

# How the Gospel Spreads

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

Date: 24 June 2018

Preacher: Kevin Murphy

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning. Is this on? Great. I don't know if you got that up, banged the symbol as we came up, which I think is an appropriate round of applause to Karen and Grace for all those names. Hi, Arapolis and Echippus and Aristarchus and all sorts of things. Well, welcome everybody.

Great to be back with you. And today we are in week eight, the second last week in our study in the book of Colossians. We are in Colossians chapter four. And we are reading the final verses of the book of Colossians. You might say, why is it the second last week and not the last week?

Well, you'll have to come next week to find out. But we come to the part of Colossians that very few of us take notice of, right? If you're anything like me, we read the book of Colossians, this incredible book. And we get to chapter one about the supremacy of Christ over all things. The fact that all things are made by him and through him and for him. And at the end of chapter one, if you're a follower of Jesus, your heart should be in awe at the majesty and the supremacy of Christ and who it is that we worship. And then you get to chapter two and we are blown away by the magnitude and the extent of the gospel. That Christ died for us so that our old life can be died with him. And Christ raised new lives so that we can be given new life in him. And we read in chapter two that every spiritual blessing that we long for and that the Christian life promises is found in Christ. Not just as a byproduct of knowing Jesus, but found in him himself.

And then we get to chapter three and we read about this incredible implications of this new life in Christ. That because his story becomes our story, we are to set our minds on things above, not on things below. And our life is now found in Christ. And in addition to this, we heard in chapter three that because our life is found in Christ, this has radical implications for our relationships, for the way we treat one another in the church, that our relationship should be filled with grace, generosity of spirit, forgiveness. And in addition to that, chapter three tells us that our relationships with our spouses, with our children, everything changes because of who Christ is and who we are in Christ. And so we call this series, the supremacy of Christ and our life in him. And then you get to chapter four, right? And chapter four sounds like a long list of names. If you're a couple here and you're expecting children, Oscar and Celeste, Sam and Jackie, I suggest some good names here for you, right?

Tickie Kiss, Ciao, sounds like it's got a nice ring to it. But you get to chapter four and you're reading this list of these strange names and you think, the temptation is to start thinking about your shopping list, right? Or who are you going to watch the football with tonight? But that would be a mistake. These verses that Karen and Grace read to us are full with gold. And they tell us not just Paul's theology, but something of Paul's passion on his heart. Who this man, the apostle Paul was.

[ 3 : 29 ] Paul, not just the theologian, but Paul, the follower of Jesus. But in addition to that, in these last 18 verses, there are so many things. We're going to just pick up on three of them today. But there's so many aspects that tell us why it was that the church in the first century exploded and the gospel reached to every corner of the world. Many of us will know that the church started out in the first century with this motley crew of 12 uneducated Jewish men in the backwaters of Israel. Not a very well-known city, famous city. And their leader was condemned as a criminal, crucified by the Romans. And yet 300 years later, the whole kind of known world of the Roman Empire is declared a Christian state. And the Roman emperor himself declares the Roman Empire a Christian state. How is it that in such a short period of time, the gospel spread from the backwaters with these uneducated Jewish fishermen from Palestine to the place where it took over the whole kind of European known world? How did this come about? Well, in chapter one, remember Paul says, the gospel has spread all over the world, bearing fruit amongst you just as it does in every corner of the world. What contributed to this gospel explosion in the known world? Well, of course, the one answer is the power of the Holy Spirit, right? Remember

Psalms 127, unless the Lord builds the house, those that build it labor in vain. Unless Christ the Holy Spirit is involved in his church, we've got nothing, right? We're just going to be going through the motions. So it's the power of the Holy Spirit that did this. But as a church, we can't just sit back and say, well, it is the Holy Spirit. Let's hope he does it again, right? What did Paul do? What did the early church believe? What was in their hearts that caused them to act in such a way that the gospel went out from them to all over the world? And Watermark, this is a very important question for us to consider. Because as a church, we've said that our vision is to see the growth of many gospel communities of mature disciples of Jesus, raised up and released to make an advancement or to help advance the kingdom of God in Hong Kong and in Asia. So we want to be a church, in a sense, we're saying, God, what you did in the New Testament, do with us. What you did in the book of Acts, use us. God, do it again in our day and age. And so it's important to ask, what was the early church like?

What did they believe? What was in their hearts that caused this gospel explosion? Now, this morning, there's a lot of things in this passage. We're going to pick up on just three of them and see where we go, okay? So that's by way of introduction. First thing is this.

The gospel spread through embracing the cost of following Jesus. The gospel spread through embracing the cost of following Jesus. Now, remember, where is Paul when he writes this letter? He's under house arrest, right? He's under Roman lock and key. Paul's not sitting in a jacuzzi talking to his secretary saying, I think we should just write an email to the guys in Colossians. Why don't you just write this email for me? Paul's under house arrest in Rome. And he's not there because he forgot to declare his tax return or, you know, some other dodgy dealings. He's there because he was preaching the gospel. Because of his love for who Christ is in the gospel, it ends up, he ends up in jail. Look at what he says in verse 2. He says, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open a door for us for the word to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I find myself in prison. And this is not particularly unusual for Paul. More than half the books of the New Testament that Paul writes are written from a jail cell. And this wasn't a surprise for Paul because from the first day that he encountered Christ, remember Paul's on the way to Damascus to go and arrest the Christians.

Christ makes himself known to Paul. Paul encounters Jesus. And on the very first day, Christ tells Paul, this is what your life is going to be like. He says to him, speaking of Paul, Paul is my chosen instrument, called by me to carry my name before the Gentiles and before kings.

[ 7 : 58 ] And I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. And then later on, a few years later in Acts chapter 21, Paul and his companions are making their way towards Jerusalem. They've been on a long trip. And they stop off at a brother's house called Philip on the way just before Jerusalem.

And while they're there, a prophet by the name of Agabus comes. And they are drinking tea and catching up. And Agabus grabs Paul's belt from his suitcase. And he ties his hands and his feet together. And then he says, this is what God says. This is what's going to happen to the man to whom this belt belongs. In other words, he's saying, Paul, you go to Jerusalem, they're going to arrest you and tie you up and throw you in jail. And what's Paul's response? He says, why are you breaking my heart? Why are you trying to dissuade me from following Jesus? I knew that the day that Christ called me, he had called me to suffer for him. I'm willing to go to Jerusalem, be arrested and die for the name of Christ, my savior. And so in our passage today, in verse 11, Paul writes, and look at what he says. He talks about these three men, Aristarchus and Mark and Justice. And he says, these men have been a great comfort to me. Well, the reason they were a comfort for Paul is because his life wasn't very comfortable. He was in jail. The natural scope of things was Paul wasn't in a jacuzzi. He was in jail for the sake of the gospel. And later on, he says, tell Achippus to fulfill his ministry that God has given him. Why? Because Achippus is tempted to retreat, to bail, to choose an easy life. And yet Paul says, this is the life of following Jesus. Again and again and again, we see not just Paul, but the whole early church willingly, gladly embracing the cost to follow Jesus and to be on mission for him. And notice further, Paul's so loved for the gospel and the Colossians that, look at what he does here. He's got these friends, right? Mark and Aristarchus and Justice and Epaphras and

Tychicus. He's got these friends and he's in jail. He's under house arrest and they've ministered to him. They've loved him. They've served him. And then what does he do with them? He sends them away, right? Look at what he says in verse seven. He says, Tychicus will tell you all about my activities.

He's a beloved brother, a faithful minister, a fellow servant of the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that he may encourage your hearts. Friends, if I was sitting in jail for the sake of the gospel and my dear friend Chris or anyone came and ministered to me and would comfort me, you better believe there's not a chance I would let them out of my sights, right? Paul says, I'm sending them to encourage your hearts. I'd say, forget about you guys. Find your own friends, right? I need all the encouragement I can get. And yet that's not what Paul does. He takes these dear beloved brothers. And he says, there's someone else that can do with some encouragement. Why don't you go and bless the brothers in Colossae? Paul doesn't hold on to comfort and convenience. So radical is his passion for the love of Christ and the gospel that he sends out these men that have become dear friends to him. Now the question is, how can we be like this? What did they know or realize that we need to know and realize? Well, there's a couple of things. Firstly, notice that right in the very beginning, Jesus made it clear that this is what it means to follow Jesus. Remember, Jesus said, this is what the Christian life involves. He says, people will hate you. People will disown you. You're going to suffer for my name. People will falsely accuse you. They'll take you property and you can be sure that they'll do this for you because this is how they treated me. If this is how they treat me, you can believe that this is going to be how they treat you. Remember, Jesus says, in this world, you will have trouble, but take heart. I've overcome the world. Remember, Jesus says, if anyone wants to be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me. You see, right in the early days, the believers, they didn't just follow Jesus of the miracles and the Jesus of glory and the Jesus of giving peace beyond all understanding. That's true, but they also followed Jesus of Calvary. They followed the

Jesus of the cross and they knew that by becoming a follower of Jesus meant embracing the cost that Christ embraced. Jesus told us from day one that to be a follower of him means that my allegiance shifts from being Lord of my own life to now Christ is Lord of my life and that involves the cost.

[ 12 : 45 ] But there's a second reason. There's a second reason why the church was so willing to embrace the cost of following Jesus. And in Hebrews chapter 10, we see this. In Hebrews 10, the writer writes to these Christians, and we don't know their name. We don't know who they are. They are anonymous Christians. Their names have been lost to us, but their lives have been etched in the scriptures. And he writes this and he says, as followers of Jesus, you will endure hardships. Remember how you suffered.

Remember how sometimes you were publicly beaten. Sometimes you so associated with other Christians that were being publicly beaten. They turned from them and they beat you as well. He says, remember how this. And then he says, for you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property.

Okay. Why? For you knew that you had a better position and an abiding one. You see what he's saying here? He's saying these followers of Jesus, this wasn't just the pious ones or the leaders or the pastors or the popes or the bishops. These are ordinary followers of Jesus. We don't know their names, but they love Christ and they said, count us in. We're in. But secondly, he says this. He says, the reason why you are willing to embrace the cost is because you knew that you had a better position and an everlasting one, an abiding one. In other words, you counted the cost, but it was no cost at all. You're willing to allow these people to destroy your sand castle on the beach because you knew around the corner Christ had prepared a real castle for you. In other words, he says, you're willing to embrace the cost because you knew that ultimately your life wasn't found in your possessions or where you live or your achievements or your promotion or anything in this life. Your life is found in Christ and who you are in him. You joyfully accept the plundering of your property. Why? For you knew that you had a lasting possession and a better one. And that's exactly what Paul has been saying.

Colossians 3 says, since you have died to your old way of life, since you've been raised with Christ, set your minds on things above where Christ is seated. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ and God. And when Christ, who is your life, appears, you too will appear with him in glory.

Friends, the early church so understood the wonder of Christ that they joyfully and wonderfully accepted the cost that was involved of following him. The gospel spread through embracing the cost.

[ 15 : 16 ] Second thing is this. The gospel spread through extraordinary prayer. Extraordinary prayer. Look at verse 2 with me in Colossians chapter 4. Paul writes this. He says, Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Continue steadfastly in prayer.

This week as I've been mulling over this passage, and I think it's actually been for the last couple of months, I have come to the place where I have realized that I've been a pastor for the last nine years.

And one of my biggest regrets over the last nine years is that as a minister, I have spent so much time emailing, organizing, planning, strategizing, everything else, and so little time in prayer.

And I've come to the place where I've had to ask Christ to forgive me, and I've made some resolutions. And I've said, and I want to ask you, and I want to say that as one of your pastors, as one of your elders, I want to lead well, but I'm committing to spending less time organizing and more time praying.

And Watermark, I want to ask you to join me in this endeavor. I want to ask that we will be a church that gives ourselves to continue steadfastly in prayer. Look at verse 12 with me.

[ 17 : 02 ] Paul writes this. He says, Epaphras, remember Epaphras is the man that planted this church in Colossae. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you.

He is always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature, fully assured in the will of God. Some translations say that Epaphras is laboring on your behalf in prayer.

The word here for struggle or labor, it's a Greek word called agonizomenos. Okay, it's from where we get the English word to agonize. Epaphras is always agonizing.

He's laboring. He's struggling on your behalf in prayer. When I hear the word labor, I'll tell you what I think of. I think of six o'clock in the morning, standing outside a hospital in Cape Town with my wife, agonizer, menacing, laboring, with the labor pains coming on her, right?

Large tummy. Woof. Woof. Woof. Holding on to the sidewalk as labor pains came on. But Claire tells me that giving birth is like running a marathon all condensed into one hour, right?

[ 18 : 20 ] Struggling with all her energy to bring forth these two beautiful children. But what is the result of that labor? What's the consequence of that struggling, that laboring in childbirth?

The result is new life. The result is children. The result is a fresh human being that's coming to the world. And friends, can I say that very seldom in the kingdom of God is new life without laboring, without the birth pains of laboring in prayer.

Friends, we have to be a church that knows what it means to labor and struggle in prayer. A few years back, Tim Keller did an extensive amount of research on the great spiritual revivals that have taken place throughout the centuries.

And he concluded that the greatest contributor to these new spiritual awakenings that have taken place across the world is the consistent, unrelenting, kingdom-orientated, united prayers of the churches.

When Christ followers from different denominations and different backgrounds and different cultures came together to pray. Not for themselves, but for their city, for the other churches.

[ 19 : 34 ] When they came together to pray, not for comfortable and convenient lives, but that the gospel would go out. When they came together to pray for one another, when they were unrelenting, incessant, unwavering, laboring in prayer.

And that's what the early church did. That's how the believers did. They knew what it was to struggle or to labor in prayer and to wrestle with God in prayer.

And notice the prayer of Epaphras. These are not delicate prayers. Epaphras isn't praying that his runny nose will get cleared up. He's not praying that he can get a bigger room in his corner office.

That's not his prayers. What's he praying? He's praying that these believers will become fully mature, knowing God and walking in him. He's struggling in his prayers on your behalf, that you may stand mature, fully assured of the will of God.

In the 16th century, so many years ago, in Scotland, north of England, there was a wonderful revival. And the revival was, there were a couple of people involved, but one of the key men involved was a man by the name of John Knox.

[ 20 : 45 ] John Knox was a man who loved preaching. He loved God's word. But even more than that, he loved prayer. He was a man of great prayer. Listen to what Burke Parsons writes about John Knox.

He says, Perhaps more than anything else, John Knox is known for his famous prayer, Give me Scotland or I die. Knox's prayer was not an arrogant demand of God, but the passionate pleading of a man willing to die for the sake of the gospel and the salvation of his countrymen.

Knox's greatness lay in his humble dependence upon the sovereign God to save his people, to revive a nation, and to reform his church. Although Knox had been imprisoned and enslaved and the church.

Although Knox had been imprisoned and enslaved, and although he was often sick, he was often under the threat of persecution, he consistently lived out his theology, believing that one man with God is always in the majority.

Okay? During the 16th century, Knox's preaching and his praying was so well known that Queen Mary, who was Queen of Scotland, is reported to have said, I fear the prayers of John Knox more than all the assembled armies of Europe.

[ 21 : 56 ] Friends, is that not a profound statement? Here the Queen of the United Kingdom, Queen of Scotland, says this, And so Paul says, continue steadfastly in prayer.

And I wonder why it is that we don't pray. Why is it that as Christians, we genuinely don't continue in prayer? Why is it that we find it so hard to struggle or to labor in this prayer?

And I think one of the reasons is, generally, it's not true of everyone, but generally we are more self-centered and self-orientated. We don't think we need God. What's the point in asking God to do something if you can do it yourself?

And we're generally, as human beings, we're so self-centered that we just don't see our need for God. But I think, secondly, we don't understand the nature and the power of God.

We overrate ourselves and we underrate the sovereign God who is the Lord of all things. And we think that God is just a slightly better, slightly nicer version of ourselves. Friends, every great prayer in the Bible, from Nehemiah to Esther to Elijah, every great prayer in the Bible started off with this confession.

[ 23 : 08 ] Oh God, we need you. God, we need you. Come and save us, we pray. Come and save us. And so look at the prayers here. Epaphras, who is this great prayer warrior, he struggles in prayer.

But what did he pray for? Did he pray for himself? Do you pray for his promotion? No, it says Epaphras is always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, praying that he'll stand mature, fully assured of the will of God.

And what was Paul's request? Look at verse 3. He says, please pray for us. Pray that God will open a door for us. Now, Chris made this point earlier this week. If I was in jail, I would also pray that God would open a door for me, right?

You know what kind of door I would want God to open? That's not what Paul prays. Paul doesn't say, God, open the prison doors that I can get out and get home and, you know, have a comfortable life.

He says, pray that a door will open for the word of God to go forth, that many people will come to know the wonder of our Savior and the wonder of the gospel. And so Paul prays this magnificent prayer.

[ 24 : 11 ] Friends, can we ask us, oh God, please deliver us. Deliver us from our self-centeredness. Deliver us from our self-orientated prayerlessness. The early church knew what it meant to be a church that prayed.

The early church knew how to get on their knees. Watermark, can we be a church that prays? Can we be a church that isn't so self-dependent and program-driven? Can we be a church that gets on their knees and says, Christ, you are God and we are not and we need you.

Can we pray for our city? Can we pray for our government? Can we pray for other churches in Hong Kong? Can we pray for the lost? Can we pray for those that don't know Jesus? Can we be a church that prays?

Christ, come and help us, I pray. God, open our eyes to see you. And to see how desperate we are for you. Third thing and finally. The gospel spread because they embrace the cost.

The gospel spread because they are of extraordinary prayer. Finally, the gospel spread through grace-saturated relationships. Grace-saturated relationships. Now remember chapter 3 in Colossians.

[ 25 : 17 ] We spoke about this a few weeks ago. Paul says, because of who Christ is and because of who you are in Christ, therefore, he says, holy and beloved ones, put on compassionate hearts.

Put on kindness. Put on meekness. Put on gentleness. Bear with one another. And if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive one another, just as Christ forgave you.

Okay, remember that? So he says, because of the way Jesus has treated you, therefore, treat one another the same way. Now, look at what happens here in chapter 4. Look at verse 8 with me.

So speaking of Tychicus, Paul writes this. I've sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts. Okay, we spoke about that earlier.

Verse 9. And with him I'm sending Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has happened here. Now, if you're here in week 1, remember, who is this guy Onesimus?

[ 26 : 18 ] Do you remember who he was? Okay, I can see Janet remembers. The back story is this. The church in Colossae that Epaphras plants meets in the home of a wealthy businessman called Philemon.

Okay, so Philemon says, you can have my home. We can all meet here, no problem. Philemon has this slave called Onesimus. Onesimus doesn't like Philemon, and so one day he runs away.

But he doesn't just run away. He also steals some money in the process. That's why Paul writes later on and says, if he owes you anything, charge it to my account. I'll pay for it. So Onesimus steals some money, runs away from Philemon.

He runs all the way to Rome. And while he's in Rome, he happens to meet this guy called Paul. Paul tells him about Jesus. Onesimus becomes a follower of Jesus. And Onesimus becomes like a son to Paul.

He starts serving him. He starts ministering to him. He goes out. Paul's under house arrest. He goes and gets food. And Onesimus serves Paul. He's like a beloved son to him. But then Epaphras, who started the church, also comes to Rome.

[ 27 : 24 ] And he sees Onesimus, and he says, Paul, do you know who this guy is? Do you know that this guy used to be a slave of Philemon, and he stole some money and ran away? And Paul says, I know.

Don't worry. We've spoken about it. And then a few years later, Paul sends Tychicus with the letter back to Colossae, back to Philemon's house. And he says, I'm sending Tychicus with this letter.

And then he says, I'm also sending Onesimus. So imagine this. They're all in this house. They're gathering. And Tychicus is reading this letter.

And in walks in the door Onesimus, the former slave who stole from Philemon, walks into his house and says, I'm back. And so what does Paul say?

He says, welcome him. Welcome him as a beloved brother. Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who's one of you. Welcome him.

[ 28 : 22 ] And then look at verse 10 with me. He says, Aristarchus, our fellow prisoner, greets you, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions.

If he comes to you, welcome him. Now, who is this guy Mark? Well, Mark is the guy who wrote the second gospel. All right? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Remember in Acts chapter 13, Paul and Barnabas go on their first missionary journey.

And Barnabas has got this young cousin called Mark. And so Barnabas says to Paul, listen, I'd like to bring Mark along with us. It'll be good for him. Paul says, sure, no problem. They go on this missionary journey, and they get to the first stop, and they count to opposition.

Okay? There's the cost involved. People are stoning them. They're chasing them out. They're not well received. And so Mark says, I think I've had enough. And so Mark gets on the first ship back to Jerusalem.

He bails on them. Right? A few years later, Paul and Barnabas are going on their second missionary journey. And Barnabas says, listen, I know Mark bailed on us, but he's grown up a bit.

[ 29 : 25 ] I think we should bring him with us. And Paul says, are you joking? I'm not taking that kid with me. Last time he bailed on us. I'm not going to babysit him. He's going to put our life in danger. He's going to slow us down.

Forget it. And so Paul and Barnabas have this dispute. And Barnabas says, no, I really think so. And eventually Barnabas says, fine, I'll take Mark. You take Silas.

And they go separate ways. In other words, Paul is so upset with Mark that he doesn't want to take him. He says, that's it. You take him. I'm not. Mark's not coming with me anymore.

We're going separate ways. Now, what's happening here? A few years later, Mark is in Rome with Paul. And Paul says, he's a beloved brother.

If he comes to you, you've heard reports about him. Welcome him. Welcome him as a brother. Friends, the last two weeks we've seen in Colossians 3 how Paul paints this radical picture of gospel relationships, right?

[ 30 : 25 ] The church is a place where Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, educated and uneducated, male and female, black and white and Chinese are all gathering together, right?

It's a place where there's patience and generosity of spirit and forgiveness with the natural operating systems of the church. It's a place where wives put their husbands' will first and husbands put their wives' interests first.

Where husbands and wives aren't tiger moms and dads, but they encourage their children and children honor their parents. It's an amazing community. But here in chapter 4, we see two real-life examples of the church as a family.

Where two people, Anesimus and Mark, had let the church community down. They had messed up. They had hurt one another. And the temptation is to harden their hearts.

The temptation is to pull back a little bit. To say, I don't know if I can trust them anymore. I gave them one chance and they hurt me. You know? I don't know. Maybe we should just keep our distance. The temptation is to say, have you heard what Mark did?

[ 31 : 24 ] Have you heard what Anesimus did? And what does Paul say? He says, because of the gospel, because of who Jesus is, what do we do with sinners like that? We welcome grace.

We extend our arms and say, welcome to our family. We soften our hearts towards them. Remember Chris said last week, the church is going to be messy. You put a bunch of sinners in a room and it's just a matter of time before someone lets another one down.



Before we get hurt. That's what happens. We're a church full of sinners. And yet because of the gospel. Because of who Jesus is. Forgive one another just as Christ has forgiven you.

Friends, despite these things. Despite these men's history. Despite the stories the Colossians had heard about Onesimus and Mark. The church family in Colossians called to welcome them as beloved brothers and part of the family.

Now, as we come to close, why is this? Why is this? Why does Paul write them and say, listen, you've heard the stories. But I don't want you to listen to the stories.

[ 32 : 26 ] I want you to extend grace. Well, the truth is, that was Paul's story, wasn't it? Remember Acts chapter 9? Paul becomes a follower of Jesus. And Jesus goes to a man called Ananias and says, Ananias, there's a man called Saul of Tarsus.

I want you to go and welcome him. And Ananias says, Lord, are you joking? I've heard about this man. He persecutes people. He's evil. He wants to lock us up in jail.

I don't want to go to that guy. Send me to someone else. And God says to him, go to him. Welcome him as a brother. Friends, this was Paul's story. Paul had a history.

Paul had messed up. And yet Christ showed him the most unbelievable grace. And friends, can I tell you what? I don't care what your background is. I don't know what your story is.

This is your story as well. And it's my story. Because this is all of our stories. You may have a squeaky clean image. You may be well loved and respected by society.

[ 33 : 25 ] Friends, before God Almighty, every one of us, our Saul of Tarsus, Onesimus the coward, Onesimus the former slave, Mark the coward, every one of us have fallen and are sinners.

And every one of us are recipients of Christ's grace if we've come to him in forgiveness and faith. And yet the story of the gospel is that God takes broken relationships with God himself and with one another, and he restores us.

Dig a little deeper and every one of us will have reasons why people should be hesitant of us. Dig a little deeper and every one of us will have reasons why relationships shouldn't be that easy.

And yet this God, this Jesus Christ, the supremely perfect one, he didn't treat us as we deserved. He didn't rub our hands and say, I've trusted him once, I can't trust him again. He went to the cross.

He went to take our sin and our shame upon himself. He went to destroy the very thing in our hearts that causes broken relationship between us and God, a broken relationship between one another, and to destroy that thing, our sin, and to reunite us with Christ and to reunite us with one another.

[ 34 : 31 ] Jesus went to the cross to heal us and to give us new hearts. Jesus died to restore us so that we can extend saturated grace relationships to one another. Friends, this is the age-old story.

This is the gospel. The problem of sin is the problem of sinners, but the hope of the gospel is that Jesus and his death on the cross means that that's not the final story. God is able to take even the worst of sinners and to reconcile them to himself and reconcile us to one another.

Men and women like Saul and Onesimus and Mark and you and me. He's able to heal us. Friends, this is what made the church the church that it was.

This is what the early church was. It was a motley crew of spirit-filled believers that embraced the cost of following Jesus. They gave themselves to extraordinary prayer and loved and served one another, with grace-saturated relationships.

Friends, can we be such a church? Can we be such a church? I pray that we will. Let's pray together. Why don't you stand with me? Can you stand? And let's pray together.

[ 35 : 42 ] Let's close our eyes. Let's close our eyes. Let's close our eyes. Let's close our eyes. Father God, we are humbled and challenged by your word, God.

Father, when we look at the lives of men and women that have gone before us, God, we are so aware of our own sinfulness, so aware, God, of our self-centeredness.

God, I pray for us as a church. Pray for Watermark. God, I pray that we will be such a church that you use, God. Won't you fill us with your spirit, God? Won't you pour your Holy Spirit upon us?

God, won't you also be a church that gladly and joyfully and willingly embraces the cost of following Jesus? God, won't you make us a church that gives ourselves to extraordinary prayer?

God, won't you make us a church, God, that is so aware of our dependence on you and our need for you? And I want you to open our eyes to see the majesty of God that we cannot help but cry out to you in prayer.

[ 37 : 04 ] Father God, we bring our vision as a church before you, to be a church that sees many gospel communities grow in Hong Kong, that advances the kingdom of God.

God, we pray, use us, Lord. God, as you did in the New Testament, as you did in the Book of Acts, as you did in the first century, we say, God, here we are, use us, Lord. Lord, do it again in our day.

Do it again in Hong Kong. Do it again in Asia, we pray, God. Father, pray for our community. God, I pray, Lord, that we will be a church, a family, which extends unbelievable grace to one another.

God, when we hurt one another, when we say things that maybe are misunderstood, oh Christ, may the lubricating oil of the gospel soften our hearts and extend grace to one another.

Friends, maybe we can just take a few minutes to come before Christ and even come in repentance. You might want to repent or ask God to forgive you because you've embraced an easy life.

[ 38 : 29 ] Your golden life has been comfort and convenience. And there have been times when Christ has asked you to follow Him to Calvary, to pick up your cross, and you haven't.

Won't you come and confess that to Christ and ask Him to forgive you and to restore you? Friends, maybe we want to repent because of our prayerlessness, our self-centeredness and our self-orientation, our self-sufficiency.

Oh God, forgive us, we pray. Friends, maybe we want to repent because we've hardened our hearts towards other followers of Jesus.

We haven't shown the same grace to them that Christ has shown to us. Let's do that now. Christ, we come before your amazing throne of grace.

Christ, you are more beautiful than any treasure in the world. You are more glorious than any money in the world, God. God, you delight our hearts more than any other thing.

[ 39 : 57 ] Oh Christ, we let go of those things. We say we're sorry, God, for living for ourselves. Jesus, come and be Lord of our lives. Come and have your way, we pray.

Christ, won't you make us more like you?