

What We Need in 2024

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[0 : 00] Good morning and happy new year. If you are new to Watermark, my name is Kevin. I'm one of the leaders here. It's great to be with you and great to see you again and great to have seen so many of you at our Christmas service just recently.

I hope that after Christmas you manage to get some rest and recuperate after the Christmas rush. Get ready for the new year. I know that we have the Lunar New Year in a few weeks time for many of us in Hong Kong.

That's a big event. And if you have children in school, it doesn't feel like a new year because the academic year hasn't started. And so it just feels like life just kind of goes from 2023 into 2024 very quickly.

But here we are, 2024. It is the start of a new year. I wonder how you're feeling about this new year. One of the things I love about the new year is a chance to slow down, to think, to pray, to reflect, and to process a little bit of the year that's gone but also the year that's to come.

What is it that I'm hoping for this year? What are some ambitions? I often like to think of what's one word I want to capture for this year? And I love doing this for me personally but also for our family.

[1 : 16] For our family, what are some of the things we want to prioritize this year? What are the rhythms or activities we want to start? What are some things we need to stop? What is this year going to hold?

And how can we move from death to life, from pain to joy as a family? What are the two or three things that are going to characterize our lives, our family this year?

But if that's true for us personally, if it's true for a family, what about us as a church family? What are some things that we're going to prioritize this year?

What are the things that God is calling us to? Of course, as a church family, we can't do everything that comes to mind. We just don't have the bandwidth for that. We can't be everything to everyone. But what should we do?

What should we prioritize? What are the most important things to keep at the forefront of our minds? Now part of what makes this question difficult to answer is that there's some things that we can do.

[2 : 14] We can prioritize devotions and our worship to God and faithfulness. But there's actually many things that are out of our hands. It's only in God's hands. The things that only God, the sovereign God, can do.

God is not a slot machine that you put in a bunch of prayers and out come the results, right? But there's some things we can do, but there's many things that only God can do. So as we think about this question, I want us to go to a passage of Scripture in the Old Testament, a very famous passage in Ezekiel chapter 37.

And we're going to look at it, and we're going to get from this passage some things I think God wants to speak to us about, but here's hard for us this year. So on that note, let me call up Rachel, who's going to do the Scripture reading.

Let's listen to the reading of God's words. Over to you, Rachel. Good morning. This morning's reading comes from Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37.

Starting in chapter 36, verses 22, we read, Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God, It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

[3 : 29] And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses.

And from all your idols I will cleanse you, and I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I give to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Then in chapter 37, verse 1, we read, The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the middle of the valley.

[4 : 46] It was full of bones. And he led me among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry.

And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, you know. Then he said to me, Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

Thus says the Lord God to these bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

So I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was no breath in them.

[6 : 06] Then he said to me, Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Then he said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost.

We are indeed cut off. Therefore, prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you into the land of Israel, and you shall know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people, and I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land.

Then you shall know that I am the Lord. I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord. This is the word of God. Great.

[7 : 34] Thank you, Rachel. Thanks for that long reading. Hey, let's pray together as we come to God's word. Heavenly Father, Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, the triune God, we come before you this morning, God, the first Sunday of the new year.

God, we come to your word because we want to hear from you. We don't just want your word in our heads. We want by your spirit for it to lodge in our hearts. We want you, God, to speak to us.

God, I pray that you by your spirit will do what we cannot do, what I cannot do, that you will cause fresh life in our heart and our souls, Lord.

Lord, as we come to the start of this new year, in some ways, one day doesn't change from the next. You are faithful forever. Just as you have been faithful, you will be faithful.

In some ways, God, you are not doing anything particularly new. You're doing what you always have done. But God, also, this new year is a chance to dream afresh, to think afresh. Lord, why don't you come and have your way in our midst this year.

[8 : 38] I pray for us as a church, Lord. I pray that we will be very attentive to your spirit, very attentive to your leading, your guiding. I pray that our hearts will be soft towards you. God, we need you.

We say, Lord, that we need you. Each one of us individually and as a church family, as a city, God, we need you. We need you to move in our midst. God, you know each one of us, the fears, the joys, the anxieties, the hopes, the dreams, and the worries that we have.

Won't you come and meet each one of us at that place? Come and minister to us. Come and draw near to us. Come and be our Father. Come and fill our hearts with your love, we pray.

God, this year, we want to walk closely with you. And so now, as we look at your word and for the rest of this year, come and draw us closer to yourself, we pray, God. Lord, we pray these things in your wonderful and your gracious name.

Amen. Amen. Well, we're looking at this passage, Ezekiel 37. Ezekiel is not an easy book of the Bible. I encourage you to read it, but it's not necessarily easy.

[9 : 44] And the context is this. Ezekiel is a prophet in the Old Testament, and he is given a message to God's people who are the nation of Israel. And the book of Ezekiel, really, Ezekiel's message contains three things.

It is an explanation. It's explaining why God's people, the nation of Israel, are in the condition that they're in. As we're going to hear in a few minutes' time, they're in a very bad state.

Things are not going well for them. And Ezekiel is explaining to them, this is why you're in this place that you're in. It's also a correction. Ezekiel's not just saying, this is the way things are.

He's saying, this is the way things are, but come back to the Lord. It's a call to return to God and to follow Him. But it's not only an explanation of why things are bad and a call to correction.

God's Word always contains a promise, a promise of hope. God speaks through Ezekiel and says, I will do something for you or better, in you, something that you cannot do for yourselves.

[10 : 55] But first, before Ezekiel gets there, before we get there, Ezekiel's going to explore the devastating condition that Israel are in. Their condition is very bad.

And it's a result of their refusal to love and follow their God, their covenant-keeping God. And so God has handed them over to their very worst nightmare.

Their worst nightmare has come upon them. Their worst enemies, the Babylonians, have come and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel.

The Babylonians, this ruthless nation from the northwest, have come. They've burnt the crops and the fields. They've destroyed the houses, destroyed the land. They've destroyed the temple.

They've killed hundreds, thousands of people. The temple, they've taken the very best articles, the furnishings of gold and silver. They've removed them for themselves and set them up in their own temple in Babylon, this pagan temple, which is sacrilegious.

[11 : 56] And the rest of the temple, they've burnt down. They've brought pigs into the temple, which if you're a Jewish person it's kind of the worst thing that you can do. They've killed lots of people.

Some of the strongest and the best and the brightest, they've marched off to Babylon to use as servants and slaves in their empire. The rest have left for dead. And then they take the king.

They kill his children before the king's eyes. They poke out the king's eyes that the last thing he sees, his last memory will be seeing his children die before him. And they put him in chains and shackles and they march him off to Babylon to be their slave.

And it's almost impossible to describe the intensity of the devastation and the hopelessness that God's people feel at this time. Their loss is a total loss.

It's political loss obviously, financial loss, okay, they're now desperate. It's relational loss. It's a physical loss.

[13 : 03] It's spiritual loss. The worst thing about this is their sense of abandonment by God. To almost everyone in Israel it seems as if God's promises have failed.

God has not kept up his covenant. What of all those promises that God made to him about I will give you a king who will stay on the throne forever? What's happened to that? What about God's promises that they will possess the land and drive out their enemies?

What about God's promises of being a shield around them? A prince of peace Alan spoke about a few weeks ago. A wonderful counselor, a mighty God, everlasting father. Where are all these promises now?

And so the essential question facing Israel at this time God's people is has God's promise that patience ran out forever? Has God's promises failed?

Were we foolish to think that God would come through for us? Has our faith been an exercise in futility? Friends, I wonder if these questions have ever crossed your mind.

[14 : 12] Maybe you're someone who you're used to at the start of the new year have dreams and hopes and ambitions for the year but you've long gone given up on such futility. Maybe you've abandoned such thinking.

Maybe you've concluded there's no point in really planning for the year it's just going to end in disappointment anyway. Maybe the idea of the promises of God's covenant faithfulness, his steadfast love seems like wishful thinking at best a cruel joke at worst.

Well it's into this context that God speaks his word and his word is like a ray of sun breaking in through the clouds on a dark and overcast day because God speaks a word of hope.

Hope to a people that are facing hopelessness and God gives Ezekiel a vision and in this vision he takes Ezekiel to a valley and the valley is a valley of desolation.

A couple of times previously in the book of Ezekiel God takes Ezekiel he gives him a vision of a valley at both times this is a vision of judgment but here it's different it's a vision of hope.

[15 : 25] In this vision that God gives Ezekiel the valley is covered in sun scorched bones dismembered skeletons a long abandoned nation. These aren't just one or two skeletons one or two unlucky people who came to an unfortunate end.

This is an entire army an entire nation who have come to a horrible end. We all know that to not give somebody a decent burial is a very humiliating thing.

To not give somebody an honorable farewell. Here is a nation of people that have come to an unfortunate end but more than that there's some kind of curse there's some kind of judgment nobody has buried them they've been left for dead they've been left for humiliation and shame.

I think of when I read this passage I think of the killing fields of Cambodia if you've ever been to Cambodia and you see just these statues of skulls that they found or maybe the concentration camps in Europe and World War II just endless bones of people that have been left for dead.

Look at verse 11 in your bulletin with me verse 11 says then God said to me son of man these bones are the house of Israel behold they say our bones are dried up our hope is lost we are indeed cut off Ezekiel realizes these aren't just any bones this is a picture of God's people this is what God's people have become but of course the point of the vision is not just what God's people have become it's what God is going to do with them Ezekiel knows the depth of despair to which Israel has fallen he's been speaking about it for years for years he's been warning them saying Israel your future is looking bleak but the point of the vision is what God is going to do with his people who have become a shadow of what they're meant to be and what is God going to do he's going to do with them and in them what they cannot do for themselves he's going to restore them he's going to renew them he's going to resuscitate them and give them new life

[17 : 31] God is going to revive them look at verse 3 to 10 with me it's quite long but let's read it together Ezekiel says then God said to me son of man can these bones live I answered him oh God you alone know that's a great answer by the way Ezekiel knows okay the natural logical answer is not a chance imagine you're a doctor you've got a couple of doctors you're working in A&E; at Queen Mary and you get a call paramedics coming we've got a dead patient on a stretcher coming in get ready with the resuscitation equipment okay we're ready and in comes a dry skeleton okay these bones are not going to live can these bones live not a chance but Ezekiel knows God is in the habit of doing the miraculous and so he says I don't know God you alone know verse 4 then he said to me prophesy that means speak God's word over these bones and say to them oh dry bones hear the word of the Lord thus says the Lord

God behold I will cause breath to enter into you and you shall live I will lay sinews upon you cause flesh to come upon you cover you with skin and put my breath in you and you shall live and you will know that I am the Lord God so I prophesied as I commanded and as I prophesied there was a sound behold a rattling bones coming together bone to its bone and I looked and behold there were sinews on them and flesh was covering them skin had covered them then he said to me prophesy to the breath oh son of man and say thus says the Lord God come from the four winds oh breath breathe on these slain that they may live so I prophesied as I commanded the breath came into them and they lived and stood on their feet an exceedingly great army God's word to his people as I said is that he's going to do something in them something to them before he does anything for them God is not just going to improve their circumstances he's going to renew them

God's not just going to change their circumstances he's going to change their being their very essence their identity God's not just going to simply bless them he's going to revitalize and renew them you see the problem facing God's people is not a superficial problem they haven't just come with a broken finger just a slight cut or need for antibiotics these people are in desperate need for renewing okay well that's good and well but the question is what does this have to do with us today I mean nice history lesson ancient Israel good for them here we live in 21st century 2024 Hong Kong what does have it's the whole point of

Christmas why Jesus came it's the point of Easter why Jesus died on the cross the whole message of the Bible every page of the Bible drips with this truth that God takes those who are dead and broken and lost and God does something in them and to them and for them which we could not do for ourselves God revives the dying and the dead God renews us listen to how the apostle Paul writes it in Ephesians very famous he says as for you as for me we were dead in our trespasses and sins in which we once walked following the course of this world the prince of the power of the air the spirit is now at work in those who are disobedient among whom we all once lived following the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of our body and mind we were by nature children of wrath that means we were by nature dead under God's judgment having no hope but

God being rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us we spoke about that on Christmas right for God so loved the world that he sent his son because of his great love with which he loved us even when we were dead it's not when we had done a whole lot of good things when we were dead he made us alive with Christ by grace you've been saved and he raised us up with Christ and seated us with Christ in the heavenly places so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable greatness of his riches of kindness towards us in Christ by grace we have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing it's a gift of God not of works so that no one can boast friends if you are a Christian this morning this is how you became a Christian not because you did a whole lot of good things but because God poured faith into your hearts so that you cried out to him recognizing your sin asked him to have mercy and

[23 : 00] God took you who are dead and made you alive again in Christ Jesus friends the good news of Ezekiel to Israel is the same good news of the gospel to you and I today this is what God is doing in the world and if you're not a Christian this morning this is what God wants to do in you and through you and for you God is calling friends our faith apart from God's reviving work is the faith of eternal separation for God in hell forever but our faith by God's grace can be an eternal embrace by God in glory of his love forever this is what God is doing in the world and this is what

God is still doing okay but now the question is well some of us many of us here are Christians already so you may say okay well that happened to me back in 2010 God changed my life radically I was one person I met God changed my life amazing but now it's 2024 so what does that have to do with me or maybe happened much earlier 1995 or 1975 what does that have to do with us today we've often said this but the gospel is not just the way into God's kingdom it's the way of God's kingdom it's not just the doorway that you walk into it is that but it's also the pathway that you walk in God's kingdom as Tim Keller famously used to say the gospel is not just the ABC of the Christian life it's the A to Z of the Christian life in other words when God by his spirit moves to renew and revitalize and restore for some people that means getting saved born again for the first time they encounter the living

God and God changes their lives I was chatting to someone recently that happened to them just a few months ago this year last year not this year change your life amazing praise God but friends for some of us we might be what we call nominal Christians maybe you've grown up in the church you always go to church you part of a CG you do the Christian thing nominal means you're a Christian by name but not by essence in those your heart hasn't really been changed revitalized you've never encountered the living God he hasn't changed renew you restore you but for some of us we may be what you call sleepy Christians in other words we just sleep walking our way through the Christian life right it's kind of like our faith is on airplane mode it's there but it's in the background it's not really having any vital impact in our day to day life we actually more focus on work and money and career and children but it's kind of in the background

God wants to revive us and renew us and restore us and for some of us in fact probably all of us just the reality of life has a way of wearing our faith down and our love for Christ down and you start off Monday on a high and by Friday you just try to hold on friends God wants to renew us and revive us and restore us and so what that means is that all of us whether you're an elder pastor or whether you've just slunk in at the back from a difficult weekend all of us need God's renewing reviving restoring renewing work in our lives but notice something else in this passage how does God do this what are the tools what are the mechanisms that God uses does he say Ezekiel go to the bones and say abracadabra no he doesn't do that right Ezekiel go and lay your hands on the bones no he doesn't do that

Ezekiel go and spray the bones with holy oil from Israel no he doesn't do that what must Ezekiel do notice there are two things that God uses to revive his people Israel he uses his word and he uses his spirit look at verse four with me it actually says it all over but look how many times he talks about the word prophesy verse four then he said to me prophesy over these bones and say to them oh dry bones hear the word of the Lord so I prophesied as I commanded verse seven and as I prophesied there was a sound and behold a rattling and the bones came together bone to its bone now I mentioned this briefly earlier the word prophesy doesn't mean to predict the future we sometimes think prophets are those who can foretell the future they can predict the future and the reason we think that is because in the old testament often the prophets come to Israel and they say

[28 : 10] Israel if you don't turn from God this is what's going to happen and then they don't turn from God and that is what happens and so we think prophets are those who can predict the future to prophesy just means to speak God's word on behalf of God to God's people so a prophet is someone who speaks God's word on behalf of God to his people notice how often what does God tell Ezekiel to do Ezekiel prophesy in other words speak my word speak my word to speak my word Ezekiel don't speak your words give my words that I give you because my words have life have power friends in God's economy God's power and authority are not found in people but in his words in other words in a great church it's not a great leader or great pastor that has power authority the power and authority don't reside on the person it resides in

God's word that God speaks it's one of the reasons why as a church we want to preach expositional sermons because who cares about what my ideas are or Neil's ideas you don't come to church to hear our thinking who cares what we think what we want is what is God saying to us it's God's word that changes people's lives God's word has power and authority which we God's people are called to speak and so in the vision God gives it's not Ezekiel the man of God who causes the bones to live it's rather something that God does as Ezekiel speaks God's word but notice the word itself is not enough because look at verse 7 and 8 Ezekiel says so I prophesied I spoke God's word as I commanded and as I spoke there was a sound and the rattling and the bones come together I looked and behold there are sinews on them flesh has come upon them skin has covered them but there's a problem in the verse 8 there was no breath in them in other words they come together but there's no life verse 9 then he said to me prophesy speak

God's word to the breath prophesy and say thus says the Lord come on them and they lived and stood on their feet an exceedingly great army now in the Hebrew language the word for breath or wind and spirit is the same word it's the word pneuma like you think of pneumonia is where we got a problem with our lungs right that's about as much as I know is pneumonia pneumonia is the way of breathing our lungs so the word breath and spirit in Hebrew is the same word is just as lifeless bodies are nothing without breath in their lungs so a person that thinks of themselves as a Christian or a church is nothing without God's spirit in our hearts reviving us and renewing us it's why later on verse nine he talks about the breath and then later on he says

I will cause my spirit to enter them why it's the church without the spirit of the living God illuminating our minds reviving our hearts making us more like Christ is no more a church than a lifeless corpse is a husband or wife a son a brother or sister and so here we have one of the greatest pictures in the Bible of how the word and the spirit work together how does God revive and renew people through his word being spoken prayed and sat under and submitted to it's why we have the Bible reading plan so that hopefully every one of us every day are getting into God's word and letting God's word speak to us and change our hearts but friends God's word alone if it just sits in our minds is not enough we need God's spirit to take the truth of these words and write it on our hearts and to change our hearts we need God's spirit to penetrate our hearts and illuminate our minds and correct our thinking and arrest our prejudices and expose our sin and weaken our pride and ultimately change us to become like

Jesus so what does this mean for us one of the things it means is we need to be a church that prays we need God's word but we need God's spirit as revelation chapter three where Jesus says to one of the churches I know your works your many works and I know you have the reputation of being alive because you look like you've got it all together but actually you did how do we come alive we pray God we need you we need your spirit to come and work inside of us God come and let your word your gospel so penetrate our hearts and our minds and our wills and our emotions and our pride that it changes us that it takes that which is dead or dying or sick and it makes us alive again now one last thing before we get to practically what does this mean for us look at chapter 36 that Rachel read to us there's lots we could say in this passage but there's one thing found in chapter 36 that is actually throughout this whole section in

[33 : 39] Ezekiel but it's really important why does God do this why is God going to revive and renew his people and why doesn't God just say I'm done with you let's just start again what is the motivation of God's heart well look at what he says here is it because we are the good ones you know we the grade students we are the top of the class we are the best of the bunch and so God looks at us and says watermark I really need you and so I'm going to do work in you that you can be your best no that's not the reason look at what he says in chapter 36 verse 22 thus says the Lord therefore say to the house of Israel thus says the Lord which you have profaned amongst the nations to which you came I will vindicate the holiness of my great name which you have profaned and the nations will know that

I you and I will cause you to walk in my statutes and to obey my rules friends what's God's point here the point is that God is reviving and renewing and his work is always a work of grace not by works friends it's done for the praise of his great name not the praise of our great name the point is not that God says I will lift up water marks or we'll see how great he is friends when God sends his spirit to revive and renew us it's not because we are worthy it's because he is worthy of worship it's not because we are holy or righteous or wonderful it's because he is all those things he will glorify his great name amongst us and our response will be great are you

Lord okay are you with me okay so what does this actually mean for us well let me close with just a couple of thoughts for us this year in 2024 what should we be thinking about focusing on prioritizing in some ways if you've been coming to Watermark for a while none of this will be new but anyway here we go again in 2024 friends let's be a community that cherishes the gospel we've only scratched the surface of the Bible's teaching of the new life that is in Christ but Watermark let's make sure we are crystal clear on the good news of the gospel and what Jesus did Jesus came not to simply improve our lives Jesus came not simply to give us life insurance from hell one day Jesus came not to give us good advice how to live our lives Jesus came to take people who were dead and lost in themselves and had no hope of save themselves and came to revive us and renew us

Christ came to save us from eternal death and to give us an eternal life people like me people like you and so friends let's treasure the gospel let's make sure that this year we love the Lord Jesus Christ and what he did for us let's make sure we never lose sight of the wonder and the awe and the joy and the God saved us from hell and brought us into his family let's be a community of both the word and the spirit the temptation for all Christians and all churches is to focus on one or the other and so either we are very word people we study the word and we analyze it we know the Greek and Hebrew and we know all the cross references and we know our Bible it doesn't change our hearts sometimes we think it's so dry and we need the spirit so we go to the other side and we think

God just do whatever you want God but actually it's God's word and the spirit that works together and so what that means friends is let's get to know God's word this year let's get to know how God speaks to his word not using it as we wanted to say let's really submit to the authority of God's word let's let God speak to us through his word but let's not just let it resolve stay in our minds let's pray the word say God come send your spirit I need you God come and illuminate my mind come penetrate my heart come and arrest my will come reveal sin let your word be a spotlight let's ask God the Holy Spirit to renew our hearts and give us a passion for Jesus and the gospel cause him to love him above all else this year let's be a community of prayer prayer is hard work it's hard work that's why the apostle

[39 : 10] Paul writes and he says labor in prayer sometimes it does feel like that it's a labor but friends God almost never moves in power in a church or a city or a community without a bunch of people getting on their knees and saying God we need you prayer is our admission that we are helpless apart from God prayer admits God we need you prayer is us getting on our knees and saying God I am not enough friends what our church needs and what our city needs is not better leaders or better pastors though we probably do need that as well not a prophet to come what we need is God to move in our midst and I've got bad news for us none of the elders can do that we can't manufacture that only God can do it but we do have a father in heaven who loves to give his spirit and who loves to bless us and who loves to save us and loves to renew us and so let's ask him

God come move in our midst friends fourthly let's be a community that hates sin if you've been following the watermark bible reading plan this week you've been reading genesis 1 to 7 and you'll see the utter devastation we're going to look at it next Sunday the utter devastation that sin brings in the world and we this is God's chosen people his nation that he saved out of Egypt by the blood of the lamb the Passover led into promised land God's abundant goodness to them and yet their sin and rebellion has left them dead like dry bones in exile in Babylon friends sin is always more serious than we think it is and it always always leads to death death of relationships death of identity death of self worth death of knowing God utter and total mess friends

God loves to save sinners and he loves to bring people back to him but the path is often very painful it's very painful and so let's flee from sin let's hate it let's ask God to give us a distaste for it let's hate what sin does in our lives and in the world and our friends this is the greatest city in the world if you live outside of Hong Kong welcome to the great city of Hong Kong this is the best city in the world friends this city is full of people that don't know him and don't know the love of the Lord Jesus Christ this city is full of people who are dying because they are spiritually dead and this city is full of people that have never encountered the renewing revitalizing work of God friends there may be people that are very wealthy there may be in Ivy League schools perfect externalities they have the great house the great job members of all the clubs but their souls are dying friends let's love our city enough to tell our city about the love of the

Lord Jesus Christ that Jesus died on the cross for sinners like me like you like us like our city let's love our neighbors and our colleagues and our family members enough to speak God's word the gospel and then to pray that God will send a spirit to use his word to cause people to be born again so friends 2024 we have in front of us what should we do what should we prioritize well let's prioritize the gospel let's come back to God let's ask God to make us a church that is vibrant and alive because his spirit and his work is in light of us we love the Lord Jesus treasure the gospel love one another and love our city with the good news of Jesus let's pray together Lord Jesus Christ we love this dramatic picture in Ezekiel God as it shows us and explains to us in such dramatic and vivid form what you are doing what you have been doing for thousands of years

God saving people who could not save themselves God many of us in this room have encountered your saving grace our lives have been turned around by you and God we our result is as Paul says in Ephesians to the praise of your glorious grace all glory to you God thank you thank you thank you God for some of us pray won't you by your spirit cause us to be born again cause us to be saved God open the eyes of our hearts to see the depravity that we have that we are without you but the hope of Jesus God thank you that you loved us enough to Jesus come and die for us God I pray last for us as a church that we will be vibrant and passionately in love with you God that's something that only your spirit can do we can't manufacture it we can't force it we can't stir up the emotions

[44 : 25] God emotions fall down but what we can do is ask you by your spirit God to awaken our hearts to revive and to renew us God for those of us who are just sleepy we are on autopilot oh God won't you come and move in our midst God for those of us who are maybe nominal Christians we Christian in the name but there's no reality no essence come and save us God for all of us I pray this year that as we go to work and school and college and university and as we stay at home God you'll send your spirit into our hearts and we will walk with you we will love you we will treasure you God come and have your way in our church in our midst we pray in your great and gracious name Amen