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SPEAKER

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Acts 1:6-11



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Well, it's great to see you Providence family, both in the room, as well as for those who are at home. We're glad that you have joined us. If you have a Bible with you, if you would turn with me to Acts 1. If you don't know how to engage with a mission is truly worth your life. I invite you to these pathway classes. They're very helpful, they're informative, and I really believe that they will help you as they have helped so many other people to know, and to grasp and understand how they can leverage their life in something that is going to matter forever and ever. It is good to see all of you. I hope that you have had a really good week. This morning we have what I believe is an opportunity, and that is to look forward and to see what the Lord himself has for us and has led our hearts to really be excited about and so I pray that you'll lean in.

I want to pray for us now as we get started, okay? Father in heaven, we look to you in faith and ask that you would be gracious that you would overwhelm us with a sense of your presence, but also your goodness and your kindness and your mercy and your love. I pray God that you would help us Lord to recognize also your holiness and your righteousness, Lord, the weight of your presence. I pray that they would have a bearing on our life that we wouldn't simply read from the Bible and simply sing songs about glory, but we would recognize that the very word glory means weight. That you would weigh heavy upon our heart. That you would help us to recognize your presence. That you would help us to feel that you were consequential in life.

And father this morning, I pray that you would do the miracle and helping us to exchange our tiny myopic selfish vision for our life, for your vision for all human life. And that we would do just what it is that you say you want, and we would be filled with the knowledge of your glory. And so I pray that you would speak through weakness and that you would speak through all the various things that might distract us, both in the room, as well as for those who are in their homes. I pray father that Lord, that you would help each one of us to be incredibly intrigued, excited, interested, as we read to understand more of what this means for our life today, and that you would speak to us clearly enough that we would know just how to apply it to our life. So we look forward to what you're going to do in our lives. And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

So I want to show you a little picture before and after, this happens to be the same house, the same backyard, it's just a little time difference between one and the other. And I want to ask you something as you look at that picture and it's this, what is required to create this kind of transformation? What's required to create this kind of backyard, this kind of beauty and, and color, this kind of a garden? And you might look, you may say, "Well, it's going to take a lot of work and it's going to take a lot of money and it's going to take a lot of energy." It might take a lot of thought. In fact, it might take a lot of creativity, but there's something that proceeds every one of those investments. Even though each one of those things are absolutely important, it is costly, it is exhausting, it does require creativity, but before all of those things, there must be one other thing, and that is vision.

Somebody has to be able to see this in their heart before we can see this in a picture. With their eyes, someone has to be able to see what this can be while it still looks like this. And that's what we call vision. The ability to see something that's in the future, that's not there, that would create a readiness to sacrifice anything that

is necessary in order to bring that vision to pass in our life. The fact is every single one of us in this room, we have a vision. We have a vision for what's going to make us happy and we're willingly sacrificial to pursue whatever that is in order to bring it to pass. The question is, is that vision really going to make you happy?

It's interesting. You read through the pages of the Bible and we find that God Himself has a vision. He has the ability to look into the future and to see what isn't now, but what He knows will be and is willing to sacrifice in order to bring that to pass. And we actually find the same vision. It's spoken of various different ways throughout the pages of scripture, but this is one of them, okay? It's Habakkuk 2:14. It says, "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Notice, it will be filled. That's because it is not there now. Right now, the world's understanding and knowledge of God's glory, the glory of Jesus Christ may look like that initial backyard where there's very little beauty and there's very little recognition of His near and of His grace, the gospel that's before us. And yet the scripture say that God sees the day when it will take place. It's not, it might happen is He says it will.

That one day, just as every single thing underneath the sea is touching in every direction, the water. Is that the day will come when literally every single human heart well be fully absorbed and consumed with the knowledge of His glory, that every human being will recognize that Jesus Christ is utterly consequential to life. The day will come when every knee will bow. It says, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Heaven, on earth, and in hell. Every knee will bow and recognize that He is the only glorious one. And every tongue will confess Him to be Lord. And what we're told through the rest of the Bible after He lays out, this is what I see. This is the vision that I see moving forward. Is that we see that He is incredibly motivated and ready to sacrifice in order to bring this to pass. You see, this is why He created us in His image, that we would have a relationship with him, love Him and know Him.

This, we're told within the scriptures, is why God adorned creation with such beauty and splendor. It says, "The heavens declare the glory of the Lord." This is why after we sinned against God and broke fellowship with Him, that He promised a rescuer, a savior in order to reconcile us back into relationship with Him. This is why God sent His son Jesus Christ to the earth. The word was made flesh and He dwelt among us. As the word, He was the revelation. The one that would point us to God and help us to recognize and see and understand His glory. While Jesus was on the earth, this is why He performed miracles. In order to demonstrate His authority over life and over death and over evil, over water, over leprosy, over blindness.

This is why He opened His mouth before individuals and before vast crowds. And there He declared in such winsome words that capture the imagination of everybody, the coming kingdom of God. This is why Jesus Christ died willingly on a cross. This, we're told in Ephesians is why Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He says it was all for the praise of His glorious grace. This is why He forgives people. We're told in Daniel that He would be glorified. That the knowledge of His glory would be seen from sea to sea when people are forgiven of their sin. This is why He justifies. This is why He reconciles. This is why He heals. This is why He formed the church. This is why He commissioned the church to go and to make disciples in all nations, baptizing

them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is why He said, “You should teach everything that I’ve commanded you and take comfort because I’m never going to leave you, I’ll never forsake you, I’ll be with you to the end of the age.”

And this is why He’s sent us as a congregation. And this is also why when you turn to the last book of the Bible, He allows us to share what He sees by giving us a picture, a picture of His very throne, a picture of heaven where everybody there is in full conscious recognition of the glory of Jesus Christ. He does this in the hope of changing our vision for life. That instead of this myopic selfish view of how I’m going to spend the days of my life on the earth, He says, “What if you spent your whole life for something that would matter forever? When you turn to the book of Acts, what we find is Acts is the story of how real people who were moved by His vision, gladly sacrificed in order to bring the knowledge of His glory to pass throughout the globe. And Providence, this Baton is now been placed in our hands.

We have the gospel. The commission rest upon us. The vision lies before us. The question is this, what vision fills our heart currently and moves our hands to act? Well, in a deep desire, I believe we’re told in Acts 1 to help His friend, Theophilus to be able to not only believe in Jesus Christ, but also to run and to adopt Christ’s vision for the universe and for His own life. Luke tells us that He wrote two books. Two books that find themselves within the pages of the Bible. One of them is Luke and the other is Acts and this is what He says. Chapter one, verse one, “In the first book,” that would be the gospel of Luke, “O Theophilus I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day that He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit, to the apostles whom He had chosen.

He presented himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them, He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the father, which He said, ‘You heard from me for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit, not many days from now.’ So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time, the kingdom of Israel?’ And He said to them, it is not for you to know times or seasons that the father has fixed by His own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.’

And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into the heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’ Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath days journey away.” Verse 14 says, “And all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus and His brothers.”

Now, what is Luke attempting to do? He's attempting, I believe, to do at very least four things. To show Theophilus four things, but in doing so, He actually shows us the very things that would change our myopic selfish view of life into a God-sized glorious view of the way that we would spend the rest of our days. And I want to show you each one of these before I show you and tell you what I believe that God is telling us to do during this season of life together as a church family. The first thing that we see here is that Jesus fulfilled all that was promised. Luke wanted Theophilus to know that Jesus' life was not just a blip on the map, but indeed ever since God created the heavens and the earth, that God through the pages of the Old Testament was speaking of Jesus Christ before He arrived. That He was giving us the blueprint of what He would look like.

He was casting the mold to say, "This is what you should be looking for." You see, God almighty promised the savior who would be born of a virgin in the town of Bethlehem, in the line of Judah. And indeed Jesus was born of a virgin, Mary in the town of Bethlehem, in the line of Judah. He would be a prophet and a priest and a king to His people. As a prophet, he would speak words with such truthfulness and such accuracy, and such authority, that literally everybody that gave up self-government over their own life, that they would hear the truth and the truth would set them free forever.

That He would be a priest to His people. That means that when people would gather near this redemptive savior that would come, they would be brought near to the presence of God. And that this one who would come would be king. That He would have unrivaled, unmatched authority over all things, including physical matter and spiritual matter. Water and demons and food and wine, leprosy and skin cells and muscles, eye sockets, everything. He would be king over His people. The Old Testament tells us that this Christ would be the only one to live His entire life on the earth without any sin whatsoever and yet He would be condemned and crucified. And His crucifixion would be a payment that would literally heal us of our own sin. By His stripes, we would be healed. And that this Christ, this coming one would rise from the dead in power. Declaring, not only that, He has authority over life and death and sin, but also declaring from God almighty, the father saying that as proof that His sacrifice can forgive you of your sins, I'm raising him from the grave.

And notice what He says in verse three. He says, I want you to know Theophilus, that this Jesus Christ that He presented himself alive. That means His resurrected body to them after His suffering. That's His cross by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. You see what this means? It means that Jesus is the reflection of every promise in the Old Testament, pointing to the rescuer who would come. And we need to know this church family, I know you hear this frequently, but you should hear it one more time. You may die tomorrow, so you should hear it today.

Jesus Christ is our prophet, priest, and king. Jesus Christ died on a cross for our sin and He rose from the dead. And if you happen to be here or at home, and you're examining the claims of Christ, and maybe even looking at your life in utter despair of the wreck that your choices have brought upon to your own shoulders. I want you to know that you can be forgiven of all of your sin by simply trusting in Jesus Christ. He says that He takes away our sin and He gives us His righteousness. This is what is available to us in Jesus.

And Providence, whatever God has for us next as a church will not depart in any way from this truth that Jesus Christ died and rose again. That He has fulfilled everything that God promised that He would do.

The second thing, I believe that Luke wanted to show Theophilus as well as us is that Jesus ascended to release all that He fulfilled. This is amazing and yet we don't even celebrate this. This is perhaps one of the great tragedies in the church today is that we don't recognize the value and the supremacy, the overwhelming gift to us, that is the ascension of Jesus Christ. If you get to the place in your life where you recognize the value of the ascension of Jesus Christ, what it will do is fill your life with meaningful activity, selfless activity and I want to show you why. First of all, Jesus promised that He would do this. He promised that He would literally ride on the clouds and go back to heaven while He was on the earth. In John 14 Jesus said, "I am going to the father. I have told you before it takes place so that when it does take place, you may believe."

And that's precisely what it says that He did in verse nine. It says, "As they were looking on, He was lifted up and the cloud took him out of their sight and He went to heaven." And we don't celebrate this. You see, you go to any Hallmark store or you just look at the calendar, what you'll find is that we make a big deal out of three events in the life of Jesus. We're all over Christmas, we're all over Good Friday, and we're all over Easter. We love these and we should love these because each of these bring something to us of substance, of real significance. Christmas of course brings God himself. God took on flesh to come to us. He brings us joy and hope and peace. And then there's Good Friday. Good Friday is the day that He died on that cross and it brings us redemption. The word redemption literally means to pay a price in order to set someone else free.

We should celebrate good Friday because we all were caught in a cage called sin. We all had a debt before God we could not pay and Jesus Christ paid for it. And every single one of us as believers in Jesus Christ should love Easter because on Easter, Jesus rose from the dead. We celebrate His resurrection because on that day, He brings us eternal life for all who believe in Him. But listen, the ascension is what releases all that Jesus is and all that Jesus accomplished and He releases it to everyone throughout the world. You see, if Jesus did not ascend into heaven, He would be in one place at one time. That means if he's today in Jerusalem, he's not in your home this afternoon. He is not in your hospital room. He is not with you at the grave side. It means He's not with our missionaries scattered all over the world if He happens to be here.

So you see, the value of the ascension is that when Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven, He sent His spirit down and what it did is that it released all the benefits of not only who He is, but everything He has accomplished, not only to one person or to one people in a particular room with them, but to all the people in the entire world. And Jesus recognized this. This is why in John 16:7, He says, "It is to your advantage that I go away." Some of us say, "Wouldn't it be great if Jesus is live with us, if you would just still here on the earth?" Jesus says, "I disagree. It is to your advantage that I am in heaven and I send my spirit down because my spirit can be in all hearts at the same time." It can be with all people in hospital rooms. It can be all people during bereavement and death. It can be with everybody who's dealing with anxiety and depression. He says, "Because if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you."

You see what this means. It means to because He rose from the dead, there's no place that you can go where he's not going to be there. And you see, this becomes really significant when you start thinking about ascending to the throne. You see, each one of us, if we could get past the security guards, we could ascend the steps and sit on the throne of England. I mean, it's a chair. It's like real steps and then there's a chair. That's what it is. But you know what, if I happen to break through the security guards, run up the steps, sit on the chair, it wouldn't change anything in terms of my relationship with the people of England.

And this is the difference when Jesus ascended to the throne and us simply... that it's not just a spatial move, moving from one place to the next. What he's doing is he's taking His place on the throne and He is actually changing fundamentally the relationship that He has with His people in His entire kingdom. You see, from that throne, He is able to be everybody's profit. Meaning the one that would come and who would give us the truth. By His spirit, from His throne, He's able to teach each one of us. That's why you can read the Bible and we encourage you to read the Bible on your own, in your home, on your couch. And you know why? Because Jesus can speak to you in that moment. From His throne because He ascended, He is the great high priest. That means that anybody throughout the entire earth who trusts in Jesus Christ are actually brought near to God.

And from that throne, he's the king over all of His people, exercising authority and dominion over our lives. You see, this is why as His 11 remaining disciples stood frozen, as they looked up, as Jesus went up, they no longer saw him anywhere. Just looking up. That's probably what I would be doing too. I'd just be looking up. Most commentators believe that they were stewed. It says stewed, meaning they were they're frozen. They felt bereft. Their teacher had left. The priest had left. Their King had left. The one that they were following had left. So what did the angels say? They said, "Why do you stand looking into heaven?" Do you know what they meant? They meant, "Oh, disciples, don't view this as the loss of Jesus leadership and intimacy and friendship and protection over your life. Instead, see it as utter gain for no matter where the mission takes you, He will be with you by His spirit."

The one who accomplished everything, releases all that He accomplished to us because He ascended and He is at the right hand of the Father today. But there's more, the third thing I believe that Luke wanted Theophilus to understand is that Jesus will return when the mission is fulfilled. He will return when the mission is fulfilled. It's a beautiful thing that Jesus Himself continues His ministry. You know, most of us, when we read the gospels, we naturally just assume, "Oh, this is what Jesus was doing and this is what Jesus was teaching." And we look back on that moment and we recognize that that was the ministry of Christ on the earth.

And then for whatever reason, when we turn to the book of Acts and we started seeing people like Peter and Paul and Silas and they're preaching, and they're doing their ministry and they're planting churches and you see all these men and women throughout the book of Acts, we just wrongly, but naturally go the gospel is where Jesus is at work and Acts is the church at work. But notice how Luke begins Acts, "In the first book, O, Theophilus I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach."

Now the word began, there's an assumption that something else is coming, that He didn't finish it when He was on the earth. His teaching ministry on the earth was not completed while He was in physical space here on the earth with a human body. He says, He only began to do it then. In other words, in Acts, what we find is Jesus continued teaching ministry. Well, how? Well, it's through people and these disciples, still they didn't understand which is tragic because it says that they'd actually spend time with Jesus for 40 days and He was telling them more about the kingdom. It was during these 40 days between the resurrection and His ascension is when they gave him the great commission to go into all the world, to make disciples, to baptize and to teach.

And yet they didn't understand that. We know they didn't understand because when you get to verse six, this is what it says, "Lord, will you, at this time restore the kingdom of God?" Will you? I want you to look at those words. Will you? This is important because then look at verse eight. Jesus says, "No, no, look, times, seasons, that's up to the Lord. But let me tell you something," verse eight, "But you will." Verse six, "Jesus, is it now time for you?" Jesus says, "Now it's time for you. I'm going to do it through you and this is how. You will receive power. You don't have the power. You're powerless for what I'm going to tell you to do, but you're going to receive the power when the Holy spirit has come upon you and you will," there is again, "Be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

What he's saying is this, is that when you Christian, tell somebody about Jesus, that person is actually hearing from me. Is that you can actually tell somebody the gospel and for those people who believe isn't this, the truth with you? Somebody told you the gospel, and yet didn't it feel authoritative from God Himself saying, "This is true, listen to me." This is the power that Jesus makes available to us. And then He gives us another promise in verse 11, these angels, they said, "Oh, by the way, this Jesus will come in the same way as you saw him go." And then, you know what, we don't know when, but we do know this in Matthew 24, Jesus said, "The gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come."

And so Providence, let's not concern ourselves with the times and with the seasons of when He might come. Let's simply be found faithful as His witnesses when He comes. The last thing I want you to see, I believe that Luke was teaching Theophilus was that Jesus releases power for His mission to those who pray. Jesus knew they needed power. Jesus knew they needed power that they did not have among themselves. And so notice what it says in verse four, it says, "He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit." I think it's interesting that word ordered. Ordered isn't suggest. He didn't recommend, "Hey, you know what, just been thinking, it might be good for you just to go ahead and stay in Jerusalem." No, He ordered them. What that means is they didn't want to. "I know you want to go preach, you have no power. So I'm ordering you to stay and to wait for the promise of the Father."

And without perfect understanding, we're told in verse 14 that they obeyed. That all of these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer. And you keep reading the book of Acts and you get the chapter two, and what we find is this explosion of power that filled the disciples and these women in such a way that they began to tell people about the resurrected Christ. And we're told that on a single day, 3000 people came from death to life. They put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. You see, one of the things about God's mission is it must be done in God's way. And we get so caught up with this. You see, we've been filled with the Holy spirit, but we're not waiting for the Holy Spirit to come. He's there, he's within us. And yet the Bible tells us that we all have a disposition to lean towards self-sufficiency to say, "You know what, we could pray, we could do it that way, but what if instead we relied on our gifts of persuasion and eloquence and creativity, our abilities, and our intellect in order to help people to understand who Jesus is."

You see, we have to understand that like this picture, that the soul of humanity is encapsulated with I see unbelief. And God has not given you a single gift that can melt even a molecule of this eyes. Apart from him, apart from His spirit, you can't sing well enough, I can't preach well enough, you can't love well enough in order to melt somebody's unbelief from their heart so that their eyes can see the reality of Jesus Christ. The only way that happens is if His people pray and yet, for whatever reason, the church won't pray. It is a stunning act of unbelief and pride that we would give ourselves to anything but prayer, anything. And that's where the power is to accomplish the mission that would allow you to see your king face to face.

And so we have to pray. You see, we look forward now. We see our mission. But I want you to notice something. We say, "Oh, we changed our mission." No, the mission is not going to change. Our mission is to glorify God by introducing all peoples to Jesus Christ and to grow them up to love and worship Him. And you know, for 42 years now, as a congregation, as a family of faith, we have sought to connect together and grow together and serve together and go with the gospel together. We have shared the privilege of crying together, laughing together, burying loved ones together, seeing loved ones, marry one another together. We've been in hospital rooms together, we've been in homes together, we've been in services together, we've been on air-planes to take the gospel to the other side of the world, and we've done this all together.

For three years together, we have planted our lives in this church. We have planted the gospel in our city. We've planted churches in the world. And as we began to see the finish line of that vision, come to a close, we have been praying for over a year. Have been working on this. "God, what's next? The mission doesn't change, the pathway doesn't change, but where are we weak right now? Where are we strong right now? What can we do right now? What are our marching steps right now? Just tell us right or left. So what do we know? Well, we know a few things. First of all, we know that there is an absolutely urgent need with eternal consequence. Roughly 60% of our own city do not know Jesus Christ as their savior and Lord and then an additional 3 billion people around the world have little to no access to the gospel at all. And all of these people are in absolute, terrible peril apart from hearing Jesus Christ.

We also know that there's a clear commission from Christ. He tells us to go and make disciples. "Go and make disciples." He doesn't say talk about what that means. He doesn't say do Greek word studies on what that means. We tend to do that. We tend to do anything, but what He told us specifically to do. Like parents, when you go away for an afternoon and you tell your kids, "Listen, I want you to clean your room before I get home. I'm going to come home and I'm going to come check your room." If you get home, and they say, "You know what, we held a little study. We did a word study on what does clean your room mean?" Mom, dad only care if the room gets clean. Jesus said, "Go make disciples." Our plans were to launch today our five year vision. The last one was a three year, this next one will be a five year, but there's another factor that lies before us that you're all aware of, and that is that there's a pandemic affecting the whole world.

You see COVID has not changed our mission at all, but it has changed our lives and it's changed the lives of the people that we would hope to reach. You all know that we are limited in some capacity in terms of what we can do and where we can go. And yet we're at a stage to where we desperately need a vision as a church family, because without vision, the people perish. We start running in different directions, not knowing what direction we should run in order to contribute to the whole. And so just as athletes prepare for a new season, we want to take these months during however long, the rest of COVID is, to grow rooted. To grow rooted in four specific ways that are sensitive to our current realities and current restrictions that's unifying to our congregation.

Meaning that if we would all do this, we would literally come together as a congregation. But not only that, but these four things would be strategic and preparing us for the next vision that I would hope to roll out sometime at the beginning of next year. But what are those four things? Well, the first one is to gather, is to gather. It would be to reengage in physical corporate worship and groups when we can. Now I realize some of you say, "Well, I can't do that. My doctor said so." That's true. There are some of us, and I want you to know that if you are not here in person during the season, then we do not think any less of you. But what we find within the scriptures is that coming together as believers is critically important, not only to our courage, but also to our encouragement.

That we need one another, we're strengthened by one another. I realized that some of you are not going to come back to the building until we have a mass burning party in the parking lot. I get it, but you still need people. You need your people. And so find a way during this time, it may be three more months from now that you're more apt to say, "Okay, I think I'm ready." When you're ready, venture out to come back to gather together. And in the meantime, let me encourage you to go on our website. There's four amazing articles. They're called Why We Gather. Daniel Savage wrote those for us and I would encourage you just to read those and study those and recognize why once again, it's important for us to gather.

The second thing we can do during the season is we can learn. We can learn what our identity is as an ambassador and as a witness of Jesus Christ. And we can learn our part in God's mission and we can do it by two different ways. I want to encourage you to read your Bible on your own. There's a Bible reading plan that

we put together. If you don't know how to read your Bible, you can come talk to us. If you don't know what to read, you can follow the Bible reading plan. What you're going to find is that Bible reading plan marches through many books of the New Testament between now and the end of the year that specifically tell us how to be a witness, how to be an ambassador of Christ and what our part is in this amazing mission in order to see the knowledge of His glory, fill the entire earth.

Another thing that you can do there in terms of learning, is you can participate weekly in our sermon series. Next week, we start a book study in Colossians and the series is going to be Rooted because Colossians is all about becoming rooted to Christ in such a way that we are able then to reach people for Christ. I want to ask you, even if you can't be here in person, even if you can't listen on Sunday is to immerse yourself in the book of Colossians. When we get to November, we're going to do a three week series on Missions and they were going to do a five week series called God With Us, come Christmas. And then we would get to January when people are just starting to think, "I think I pray to God." We get to the place in January. I think I can get out again, but do I really want to. We're going to do a series on community. What does it mean to be friends with one another?

I want to encourage you during this season to learn. That's something we can do during this restricted season. The third thing we're going to do is pray. We have to pray. I want to encourage you to participate. On Wednesdays, over the last several months, we've had a prayer meeting. It started with several hundred people, and it ended with a handful of people that were participating in praying on Wednesday nights. I realize school has started, and we also know that our students now are starting to meet on Sunday nights. And so what we've done is we've moved those nights to Sunday nights so you can come in person or watch online but three nights on the first and third Sunday nights of every month, starting September 20th.

We're going to devote the time to pray that God would pour out His power upon us for the mission. Then fourth, we can all love. I want to encourage you to meet specifically, maybe for you, it's one person. Maybe you don't know any unbelievers. If you don't, maybe you can meet one. Meet one or two. If you shoot the moon, go ahead and aim for four, okay? Four. Identify four people that you can meet. Maybe you don't know who they are right now. Maybe they're a believer you don't even know. They're just a neighbor, but you could meet four people that you don't know. Identify for unbelievers that you could pray for weekly and find some way practically to bless once a month. To just get into the rhythm of our life of looking and seeing and pursuing and prioritizing people who may not know Jesus Christ as their savior.

These are things that we can all do and it is so important that we see it with our imagination. We see it because when we see it, we see what's possible if we would indeed deepen roots of our life. And so just imagine the mutual encouragement that will come to us as a body by gathering when it's possible with other believers. And imagine just for a moment, the motivation that will form within our own hearts, but understanding with clarity, our part in God's mission. And just imagine God answering our prayers for power and seeing hundreds or thousands of people trust Christ in the next year. And just imagine, just imagine the joy of

opening your own eyes after hearing your own friend, who has just prayed to receive Christ, say, amen. Just imagine what that would be like. And just imagine God smiling upon us because we did God's mission and God's power.

Do you know who will see these things with their eyes? Those who first see them in their heart. And so I urge you to envision what He might do if we grew these roots deep. And for those of you who have never trusted Christ, again, I implore you repent believing you can save yourself. Look to Jesus Christ, He's the greatest friend of sinners in the History of the world. He wants to be your prophet, your priest, and your king to teach you, mediate for you and direct your life. You trust Him, He'll forgive you and He'll give you His righteousness and you can do that right now, right where you're at. So let me pray for us.

Father in heaven, we love you and we thank you that you love us. We recognize your authority over our lives and pray now God, that you would stir our hearts with greater affection, not only for who you are, but what you have accomplished. We thank you Father now that we have the amazing privilege to be able to even observe. Lord, one of the things that we long to see is lives changed and so God, I pray that as we have the privilege to be able to observe baptism, God, that you would encourage our hearts and stir our imagination with a vision that maybe one day our friend would trust Jesus Christ and be baptized maybe in these same waters. And so God, would you do a great thing in our hearts, open our eyes. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.



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