

# Church belonging

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're looking at some aspects of the life and experience of a Christian and a Christian church and asking whether these are just optional extras. So if you've taken to heart what we've said from the passages of the Bible, I hope you found this material from the Bible very plain and clear.

Some people feel that the whole issue of baptism and communion is rather confusing and therefore they don't want to engage with it. But actually I think the Bible is rather clear about those two subjects and that we shouldn't hold back in those areas.

It's that the Lord commands believers to be baptised and we should be baptised. And he commands us to remember him in communion and we should come to communion as Christian people.

As Christian people have always done and God willing will always do. And we will do that and we will do that tonight. He shows us what we need to know and what to do.

So I just asked the question, are we obeying God? We've heard the word of God, are we obeying God in that matter? And this morning we're looking at another subject that many Christian people clearly feel is an optional extra.

[ 1 : 39 ] Belonging to a church or as the heading, as you'll see later, says, church belonging. Now this is a very big subject and it's open to all kind of interpretation.

So let me start with a definition of what we're discussing this morning. And I have it on the screen. So I read it out. What do I mean by church belonging? Personal identification and involvement with a particular community of Christian believers meeting and behaving together as a biblical church. And you might find that a mouthful.

A very topical issue, certainly in Great Britain. There appear to be a large number of Christians who do not join regularly with a particular group of Christians and for a variety of reasons.

And there are also a large number of people who attend church but aren't actually deeply involved in the life of the church. And I think this is a growing issue.

[ 3 : 02 ] I don't have statistics but I do have some representative stories which I want to tell you this morning. Representative stories of people that I'm talking about.

Let me say right from the outset, nothing I'm saying of these stories is relating to anybody in the church here. But of course, I may be saying something unknowingly that does relate.

But then God will take that to your heart. Simon became a Christian at university. He attended the Christian Union and helped in evangelistic summer camps.

Whilst at university, he joined other students on Sunday mornings at a large and lively church. In particular, he really enjoyed the teaching and help he received from one of the church elders.

His first job in another place brought challenges to his faith. Pressure and deadlines squeezed the time he used to give to Bible reading.

[ 4 : 07 ] And although he tried a few churches, he didn't find anything quite like the church he'd gone to when he was a student. Then he met Jane.

They went to church together a few times but she wasn't a Christian. Then Sunday started to become busy with other things. And he and they, they haven't been to church for six months now. And it seems unlikely that they'll be going again soon. Judy loved the worship. It was uplifting and invigorating.

But there didn't seem much time for Bible teaching. And she felt she needed some of this. And when a Christian friend from work invited her to another church, it was like a whole new world of possibilities opened up as the Bible was clearly taught.

At first, she didn't miss the worship time of the other church too much. But after a few weeks, she began to find this a problem. That was ten years ago.

[ 5 : 09 ] And over those ten years, she's been to a few churches. At first, she rather enjoyed the freedom of not being tied to one group. And rather pitied the people who just seemed to have one rather narrow experience of Christianity.

But there were problems. Some churches seemed to be strong on teaching. Some on music. Some on Christian friendship and service. And she's now a bit uncertain what she really believes.

She's heard a lot of different teaching over the years. She knows that there's no perfect church. But why are they all so imperfect? Some Sundays, it's less hassle to tune in to one of the websites and get whatever she feels she needs via the media.

And another thing she's never really got to grips with is the idea of serving. Well, she can't really because she's never sure where she's going to be from one weekend to the next.

And it's too late to start now. Sarah was heavily involved in her church.

[ 6 : 20 ] Though she was juggling family life, the school run and a part-time job, she really appreciated getting together with the Christians from church for a midweek Bible study, as well as the Sunday mornings.

She was on the road to several serving ministries. It was good to be part of the family. Well, good until she'd found herself getting upset with Vivian.

Vivian wasn't the easiest person. But Sarah did her best to get along with her. Then Vivian said something rather hurtful about one of Sarah's children.

Sarah was so stunned that she didn't know how to respond. She found being a parent difficult, and Vivian's comment only confirmed the fact that she wasn't a very good mother. Nothing more was said, but Sarah thought about Vivian's comment again and again.

Four months later, there was another incident with Vivian, and Sarah suddenly found herself blurting out unkind words which she couldn't take back. She tried to apologise, but felt she didn't do that very well either.

[ 7 : 28 ] Now both Sarah and Vivian are upset, and they avoid each other at church. It seems best, but it's still a shame. And Sarah feels that the innocent enjoyment of church life that she once had has been lost.

Occasionally, she misses Sunday morning because she hasn't got the energy to deal with the risk of encountering Vivian. John and Val were young Christians when the church split.

It was all rather confusing. They didn't know how churches function, but there seemed to be a falling out. And one Sunday, some of the prominent people in church life weren't there. There weren't any good explanations, and John and Val were left feeling empty and rather disillusioned.

They were glad that becoming Christians had given them a good foundation to live their lives by. Sometimes, but not often, they read the Bible and occasionally pray, but life is busy and the memory of those bad days at church is traumatic.

They don't want to face the disappointment of church life again. So it's four people at random, different stories.

[ 8 : 46 ] You may have met people like this. You may be one of those people yourself. Every story is different, but they have a common ingredient.

People have either never got involved in a church or have had some experience or life change that has caused them to lose that involvement. And there are plenty of good reasons why this happens, especially in the United Kingdom.

And I'll suggest a few here. We have a 24-7 culture where each day is just like another. Whereas even only 50 years ago, we had a culture where Sunday was a different day.

It's certainly not like that now. We work, we shop, we play on Sunday as much as any other day. This affects our meeting together as a church on Sunday.

Because there are certain people who are not in this building this morning because they're on shift work. Families are particularly affected.

[ 9 : 53 ] Events for children, family get-togethers, travel arrangements. If you want to keep Sunday special, you're going to have to negotiate some awkward family moments. Thirdly, the convenience of other options.

You can enjoy the finest worship bands, the strongest teaching, and the most uplifting experiences from the comfort of your sitting room. Especially on a cold, wet Sunday evening in November.

If it doesn't meet your expectation, you can change channel or switch off. And church life can be hard work with apparently little to show for it.

A lot of what we do as a church can appear to be and sometimes feel like a slog with little to show. We live in days when the gospel of Jesus seems to advance at a snail's pace in this country.

The experience of an average church like ours in the UK, and this is based upon the latest information from the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, says this, that a church like ours may expect to see 1 or 2% growth by conversion a year.

[ 11 : 15 ] What does that mean? That means in a congregation of 100 people, we might expect, on average, to see 1 or 2 people converted in a year.

In a year. That's a very sobering statistic, isn't it? Although don't forget, that that's exactly the proportion that Jesus referenced when he spoke of the good shepherd leaving a flock of 99 to seek out one.

And there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents. But if you're an investment bank, 1% return per annum doesn't sound very good.

And if we're living in that sort of culture, and we're running a business, and we're thinking about progress and so forth, 1% growth seems completely overwhelmed by the tide of the opposite direction.

So to be at work in a church, one has to have a spiritual mind. One has to hear the things that God says.

[ 12 : 33 ] But every so often, especially after a long day, it can be very easy to think, what is it all about? Where are we going? There is no evidence that any of these trends on the board here are slowing, let alone reversing.

These things are likely to be more of a challenge in the future. So with all these cultural pressures and opportunities, it's not surprising that Christians begin to wonder whether the idea of identification and involvement with a particular community of Christians is practicable.

And if it's not practicable, is it necessary? Now my purpose this morning is not to roll back the clock to recover a tradition that might have existed 50 years ago under a particular set of circumstances, but rather to try to set a vision of what God sets before us in the teaching of the Bible and the practice of the New Testament church.

And we can immediately take an enormous amount of encouragement from the thought that whatever God has said to us in the Bible about this subject is absolutely appropriate and helpful for us today as in any other times or generation or indeed in any kind of culture.

So clearly, Christians meeting in Burma or Indonesia or New Zealand or Angola or Chile are each in a very different culture to us, but we can all pick up the same Bible and the same passages of the same Bible and learn the principles that need to underlie our practice.

[ 14 : 22 ] So hallelujah for that. That's a glorious thought. I'm delighted we are to be in a multicultural, multi-ethnic, international group always on a Sunday morning and to be able to say what is being said here has absolute application for you as you go back into the countries in which you live.

It's particularly encouraging I think to consider the culture and circumstances that face the first Christians, the ones we read about in the book of Acts and the New Testament letters and to think that God's, in God's wisdom and purpose it was these people who first received and needed to work out God's word.

Those principles of God's word. So, what can we say about them? they didn't live in an era when one day in seven was special.

They lived in the Roman Empire and the Roman Empire didn't distinguish the days. So it's a bit of an aberration for us in the United Kingdom that we've enjoyed the privilege of having the idea of the Sabbath or the Lord's Day that one day in seven is special.

Most countries in the world don't enjoy that. And the New Testament Christians by and large didn't live in an era when one day in seven was special.

[ 15 : 59 ] Many of them were slaves. They were slaves. They didn't have the opportunity of deciding what days and hours they could be free.

they were just at the mercy of their masters. Their time was not their own. Many of them were strangers in foreign lands.

We know that a number of the early Christians had to live in places far away from their lands of birth because of persecution. There was a lot of cultural diversity.

And some sort of opposition was the common experience of most Christians. All of this meant that they couldn't rely on traditions but had to work out the principles of what it meant to be a Christian and a Christian church within the circumstances, the particular set of circumstances that they faced. And we are going to have to do that. We have to get hold of those Bible principles and to work out what that might mean.

[ 17 : 09 ] Now that's hard enough for an individual but it's very challenging to do that as a church community. But it's actually what we need to be able to do in order to be able to have integrity with these Bible principles and not just live in a nostalgic time warp where we wished everything was better.

better and different. So I want to draw attention to that particular passage in Acts and Philippians. We'll be referring to that. And I want us to get encouragement as well. The point I want to make from this is this, that the New Testament church of the book of Acts feels, to my mind, a lot closer to the situation we're in now than the church that might have been here and was here a hundred years ago.

Well, praise God. I'm just so glad the book of Acts doesn't talk about a nice Christianized country where people just trotted a log on a Sunday and the whole day was free for that and so forth. It doesn't talk in that language at all. Here was something, a radical new religion had come upon the earth and the people were despised or they were attacked, they were misunderstood, they were put in prison and that's the common lot of many of our brothers and sisters in other countries and I encourage you and I'll read it out at some point.

[ 18 : 36 ] John Benton has just written a most searing editorial article in Evangelicals now on this very subject and he's saying do you realise we are in the minority?

We are the ones who are going to be in the spotlight in future. We are the wrong side of public morality. We are the people who believe a number of things which is absolutely anathema to many people and we're in this city.

We're in this city. It feels like Book of Acts to me. It feels like we're going back to our roots. It feels like we're going to have to address the questions that the early Christians had to face and to see how they tackled it. Didn't always get it right but by the presence and help of God's spirit God did a work and by the presence and help of God's spirit he'll do a work with us.

In our time, in our generation hallelujah, the Book of Acts hasn't stopped at the turn of the millennium. It's not as if we've turned a new page and somehow we're going to have to find a new Bible to work from.

[ 19 : 59 ] God has spoken endearing eternal words which are for our blessing and encouragement to help us, these people here, now, today, to be able to live to his glory and praise.

So here were the New Testament churches scattered abroad and it's interesting to sort of look at that map and to think, well, here they were, they were just in Jerusalem, that day of Pentecost, 3,000 people, fantastic and no doubt some of those, they'd come for the feast so they spread out again to where they'd come from, the different places.

That was all God's purpose, wasn't it? So that they could actually be taking that good message through. But it was persecution that thrust some of those believers in Jerusalem out.

It was God's specific intervention that caused the Apostle Peter to have to go and meet some Gentiles. I can't be with those people. Oh, you will.

That's what I'm telling you to do. So the Apostle Peter has to go and meet with Gentile people. The gospel is sort of pushed out, thrust out by the power of God. It's God's Holy Spirit that causes Paul and companions to go into all these areas of modern day Turkey.

[ 21 : 21 ] It's as they are in this place here, near Troas. And they've wanted to carry on in here. But a vision comes in the night and tells Paul to go over, over, to come over to Macedonia.

That's Macedonia. And to Philippi. And Philippi becomes the first Christian church in modern day Europe. And it's all these thrusting works of God's spirit that caused the church to be expanded. and typically it's God speaking into these people's situations and telling them to do things that culturally they weren't equipped to do or they didn't feel able to do.

They were taken out of their comfort zone constantly. That has a message for us there, isn't there? So here are some snapshots of Bible churches and what mattered.

Well, we could spend a long time on the things that matter about Bible churches. But let me suggest as a number one and a cardinal principle in Acts chapter 2 verse 42 and I haven't got the page number up there but it's in your Bible.

[ 22 : 40 ] Acts 2 verse 42 it's page 1094. It says about these people immediately they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.

It's a good strong word. They loved it. Couldn't get enough of it. They actually allocated time to actually the apostles' teaching.

Now, it could just mean that it was the apostles who were doing the teaching at that time and therefore those were the people who were doing it but I think there's something more in here which is basically that it was by God's providence a method.

It was those apostles, the appointed ones, the sent ones who were given the prime responsibility of teaching the early church. What a crucial moment for them.

Which direction should they go? This is all completely new territory. So God causes these particular men to be set apart for this particular ministry.

[ 23 : 43 ] and such is the bigness of this ministry that they found out very soon that they had to drop other things in order to devote themselves to the word and prayer. It was important in the early church.

It was important for the early believers. It was absolutely critical. Paul, many years later, saying goodbye to the dear folk from Ephesus in southwest Turkey.

It's found in the book of Acts chapter 20 and verses 26 and 27. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

That's a kind of strong language to say you can't hold anything against me. I'll tell you why. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

I've taught you. I've told you things. I've told you things that are from God. It was a really cardinal principle in the apostles, Paul's personal life, his personal ministry.

[ 24 : 57 ] This was number one. But it was also very important for him as others needed to be appointed to carry on, to carry the baton forward into the burgeoning new church.

2 Timothy chapter 2 verses 2 to 4. 2 Timothy 2 verses 2 to 4.

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus and the things you've heard me say in the presence of many witnesses in trust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Teaching, teaching, so important. Chapter 4 verses 2. Preach the word, be prepared in season and out of season, correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

[ 26 : 07 ] They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. That's the reality. That's what's going to happen.

So Paul, it's not just teaching but it's sound teaching. There is a body of teaching which is sound. There is good teaching and there is bad teaching. There is true teaching and there is false teaching. It isn't just teaching. It has to be based upon the word of God. And as amazing as the word of God is as a book, it is not impenetrable.

It is not impossible that we should understand the things that God says. It is possible for us to be clear in our doctrine. It is possible for us to understand the character of God.

It's possible for us to be clear about the position of man and the need of salvation and the nature of grace and the person and the work of Jesus Christ. These things are not vague.

[ 27 : 11 ] They're not confused. They're very clear in the Bible. And Paul says, I make it my job and I make it my responsibility to pass it on to others, to pass on to others, that they should teach these things absolutely clearly so that no one should be in any mistakes.

So on the day of judgment it could not be said, I was never told about that. My church never taught me that. Good, sound teaching is an absolutely fundamental bedrock of a church community. we need it. And let me say as we think about the work of assistant pastor, this has been a very, very important issue for us.

We're not looking for a manager. We're not looking for a CEO. We're looking for somebody, a man of God who will teach sound doctrine in a Timothy-like way.

this must be our prayer. Because if you're not receiving sound doctrine you will receive false doctrine. We're like sponges.

[ 28 : 31 ] The world out there is telling us things constantly most of which are false. There is no God. Is that true or false? Well my Bible says there is.

But the world doesn't believe that. So it's false doctrine out there. It's false doctrine. If you distance yourself from a church community where sound teaching takes place you will inevitably be completely overwhelmed by false doctrine.

And equally I would say to you if you dabble in the internet in order to try to improve your knowledge you will be confused. by the hundreds of sites that peddle all kinds of things.

It wasn't a problem in the days of Timothy and so much the teachers came around they walked around you could see them but you press your button on the internet websites you could hear about anything at all.

and there's a market for it because we have these itching ears that Timothy speaks is spoken about. We have the itching ears tell me something new tell me something different.

[ 29 : 50 ] Sound doctrine. If we're not well taught we will definitely be badly taught. Are we facing up to the difficult passages of God's word as well as the comforting ones?

That's such a challenge for the ministers of churches to teach the whole counsel of God. we live in an age when people want to be stroked.

They say I'm tired I want to be comforted I'm in need fill my needs that's the back music of the age in which we live.

So it's hard for a man to stand in the pulpit and to say things which are challenging and make people upset but if God says things which make us upset we have to say them because you need it. Sometimes you need to be upset because upset leads to growth to change your mind gets different you see things as God sees them and the safest and the most blessed place for any of us to be is to be fully aligned with the truth as it is in Jesus.

[ 31 : 11 ] That's the safest place for us to be it's the best place. Close fellowship and shared lives.

It's delightful to see in that passage in Acts there Acts chapter 2 go back to that Acts 2 verse 42 there's a lot of detail in this particular passage but I just want you to get a sense of what was going on on those early days as early Christians.

They couldn't get enough of each other could they? They wanted to be together they took every opportunity to do so. The breaking of bread I think they were just having meals come around have a meal oh come around tonight come around tomorrow morning.

It was going on day by day by day the Christians were getting together breaking of bread. All the believers were together had everything in common.

They gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes together with glad and sincere hearts. you just get a very strong impression of people who loved being together.

[ 32 : 30 ] They devoted themselves to one another. They gave and they received. Apostle Paul later on talks about the fact that that's only really a reflection of a big reality that God by his spirit has created that if you're a Christian you are a member of the body.

It is true that we're a member of a vast worldwide body. We're a member of a body which actually goes back centuries and will go forward until Jesus returns.

But the Apostle Paul writing to individual churches like ourselves talks about this idea of the body in the context of the smaller group community.

And that's amazing. That's a wonderful thought. We are members of a body here. 1 Corinthians 12 27. Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.

So we're a part of it. And that means that we have a role to play. And others have a role to play towards us. And we need each other. We're all part of this together.

[ 33 : 44 ] I'm going to make a very obvious point. if you are not associated with a local body of believers you are not fitting in with a pattern that the Apostle Paul is describing here.

You don't know where you live. You don't know where you fit. The Apostle says find out where you fit.

Find out what part of the body you are. What you have to offer. You can only realistically do this when you have a close relationship with people.

When you know them and they know you. You see this beautifully expressed in the New Testament letters. People are named. I think it's a wonderful thing when people are known by name. It's your dignity. It's your dignity. You need to be named in this church. you need to be remembered by your name. Paul managed it.

[ 34 : 52 ] Remember that reading from Philippians? He talked about the ones who were in someone in Chloe's household, Epaphroditus. They had names. Individuals.

Their particular work is applauded. I really remember that good job that Stephanie did the other day. again and again he says, your fellow workers, fellow workers, I've been working with you.

We're in the same task together. They're prayed for, they're even agonised over. But there is more. Being close to other people can also bring out the worst in us.

Things we didn't think were a problem. So Philippians chapter 4, I deliberately wanted to read that passage, partly to bring out this point. That in Philippians chapter 4, Paul says, I plead with Aodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.

It's a rather astonishing thing. This is a letter which has been read out in public to the church in Philippi. And Paul says to them, I know what's going on. I gave you that story about Sarah and Vivian.

[ 36 : 05 ] And it's almost like Paul is saying, okay, these are funny names, but they're just breathing human beings like all the rest of us. I plead with Iodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.

These are good women. They've contended in the gospel, but they've fallen out with each other over something. But unlike Sarah and Vivian in my story, who actually couldn't make it up, they had to make it up.

They couldn't say, and they shouldn't say, I wish Syntyche wasn't in this church. I just wish she had a job transfer to Thessalonica. No, in God's providence, they've discovered something about themselves, haven't they?

I thought I was such a patient person until I met Jo. Oh, dear. I've discovered something about myself.

Syntyche discovered something about herself in the Odeo as well. And you think, this is disaster. It's not disaster, it's life. It's church life.

[ 37 : 22 ] It's what goes on. It's what happens. What is disastrous is if you don't handle it in the Bible way. What is sad is if Syntyche definitely makes an artificial transfer to a church in Thessalonica rather than resolving her differences with the Odeo.

What is sad is if Syntyche sits there and the Odeo sits there and that's where they always sit. What is sad is if they're both so stressed on a Sunday morning in case they happen to bump into each other that they can't devote themselves properly to the worship of God or to the service of God's people.

Satan has had a field day then, hasn't he? He's wrecked their ministries. Two people have been taken out of the frame. What is glorifying to God is if Odeo and Syntyche actually have the courage to do something which is very, very hard but to stumblingly attempt to reconcile to each other.

Build the bridges, mend the fences. Well, Paul thought that was certainly possible. He wouldn't have said it otherwise, would he? agree. I said, I plead with Odeo, and I plead with Syntyche.

Strong language.

Agree with each other in the Lord. Of course he's different persons, different personalities, but there's a lot you can agree on in the Lord. You don't have to be best buddies, but you have to be reconciled in Jesus Christ and to recognize that Aodia, Jesus Christ died for you.

[ 39 : 06 ] Syntyche, Jesus Christ died for you. He shed his blood, he was transfixed on a cross and shed his blood, he died for you, that's how much he loves you, each of you, how precious each of you is.

How are you doing? Accountability. How are you doing, the question, how are you doing, the question? You don't see this mentioned in the Acts of passage for the simple reason that the first days after Pentecost everything was wonderful and positive, but pretty soon there were challenges. Acts 5 tells of a shocking story, we won't look at it now, here were two people, Ananias and Sapphira, do you remember the story? They deceived the church, they deceived God, but they deceived the church as well, by withholding something of what they indicated they had given, and as a result, they died.

As a result of their misbehavior, they died. How you live affects you and it affects other Christians and it affects the reputation of Jesus Christ in the world.

The Acts 5 story is an extreme case, but it tells us that we have to be accountable to one another because though we are saints, we are still sinners. It's not enough for us to think that looking after ourselves is going to be enough.

[ 40 : 34 ] We need the encouragement and rebukes of others. We need the oversight and intervention if necessary of church elders. If you're going to be changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ, this is what you and I need.

the only way of doing that is to voluntarily commit to a single group of God's people. If you're trying to be a Christian by the internet and city room services, you have no accountability to anyone.

If you're attending different churches, who are you accountable to? Who's watching out for you? It's just so easy for people to say, I don't like what that person said about me.

I think I'll go somewhere else. If you're attending just one church but not formally putting yourself under the discipline and authority of that church, who are you accountable to?

Hebrews 13 verse 17 says, Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men whom has given account.

[ 41 : 48 ] obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you. Question eight of our membership service here in this church says this, do you submit to the informal and formal discipline of the church, placing yourself under its discipline rather than above it?

discipline. In brackets, I like that phrase. It was almost like, rather than above it, discipline's okay for other people but not for me. This is a very tough thing to say in 2016.

Very tough thing to say. It's really counter-cultural. But if you're going to take your Bible seriously, this is going to have to be a very important element of a church's life.

There has to be discipline. We expect standards of behaviour. We're under the authority of our captain Jesus Christ.

We're in his army. We're under orders. Paul says in Corinthians, you're not your own, you were bought at a price. Moving on swiftly, looking out.

[ 43 : 03 ] Again, you don't see this mentioned in the Acts 2 passage. It was the very beginning of the church had its hands full coping with 3,000 converts. But very soon they had to look out. As I've indicated, the Lord forced their hand by providence.

The church set aside its very best to see the gospel spread. I think we'd be pretty delighted to have Paul and Barnabas on staff here, wouldn't we?

Or maybe we'd find it very challenging. But actually, they needed to go out. They needed to go out. They sacrificed hugely in order to play their part to see God's people supported and Christ's kingdom extended.

Now, of course, we can get involved individually, but it's a really beautiful thing when a local community of God's people goes about this business deliberately and seriously. So, fellow elder Phil goes to Sri Lanka almost every other year.

Praise God. God. We're so delighted he can do that. We pray over that and we're blessed. Ben and Christopher go to Belarus.

[ 44 : 18 ] Praise God. Financial support is given for different churches and individuals and mission endeavours. This is how we experience, this is how we experience the remarkable diversity of God's kingdom.

So, if someone says to me, you've got a very narrow experience of Christian life, I say, no, we haven't. No, we haven't because we have some fantastic links with God's people in all other parts of the world.

This is the scripture picture. These are the core principles of how Christians need to function together for the glory of God. So, how does this work out in practice? Different churches try to express these principles in different ways.

For ourselves, we've decided the best way of fulfilling God's word is to have a clear list of those who have voluntarily and willingly committed themselves to Calvary Church and express that commitment by certain statements and promises so they become members of Calvary Church.

The commitment is deep and it's challenging. But do you think that being a Christian could be anything other than a life work? Some quick questions, objections.

[ 45 : 38 ] I'm a rubbish Christian, always failing. I couldn't ever be a member. I don't want to commit. It's essentially true of all of us, isn't it? We're all rubbish. We can only live and progress by God's grace.

Family commitments involve, it's very difficult to even think. if this is God's will, there will be a way. I've had bad experience of church involvement before, but shouldn't you do the right thing, even though there was a problem in the past?

Janet had always been shy. following the death of her husband, she moved to a smaller property near her daughter and grandchildren. That hadn't been easy. Actually, quite emotional and she was grieving and she wasn't convinced it was the right thing to do.

The local church was welcoming, but it's hard to make new friends and she couldn't help unfavourably comparing the church she'd come from and so enjoyed with the new one. Still, she persevered and began to appreciate the teaching.

The style wasn't the same, but the content was and she began to see old passages in a new light. It was a bit of a breakthrough when Amy invited her round for coffee. It wasn't easy for either of them, but they found they had much in common.

[ 46 : 58 ] Janet began to look forward to her coffee times with Amy and there was a need in the Sunday club. Janet felt rather relieved that she'd done her stint. Fifteen years in the Sunday club is a long time and it was hard work, time for a break.

Anyhow, she was too old. But the elder mentioned the need again in a few weeks later and Janet happened to have a conversation that touched on the same subject.

She mentioned it in her personal prayer and left it there, but the nagging thought came to her that maybe she could help. Months later and despite the hassle of interviews and safeguarding forms, Janet found herself sitting next to Ollie and Fred in Sunday club.

They enjoyed the craft, she enjoyed being with them and week by week she got to know them a bit better as well as their parents. Janet could begin to see God's hand in all this and how she had been brought by God's plan and purpose to be a part of the church.

And sometime in this process she asked to become a member of the church. That's another story. Let's close with a song.

[ 48 : 08 ] Oh Christ, the great foundation. This is a great song. Transcription by CastingWords  
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