends of the earth.

But let's be realistic. It's hard for people of different cultures to get along, never mind two people that had tension for hundreds of years. Look in our day at the human level conflicts that we have due to different views on politics, race, religion, sexuality.

Years ago, I went to a football match in Rome in Italy. And as I was watching the match, the two opposing fans, they literally were punching each other in the stands during the match.

And that's sport, not even race or religion. But the apostles back in Jerusalem, they were aware of this tension, obviously. And when they heard of the Samaritans believing in Jesus, they sent Peter and John, two senior apostles, all the way from Jerusalem to Samaria for one main purpose, to pray for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit.

[ 11 : 54 ] For it says, in verse 16, for he, the Holy Spirit, had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. What on earth is going on here?

This raises two questions, at least. First, why did Peter and John come all the way from Jerusalem to pray for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit?

Are Peter and John micromanaging Philip? And second, and more perplexing, why do Peter and John need to pray for the Spirit to fall on these new believers in Samaria?

On question two, isn't it true that since the day of Pentecost, in Acts chapter two, when a person believes in Jesus, don't they receive the Holy Spirit at that moment?

Peter said, in Acts chapter two, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[ 12 : 56 ] Paul said in Romans eight, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. There is a consistent theme in the New Testament.

Believe in Jesus and the Spirit of God will dwell in you. Normally, it's one step. But here in Acts chapter eight, there appears to be a two-step process.

First, the Samaritans believe and are baptized and then second, they receive the Holy Spirit when Peter and John prayed for them. You guys following me? Everyone okay?

Yeah? It's a bit dense and confusing, but here we go. We'll continue on. Back to our two questions. Why did Peter and John come all the way from Jerusalem to pray for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit?

And second, why did the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit in this abnormal two-step process? Well, Bible scholars have debated these verses for quite a long time and the interpretation is by no means settled.

[ 13 : 58 ] But here is what is the most likely explanation. Remember, the Jews and Samaritans were at odds for hundreds and hundreds of years. But as the gospel expanded outside Jerusalem as Jesus prophesied, amazingly, the Samaritan people, they heard the gospel and they believed in this Jewish Messiah.

And somehow, God in his sovereignty held back his spirit from the Samaritans such that Peter and John would have to travel all the way 50 kilometers from Jerusalem to come and pray for the Samaritans to receive his spirit so that all the Samaritans present at that time would witness the great power of God.

And all those Jewish believers back in Jerusalem would hear the chatter that this people, the Samaritans, this foreign people once looked down upon by the Jews, once considered second-class citizens by the Jews, were now of one faith, one heart, one spirit, and one Savior, Jesus Christ.

So Peter and John came from Jerusalem to pray for these new Samaritan believers to receive the Holy Spirit which welcomed them into Jesus' family, his church.

Let me try to illustrate it in this way. Imagine you are applying for your very first job. You land in a job interview with Apple in Hong Kong, but you're an outsider.

[ 15 : 31 ] Your family are poor immigrants. You're a university dropout. You even have a criminal record for stealing food to try to provide for your family. But somehow, you interview and you land the job.

But you're understandably a bit insecure. You have imposter syndrome. You're worried that the folks at Apple will realize that you're actually not really worthy to work there.

But on your first day, you're at your cubicle, you're hunched over coding on your laptop, and guess who comes over? Tim Cook, the CEO. He's flown all the way in from the US of A just to see you.

And he says to you, hey, welcome to Apple. I'd love to take you out for lunch to welcome you here. And then, we're going to call a global, company-wide Zoom call so that everyone at Apple can welcome you into the Apple community.

You are now one of us. Welcome to Apple. Now, that is kind of what happened, kind of what happened with the Samaritans, except the Samaritans. It was more than just a welcome party.

[ 16 : 36 ] It was a healing party. You see, that event crystallized the restoration and healing between two deeply divided people groups, two deeply divided ethnic and religious groups, breaking down the walls that stood for hundreds of years.

A similar thing happens, event happens, in Acts chapter 10. We'll look at that a bit later on in a few weeks. God sent Peter all the way to Caesarea to share the gospel to the Roman centurion, Cornelius.

And there, for the first time, the gospel moves not just outside Jerusalem to Judea or Samaria to half-Jews, the gospel moves to non-Jews, to Gentiles.

And what happens? As Peter's preaching, the Holy Spirit falls on Cornelius and all of his close friends and family. The Holy Spirit falls like a seal to publicly display the inclusion of another people group into God's family, his church.

This is how the gospel advances through the unity of God's church. Now, it's important to mention that this event does not happen anymore, mainly because this was the first time the gospel expanded to Samaritans and then to the Gentiles.

[ 18 : 02 ] And hence, these were unique one-time events. But what does happen today is that when we believe in Jesus, we become baptized. We get baptized. Baptism is a public declaration of our faith in Jesus, right?

For us to say and for our church family to say back to us among many things that we are unified and united in one church. in the family of God. Okay.

So now, what does this all mean for us here at Watermark? Well, look around. Look around the sanctuary. You can actually do it. You can actually do it if you want to. We are a picture of God, unified church.

Look at us. We are from many different countries, nationalities, and backgrounds. We are from different demographic spheres, different educational backgrounds, different histories.

but all welcomed by God into his church family and unified together. And second, isn't this unity such a powerful and attractive message to a world that is so fragmented and broken?

[ 19 : 08 ] when we care for one another, when we actually reconcile very difficult relationships and conflicts, we're telling the world, I'm doing this.

I'm caring for those that are not easy to care about or different than me. I'm doing that because there is one person, Jesus, who cares so much more for me that he gave his very life for me.

And so I desire to honor him and to care and love and accept others. Isn't that a beautiful picture of God's church? And isn't that a beautiful invitation to God's church?

This is how the gospel advances through the unity of God's church. Okay, so, now, we've seen the big picture of how the gospel is advancing and going out according to God's plan.

But now, what does that look like? How does that happen on a micro level? Well, we're now introduced to a man named Simon, a magician, who, for a long time, amazed the people of Samaria with his magic.

[ 20 : 13 ] People were so amazed by him that they said, this man is the power of God that is called great. Some believe Simon was some sort of demigod. But then Philip the deacon shows up proclaiming Jesus and many people, as we saw earlier, believed in Jesus and were baptized.

And even Simon the magician believed and was baptized. And it says in verse 13 that he continued with Philip. Simon used to amaze people with his magic and now he's amazed by Jesus.

Or was he? Later on, Simon sees the power of God's spirit move when the apostles lay hands on the Samaritans. And you can imagine Simon's eyes grow wide.

The passage doesn't say what he saw, but we know from the rest of Acts that when God's spirit falls on people, there are outward signs. Boldness to proclaim the gospel, praising God unceasingly, speaking in tongues.

And so, like Gollum in Lord of the Rings, Simon wants that power. Simon needs that power. Simon offers Peter and John money for that power.

[ 21 : 24 ] And of course, Peter strongly rebukes Simon. So what drove Simon to want this power? Well, we read that his magic amazed the people of Samaria and that he loved the attention because it made him feel great.

It made him feel that he himself was somebody great. Verse 9. And so when he sees the even greater power of God's spirit, he wants it not to bless others, but to impress people even more.

Because what made Simon most happy, what made him most content, gave him most joy, was when people thought highly of him. He wanted to be known as somebody great.

Martin Luther wrote this, whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God. Meaning, whatever you fundamentally believe will make you most happy.

That is what drives your decisions and possibly the entire direction of your life. You will pursue and cling to what you adore. And for Simon, he pursued and he clung to having a good self-image.

[ 22 : 32 ] His God was his own self-image. Now, wait a minute. Wait a minute. Didn't we read in verse 13 that Simon believed in Jesus?

Wasn't he baptized? Wasn't he amazed by the signs and the miracles? That he saw? Didn't he continue with Philip? And this is where this passage gets quite personal and challenging.

If you know this parable, parable of the sower, Jesus said, Jesus spoke about actually this very heart condition. Jesus said that God's word, the gospel, is like a seed which a farmer grows.

Some seed falls on the path but has no roots and is taken away immediately. Other seed falls on rocky ground but persecution causes that person who receives God's word to also fall away.

And then there is God's word that falls on thorns. These are people where they hear the word, the gospel, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things enter in and choke the word and it proves unfruitful.

[ 23 : 45 ] And this third way, the seed that is choked, describes exactly Simon the magician. When Simon first heard the news, the good news of Jesus, he probably thought, oh, that's great news.

I'll follow Jesus. When he saw the signs and the miracles, he thought, he was amazed. But like in the parable, the gospel never found any roots in his heart because it was crowded out by his desire to promote his self-image.

You see, Simon wanted the power of Jesus, but he wasn't willing to take up the cross of Jesus. He wasn't willing to give up his self-promotion and self-image.

And so the apostle Peter tells Simon, your heart is not right before God, which can also be translated as your heart is not straight with God.

You have a crooked heart. Peter then has some even stronger words for Simon, which tells us that although Simon professed to believe in Jesus, although he was even baptized, he wasn't actually saved or born again.

[ 24 : 57 ] Simon's heart never turned towards Jesus. He wasn't a true Christian. Peter says to Simon in verse 23, you were in the gall of bitterness, which suggests someone who is wretched, and you were in the bond of iniquity, which suggests Simon was a prisoner of sin in bondage.

And this is, let's be honest, this is challenging, is it not? But being born again, becoming a Christian is not just a one-time verbal acknowledgement and then we just think and live as before.

It's a heart that turns away from our own selfish desires towards Jesus and on that new path and in that new life, we seek to honor him and to submit to his authority and the way we speak, the way we live, the decisions we make reflect the inner reality of this new path that we're on.

John Piper says this about Simon the magician. Piper says, at the root of Simon's false faith was a heart problem. He was a man with a crooked heart who willfully suppressed the knowledge of the true God whose spirit cannot be bought.

Deep down, he still wanted to be a great power broker. You see, Simon never loved Jesus. He just loved what he thought Jesus could give him. Power to boost his self-image.

[ 26 : 30 ] Now, notice though, that although Peter rebuked Simon quite harshly, he doesn't just leave him there. He advises Simon to repent and to pray to the Lord that if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.

In spite of Simon's sin, all is not lost. There is another chance. Repent. This is the same simple and consistent gospel message throughout the book of Acts and throughout the entire Bible.

Repent. Peter in Acts 2, repent and be baptized. Peter in Acts 3, repent and therefore turn back that your sins may be blotted out. John the Baptist, repent for the kingdom of God is near.

Yes, your heart is dark. My heart is dark. Yes, you're in bondage. Your selfish desires. Yes, your heart is crooked. It's not straight. But the true repentance that you may have missed the first time, it is still on offer.

It is still there for you to take today. You have a second chance. The wonderful forgiveness of Jesus that you missed before, it is on offer for you today, but you must repent.

[ 27 : 39 ] But what does Simon do instead? said he doesn't pray to God for forgiveness. He doesn't acknowledge his offense against God.

He says to Peter, you pray for me. You pray for me that I won't be punished. But true repentance, friends, is not simply trying to avoid punishment.

True repentance is omitting the offense, owning the mistake, and asking but not demanding forgiveness. True repentance is omitting the offense, owning the mistake, and asking but not demanding forgiveness.

You see, this story, this little vignette about Simon is a sharp warning for us. You see, the Bible oftentimes doesn't end a passage or a book with a neat little bow or fairytale ending.

We're often left with a challenge. Consider the prodigal son story, right? The older brother at the end of that story, even though he served his father faithfully in the fields, his heart was cold towards his father.

[ 28 : 54 ] He never loved his father. Or consider Jonah. We just went over Jonah last couple weeks. Consider Jonah. He was a prophet. He knew God's word inside out, but his heart never loved God.

God. He actually was angry at God. These teachings are meant to provoke us to look inward at our own hearts.

It's the same here today as well with Simon the magician. So today we've seen how the gospel advances. It's going from Jerusalem to Samaria to the rest of the Gentile world and it has come to us here in Hong Kong.

the gospel is for anyone and everyone. The offer of Jesus is to all people one life at a time.

One life at a time. But as the gospel confronts the idols of our hearts, we must make a choice. Will we tear down those idols and submit to the authority of Jesus?

[ 30 : 00 ] Will we cast our idols aside and make that sacrifice and love and trust Christ above all? And so as we reflect on Simon, two questions for us to consider.

First, what do you crave most? What makes you most content? Is it promoting your own self image like Simon? Or maybe something else?

If you crave financial security, as an example, you will make big sacrifices to make more money. If you crave relational intimacy, above all, you will make big compromises to pursue what you adore.

I've actually done both in my life. Often the things that we care about most, that are most important to us, health, job, money, relationships, children's education, and success, these are the very things that choke us from knowing and experiencing the goodness of God.

Second, are we amazed by what happens in church? Or are we amazed by Jesus? I do think we have an amazing church, by the way.

[ 31 : 13 ] But like Simon the magician, we can marvel at the signs and the wonders, and we can miss the giver of the signs. Simon marveled at the arrow, but he missed what the arrow was pointing towards.

See, everything we do here at Watermark, the preaching, the music worship, our great kids ministry, our gospel community, even this building, everything we do at Watermark is like an arrow pointing not at ourselves, but pointing towards Jesus.

Everything we do as a church community is to point each other back to the only one who can save us from our wandering and sinful hearts, and that is the person of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

So we've looked at how the gospel advances through people sharing Jesus, through the unity of God's church, and one life at a time. As we close, I have one final thought, and that is comparing Philip and Simon.

Philip's only mentioned in Acts three times. Philip is mentioned twice in Acts chapter eight. We'll look at it next week as well. And then he's mentioned once in Acts 21.

[ 32 : 28 ] And in Acts 21, that's 20 years after today's passage. In that chapter, the apostle Paul goes on a trip and he visits Philip.

Philip's living in Caesarea at that time. He's an older, more seasoned man. He has four grown daughters. And in Acts 21, Philip, his title's different now. He's called Philip the Evangelist.



Philip the Evangelist. And this name signifies his faithfulness in expanding the gospel of Jesus for the intervening two decades that aren't mentioned in the book of Acts.

Imagine the lives that Philip impacted through sharing the gospel, preaching the good news of Jesus. But then consider Simon the magician. As we learn after hearing the gospel, Simon doesn't really believe.

Simon isn't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. But other historical documents, in other historical documents, there are indications that after this episode in Acts chapter 8, Simon founds a religion called Gnosticism.

[ 33 : 34 ] It's an ancient spiritual movement that is anchored in the belief that salvation comes from mystical! And Simon claimed to be some sort of teacher of Gnosticism.

It sounds like he still only cared about his self image. It's very likely that Simon fell away, never turned and repented towards Jesus, and his life ended in death and destruction.

You see, Philip loved Jesus and pointed people towards Jesus. Simon loved mainly himself and pointed people to himself. For Simon, it was all about Simon.

For Philip, it was all about Jesus. Jesus. And so here, as we close, some final questions for us to think about and meditate over.

First, is your faith rooted in the person of Christ, or is your faith merely because of the benefits of Christ?

[ 34 : 35 ] Is your faith how Jesus can make you a better person, friend, son, daughter, father, mother? How you can make your life more comfortable? Or is your faith centered on the wonderful person, the wonderful person and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus?

Second, how do you actually relate to Jesus? Meaning, when you pray or read his word or when you spend time with God, which we all do, right?

Okay, Joby does. Are you simply asking Jesus to help you to get by in life? Are you simply asking him for favors to do this or that? Or are you worshipful? Are you delighting in him?

Are you enjoying him? Are you satisfied in him? And third and final, when you consider the great commission from Jesus in Matthew 28, go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Or when you consider the great proclamation of Jesus in Acts chapter 1, you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

[ 35 : 47 ] What is your honest reaction? Overwhelmed? Someone else's job? I used to think I don't have it all together. I'm so busy and no one has it all together.

But today, more than ever, I'll tell you, friends, I'm convicted and I'm also excited. I look out there and I see the brokenness and the pain in this world.

I see friends, I see family members, I see acquaintances, I see the world out there running after and pursuing things that never satisfy, that never give us true joy.

They're always fleeting and always fail us. But I see one solution. I see one solution and one solution only, and that is believing in, trusting, and loving the person of Jesus Christ.

that's the one solution. Today, I'm more convinced than ever of what Philip saw. The offer of Jesus trumps anything this world can offer.

[ 36 : 48 ] And so, Watermark, may our prayer be that may God's Spirit give us the strength to submit to Jesus, to love and trust him above all, and to honor his calling, to share his wonderful message of salvation and grace to all.

Let's pray together. Father God, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, it's a challenging message, God, we admit.

Your word is challenging. Sometimes it hits us with a ton of bricks. And we ask God, as we digest and meditate, that we would not just let it go by us, that we would honestly reflect on how you want to speak to all of us, Lord.

All of us, God, we admit there are things in our life that we are not proud of, and there are things, God, that are holding us back from knowing you. There are thorns in our heart that we are adoring above you, Lord. Help us, God, to be a people that bring those to you, that have the strength to lay them down at your feet, and to honor you above all, because you are worthy of honor and praise.

As we continue the service, God, Spirit, please be with us. Illuminate our hearts. Help us to see our own sin. Help us to see the wonderful beauty of Jesus.

[ 38 : 21 ] In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.