

Week of prayer - finale

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[0:00] My phone in the car and you're probably wondering why is it so important that you have your phone in a Sunday evening worship meeting.! It is important because Daniel has WhatsApp me some points for prayer later on. So I think it's important to have those to hand when we come to pray.

Welcome all. Good to see you. I'll just get my breath back. I had to run to the car. It's an indicator of how unfit I am.

But it's good to be here and this is our last evening of getting together in terms of the week of prayer, isn't it? It's not our last Sunday evening of getting together, thankfully. But we are marking the end of our week of prayer and it's been a good week.

We've covered a lot of ground and I think this evening it will be very helpful for us to spend a good amount of time praying. Tonight.

Phil was meant to be leading the meeting this evening but unfortunately he's unwell. So I've been asked to lead it rather last minute. So apologies. I've got some reflections on what Daniel was sharing this morning.

[1:12] For those of you who are here on the theme of unity. So we can have a little think about that because I think it does connect quite importantly to the whole matter of prayer and what we're praying for in us as a church.

So we'll be looking at that again, just refreshing ourselves. But before we do that, let's just turn to Psalm 133 came to mind as I was thinking of a nice way of introducing this evening's meeting. Particularly when we think of the whole matter of unity. Psalm 133. Sorry, I don't know what page that is in the church Bible. If someone would like to call that out.

626. I've got a slightly different version but I shall read that out. 133. 133. A song of a sense of David.

Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. It is like the precious oil on the head running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron.

[2:26] Running down on the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord has commanded the blessing.

Life forever more. Our Father in heaven we thank you so much for this precious gift of unity. In a world where there is so much discord.

So much division. And so much conflict. And turmoil. It is something we mustn't take for granted as a church.

That we do know a measure of unity. It saddens us Lord when we consider the wider church. The universal church. And it is the truth that in so many ways there have been great divisions and strifes within the church.

Some have been needed for good reasons Lord. But some sadly haven't. But Lord we do pray as we consider these matters this evening. And we bring our prayers to you.

[3:33] Particularly in consideration of the future of our church here at Calvary. This little expression of Christianity in this corner of the world Lord. That you would bless us with your presence.

And you would lead and guide our thoughts and our meditations. And that they would be pleasing to you. And we ask this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

Well to start off we are going to sing. Mark's going to join me. And we're going to sing. Our first song is a well known song.

Behold our God. Can I ask someone. I don't know. Ask Emma. Could you just operate the clicker please. Thank you. Thank you. So when the music starts please do stand.

You might want to turn me down when we start singing Ashwin. Ashwin. Your goodness. Your dealings with us as your church.

[4:38] May we leave here this evening spiritually refreshed. May we leave here this evening encouraged and built up. And may we leave here this evening walking more closely and dearly with our precious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And we commit this to you in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well our scripture reading as was this morning is going to be in the book of Acts.

As you're all aware I think. We've been going through a sermon series in the book of Acts. And we've reached chapter 15. A very pivotal chapter actually in the whole book of Acts.

And I would go as far as to say a very pivotal chapter in the entirety of redemptive history actually. Some of the things that have been in the book of Acts. Some of the things that have gone on in this chapter in a sense have set the course for the Christian church.

I think in a huge way. Shall we read chapter 15.

[6:07] Shall we read chapter 15 verses 22 to 35 please. The apostles. The apostles and elders with the whole church decided to choose some of their own men and sent them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

They chose Judas called Barnabas and Silas men who were leaders among the believers. With them they sent the following letter. The apostles and elders.

The apostles and elders. Your brothers. To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia.

Greetings. We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you troubling your minds by what they said.

So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Saul and Paul. Men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements.

[7:27] You are to abstain from food sacrifice to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell. So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. Judas and Silas who themselves were prophets said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. After spending some time there they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them.

But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord. Thank you for that reading.

Thank you for that reading.

[8:55] Thank you for that reading.

Thank you for that reading.

Thank you for that reading. It depends how you define persecution. I personally don't think here in the West, or specifically here in the UK, we're seeing anything of the persecution that these believers saw in Acts, and some of our brothers and sisters in places like Nigeria or Pakistan.

But certainly it wouldn't be overly surprising if in time we saw persecution in the sense of social ostracizing, isolation, limitations in the kind of jobs and careers you could go into, so Christianity doesn't carry with it the kind of social kudos and status that it once did.

I think Christianity is generally seen suspiciously, although we are seeing indicators that maybe things could be changing amongst our younger generation, and I do hope that is the case.

[10:46] I've heard little bits and pieces of Gen Z being more open, actually, to the gospel. That's an aside. But here tonight we're thinking about unity, and we are blessed as well at Calvary in that we do have a

measure of unity, and that is not something to be taken for granted.

We often hear of other churches as they grow. I'm sure every one of you who has Christian friends from other denominations, different expressions of the faith, I know a few of my own experience, where there's been splits in churches, possibly over minor things, or when one particular personality has taken over a church in terms of prominence and status, and sadly that's caused problems. And again, it's an aside, but that's why we feel so strongly it's important that we have a plurality of elders and leaders. Because it's almost a check and a balance from someone who's got big ideas and a vision for the church, without being able to check those out and have that level of accountability.

It's very important. So we see here the threat to the unity of the church. Sorry, I keep brushing my arm against this. I'll try not to. And we see here that unity is essential.

It's not an aside. It's not a minor kind of doctrine that we can just choose to not take seriously. It's a critical doctrine. It's critical to the growth and the health of the church.

[12:18] You notice in the book of Acts, Acts often, and I thought about this as Daniel was preaching, this term, one accord. Have you heard that sometimes? Just popping up. They were all at a prayer meeting in one accord.

You know, you get the sense of being one mind, one voice, one accord. That sense of kind of oneness. It's hugely important for the growth and the health of the church. And this is, as I said earlier in my introduction, this is an essential time for the church in terms of redemptive history because this Council of Jerusalem isn't dealing with merely a minor secondary issue that we can kind of take or leave and it doesn't have massive ramifications.

It's a gospel issue, actually. And it's a time in redemptive history where the church is transitioning from being almost like a Jewish sect and becoming the Christian church.

They're working out their doctrine. It's a church, I said it last week on another matter, but if you like, it's helpful to think of the church in infancy. It's the church in infancy and they're working it out and they're transitioning from being a Jewish, mainly identified as, not that they were, but identified by the world around them as a Jewish sect to truly a Christian church.

And they always were, obviously. I'm not saying they weren't. So these things are going on. And Daniel reminded us of these things and reminded us of three points. He talked about how in these texts we see the leaders striving for unity.

[13:56] He reminded us of the spirit to protect unity. That's in verse 28. And then the third point, a church who is glad to be united.

Let's just revisit them just to refresh us a little bit and consider that. I thought it was helpful for Daniel to remind us that unity is something Christ spoke of and spoke of very clearly and very beautifully in the Gospel of John.

I'm going to turn there because I think it was a very good place to start. The Gospel of John, a well-known text. John 17, John 17, verse 20.

John 17, verse 20. I'll read it out. This is Christ's high priestly prayer.

I do not ask for these only, these only being the disciples, but also for those who will believe in me through their word. That's us. That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you.

[15:07] That they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. An incredibly important and powerful text, isn't it?

And it's a wonder, isn't it, to consider that Christ speaks of our unity in relation to the unity between the Father and the Son and the Godhead. That's quite mind-blowing, isn't it?

When you think about the closeness and the inter-Trinitarian closeness, the indivisibleness, if that's a word, of the Trinity. And that's what our unity should bring to mind.

Daniel didn't mention this text, but I thought of this, a helpful text in Ephesians, when we consider unity. Ephesians 4. I'll read, I think, from verse 1 just down to verse 6 or 7.

I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

[16:19] There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

I'll stop there. I think it's important for us, as we consider this whole matter of unity, that unity is profoundly Trinitarian. Did you pick that up in the text? And we thought about it to some degree earlier on, as Daniel was talking in Acts.

There's much about the Spirit's work in unity, and we've seen it here in this text. We see in John 17, Christ, speaking of unity. The Lord is mentioned here, one Lord, one God and Father, our Heavenly Father, the First Person of the Trinity.

So as God has called us in eternity past, and has chosen us, and as Christ has accomplished redemption for us in time, the Spirit applies all the benefits of that for us individually, but not merely individually, that we would be a unified body, that we would be one, the bride, the church.

So we see a profound truth that there's a connection here between unity and our triune God in Ephesians 4, and certainly in John, when we think of that inter-Trinitarian relationship.

[17:49] And certainly in Acts, there's talk of the Spirit working in unity and to unify. And you recall I opened the meeting with Psalm 133, and in our day and age, it seems a bit strange, doesn't it?

Thinking of oil dropping down into the beard of somebody and then dropping onto their robes. What on earth does that mean? Well, here we have a picture of the, this is the consecration of the priest. You think of the Aaronic priest being consecrated, and with our New Testament lenses on, we think oil, oh, that seems familiar. What's that indicative of? That's the work of the Holy Spirit.

So when we read those Old Testament texts, we can think very much of their New Testament application. And even in the Old Testament, in that dispensation, unity was hugely important.

So this isn't just a New Testament thing, it goes through the whole thread of redemptive history. But here, Daniel reminded us this morning in the book of Acts, in the particular text we're looking at, that the leaders, the leaders would strive for unity.

[19:02] And as I touched on earlier on, it's very important, isn't it, that it speaks of apostles and prophets. It doesn't speak of just Peter or just Paul. Here we have a plurality of leaders.

Plurality always helps in terms of, it's not absolutely foolproof, but it certainly helps in terms of bringing about unity. As I say, having accountability and having checks and balances and guarding against one particular individual taking the church into a strange direction.

It is interesting. I don't know much about sex and cults, to be honest with you. I don't know much about Jehovah's Witnesses. I don't know much about Seventh-day Adventists and more kind of theological sects that are kind of under the wide branch of Christianity.

But the little bits I have read about them, and you can correct me afterwards, it would seem that at the helm is one very charismatic figure, often. I don't know anywhere it's been a plurality of leaders. It's often one charismatic figure who's got a big idea, and that kind of leads into kind of false teaching. But here we see the leaders would strive for unity.

[20:19] They met together to discuss the matter. It's important, isn't it, that we don't just run with things. That as a church, we discuss things, we pray things over, we meditate on things before big decisions are made.

And their discussion was God-centered, and it was God-exalting. They were looking to God's will. They were looking to the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit. And they discussed the Scriptures as well.

And they discussed the Scriptures in a way that was based on the Spirit's teaching. If you recall, this was from last week. In Acts 15, a portion is quoted with regards to David.

After this, Acts 15, 16-17. After this, I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the lost, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name.

Says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old. That's what I'm struggling to read there. I guess the point I'm making is they looked at the Scriptures through the lens of a kind of new covenant, Christ-centered perspective.

[21:40] And they saw this, and this is all leading to something. And this is about the Gentiles being brought in. So the church here, they saw unity in a way that was guided by the principle of salvation.

I said this earlier, and I think this is absolutely key. It was guided by the principle of salvation by faith alone through grace alone. This was an absolutely pivotal, foundational issue.

They weren't seeking unity on the basis of traditions or other such things. This was a really... And we see as we read the epistles and Romans and other places, how Paul just unpacks this so carefully.

So what does this mean for us in terms of this first point? We've talked about leaders, and I think we've explored that. But do you recall some of the areas where we as a church can practice these principles?

Now, we're not grappling as a church with this issue. We haven't got people that are creeping in and talking about false teaching. But some issues were mentioned earlier on that I think were quite helpful, where we have had to discuss and deliberate and check things out.

[23:02] Can you recall what Daniel said? Yeah. Yeah, and the Lord's Supper. Yeah, thank you. These are really important things as well, aren't they?

And there'll be things. What I thought was interesting about what Daniel said, that these aren't absolutely... There is freedom to do them different ways, and it isn't a salvation issue.

Some of it can be about preference. Some of it can be for good and necessary reasons. There may be good and necessary reasons to have the Lord's Supper first thing in the morning before the main reason. There may be really good practical and spiritual reasons.

There may be good and necessary reasons to have it in the meeting. It gets quite complicated, doesn't it? Music. That was kind of more around conscience, and for some people, singing songs, where the words are reasonably sound, but if they're associated with a ministry, where there is really worrying or troubling associations in terms of false teaching or things that are ethically or morally questionable, that for some people in Calvary, in our congregation, were really struggling. And for us as elders, we had to really consider that, but some people didn't have an issue singing those songs. So they're examples of things that can affect us in terms of unity that we as leaders have had to really think about.

[24:37] It's not a light for light, because here we are dealing with a salvation issue. But this is more about conscience. But I thought about this this afternoon for a few minutes, and there are some areas, and I think this is important to mention, as we grow as a church, there are some areas where members, regulars, friends will have different views.

I'll name a couple. I'm not going to exhaust them all. I'm going to name some that I've come across. I think they're important matters, but I don't think they're things that should divide us.

One is the whole matter of the place of Israel in redemptive history in terms of end times and kind of end times prophecy. There'll be those among us who have differing views on these things, but it's fine to discuss them.

It's healthy to discuss them, but it shouldn't be a matter that divides us. There are many who are well within the realm of good, solid, orthodox Christianity that will have different views on these things.

Another one I've come across is charismatic gifts. We as a church, I hate this term, but I'm going to say it because we fall in more the category of cessationist, which doesn't believe in the...

[25:52] I choose my words carefully. There are many people who are not ongoing, extraordinary, miraculous works of the Holy Spirit because we don't believe in the ongoing office of apostle and prophet.

Now, there may be people within our membership and regulars who are really solid, sound, orthodox Christians that may see things differently, and there are many great teachers that we can learn from that see things differently.

We don't divide over that. It's an important issue, and there may be people that choose to practice those things in different ways. So that's something that I've come across in the church, and as our church grows, we might see more of these kinds of things.

Another thing I've come across is Bible versions. Bible versions. It can be a hot-button topic for some people, and I've had some really interesting... I know very little about Bible versions.

To be honest with you, it's not an area I have any real knowledge of. So I'm keen to listen, but I've spoken to people that absolutely swear by the authorised version.

[27:00] They feel the authorised version is the best, the most... In terms of it's not what they call dynamic frequency. It's the best word-for-word version. It has all the historical background to it, and they will only use that at home.

But they don't seek to change us into a King James-only church. They can respect that they can use... So there are things that we can differ on, think a little bit differently about, but we still maintain the unity because the central matter is the gospel.

None of those things are central in terms of the gospel. So they're things that we need to think about as a church, and particularly as we grow, people will have different views and ideas on these things.

Daniel went on to speak about the Spirit protecting... protects unity, and he quoted from verse 28, which is helpful for me just to read. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than those requirements.

It's an interesting text, isn't it? Because I often find when people want to push something that's just a little bit left field or maybe kind of in the realm of false teaching, it kind of lays a bit of a burden, doesn't it?

[28:17] It takes something away from the exclusivity of Christ's work. And I think Mark mentioned it in his sermon, and Daniel mentioned it, Jesus plus.

You've heard that term before. Just Jesus plus circumcision, or Jesus plus using this version, or Jesus plus... If you understand this whole kind of scheme around Israel, and we just throw in a little bit of this, then you're truly saved.

And we hear this quite regularly. But the Spirit leads us into a place where no greater burdens are placed on us.

The Spirit points to Christ. I think of Packer, who wrote somewhere, I can't recall where, that the Spirit is a bit like the flood, he called it the floodlight ministry, just shines a light on Christ.

That's the Spirit's work, just illuminating Christ. And these other things, as important as they are, they pale into the background, so to speak. And Daniel said, we must depend on God to lead and guide us.

[29:27] But I wondered if we'd take a few minutes to think about false teachers here, because Daniel spoke about the whole risk of false teachers coming into the church.

And are there any particular things that people have been aware of, or that are going on, that they think we need to just be on guard about, or just to be mindful of? We've got the absolute advantage and privilege of actually having printed scripture, scripture, which in those early days, they had the Old Testament, but we have so many examples of different scenarios in the Bible in front of us, which is such a huge blessing.

And we're very privileged, but there are many in other countries who don't actually have that blessing. And so I think there's more possibility of them being led astray, because they haven't got the word in front of them.

Yeah. Yeah. That's a pretty good point, Rose. I just want to say that, how very blessed we really are to be in a fellowship where the ones speaking from the front, teaching, preaching, are so solid and grounded in the word of God.

And that is fundamental. And it's so, I don't know, it just builds you up to be able to go out and meet others with different views and different ideas.

[31:33] And the Lord gives you a discernment about things. Well, that's how I found it in my life.

I've come so close in so many times of going slightly wrong, but the Lord has pulled me back and has kept me on the straight and narrow.

And I'm grateful for that and I'm grateful for the teachers here as well. And you make a point there that it's the Lord that keeps us and brings us back because, and that's the point Daniel was making, that the Spirit protects unity looking at that verse 28.

And you kind of sense in yourself, oh, I'm going a little bit off here in a tangent. And I think we've all had moments where we've done that or we're listening to a teacher or reading something and it would seem on face value, okay, and there's some good things being said.

But then you think, oh, there's something not right here. I've noticed if you depend only on TV evangelists or preachers, then that's an area where you can really get lost.

[32:52] I think for me, when I was thinking of this, there are two areas that I think that where potentially false teaching or erroneous kind of views can creep into the church.

Kind of within the realm of Christianity, you've mentioned it, I'll say, Emma. It's interesting, I see more and more people coming in and saying, and we're all susceptible to this, I just saw this online. So there's a whole world of stuff out there. Some of it's very, very good, but some of it is really, really off key. And people, there are no filters, there's no church accountability, there's not a kind of statement of faith or a creed or anything that just keeps people in check.

It's just me, my Bible and this teacher. And I think what people can interpret this certain ways, can't they? And without those kind of accountabilities, I think of the prosperity gospel, thankfully, I don't know if that's not creeping into Calvary Church, but it's something that's out there.

There's a kind of social gospel and of course, as a church, we should care about social things, of course, and poverty and so forth. But when that is all the gospel is about and that is what the gospel is, there are some problems there.

[34:07] Daniel touched on churches that are kind of loosening the moral and ethical standards to suit the kind of culture around us. That's something that could creep in. We need to be mindful of.

I thought of something else that I think impacts young men more. We don't have many young men among us, but I think this is significant. And I'm thinking outside of the realm of church, online, there are certain figures that young men find particularly attractive because they hold a certain amount of masculinity to them.

and you could read or listen to them and they say some things that kind of line up with Christian values, but they can be incredibly dangerous.

One who's incredibly dangerous and has said some abhorrent things that young men seem to be quite attracted to is Andrew Tate. He's not a Christian, nowhere near. He's a Muslim, but this is the kind of thing that people tap into.

And, you know, young, vulnerable Christians could be hearing guys like this and think, oh, they're saying something good here. Another one who's not in the same category as Andrew Tate, I don't think, and he's a very intelligent man in many ways, is someone called Jordan Peterson.

[35:15] And he says some good things, but not a Christian. But when he gets into the realm of theology and he's not a Christian, it's no good. Our rule should always be the Bible and should always be sound, doctrinally grounded teachers.

Don't look for role models and so forth. I mean, that doesn't necessarily apply to us directly here, but it's something that came to mind. Would you say like, it's good that we go through a chapter a week, I'll say, but I don't know about other churches.

Do they go through the scriptures? That's a good point, Rich. Yeah, I don't believe all churches do, no. I mean, I've been in churches where what they'll do, they'll open the Bible and use it as a kind of springboard.

And sometimes that's okay just to have a talk or a kind of a moral, but, you know, in terms of preaching and teaching, the business of the church should be going through books in the Bible as Daniel does in the mornings.

I know in the evenings we're doing something different like this evening. I'm not expositing verse by verse through this. Daniel, you know, but yeah. Ruth.

[36:35] Yeah, I think it's a really good point about those kinds of well-known figures who've gathered a lot of press and have a lot of visibility, particularly for young men, perhaps.

I guess, maybe a couple kind of slightly curveball points. One is that when I have heard bits and bobs of those kind of people, in some ways what's encouraged me is that there's an interest in Christian things.

Yeah. So I think there's that thing of like I'm encouraged to like let's be praying for these men because how precious if we see such folk coming from the kind of a bit of a almost a bit of a kind of muddy, unclear or really kind of wacky place but coming to a place where oh, okay, all these things

where I had questions and I was drawing from all these other places now I find the answers in the person of Christ and in Christianity.

So I think in some ways those folk I've heard have kind of nudged some folk towards churches so I think we can maybe be expectant to see some young men coming into churches you know we pray over the coming weeks, months may we be prepared to engage with them and bring challenge to maybe against some of the things that have been said by those guys which have not been grounded in the gospel.

I guess the other thing that came to mind based on what you're saying is like let's say when people are coming with teachings that are not necessarily seeming particularly sound I guess I personally and I think you said I remember the word you said something like sometimes we can be you can see like people are trying to add to the gospel let's say in some way I guess one of the things I felt personally challenged about is that thought of I don't want to be I don't want to be responding to folk by saying necessarily by saying not that this is wrong but like our church believes as in like well I heard the preacher saying this so here's me repeating it but more I have become convinced based on me reading the word of God that this is it so let me open it up because I have that familiarity myself so I guess there's also that risk of being

[39:16] I don't want to be a passive learner even as we're gathered that it's not it's like well the preacher they're the one that know I'm just the one that imbibe so it's like I guess just that thing there's the challenge to be active learners as we engage in the word of God being preached when we gather rather than being passive and just saying well you know the preacher says it so let's believe it thank you Ruth you make some really really helpful points there and your first point fully agree with we should be praying for people like a Jordan Peterson that he is saved and I think these guys are filling a void that the church isn't filling they're presenting something intellectually and culturally quite masculine and muscular and young guys are looking for that your other point I think was a very pertinent point we are not Roman Catholics so the church doesn't hold the kind of inerrancy and infallibility that the Roman Catholic church pronounces we don't as elders say that we have a magisterial function as the

Roman Catholic church does so what I say up here is ex cathedra it's inerrant you must take what we say what Phil says just be passive Phil says it therefore it is no go away we have a ministerial function and there is a distinction yeah if that helps and I think you're absolutely right I think there's a real Protestant maxim there isn't there an evangelical maxim that no it's not just about church tradition we grapple with the text and yeah thank you just to encourage you recently I was in Southampton and I witnessed multiple baptisms and one of the folks that was baptized I think it was a young student and he came to faith because of Jordan Peterson reading his book thinking about it so yeah praise the Lord that he uses that way yeah thank you Mark really helpful it's amazing isn't it how God can use people that are just kind of outside the kingdom oh yeah yeah absolutely yeah God is great isn't it I'm just aware of time I must move on just the third and last point that Daniel made was a church that's glad to be united I thought this was a lovely point because what he was getting at here was that for the sake of preserving unity with Jewish brothers and sisters the Gentile believers were clearly directed not to you know go into temples not sacrifice in the pagan temples or eat food eat foods that are sacrificed in the pagan temples and this whole matter of kind of love should undergird our unity shouldn't it and we need to be sensitive I think Daniel used a good example another good example is alcohol there might be differing views around alcohol in the room some people might abstain and think that's the right thing that's what God would have me to do others may not for the sake of unity if you're around someone that's having some difficulties with alcohol don't have a drink around them the TV

I thought was a good one so just in summary because I do want to spend a good amount of time in prayer there's an old saying I don't know who the author of this saying is some have said it's augustine you've probably heard it but I think it's helpful in terms of this matter in essentials unity in essentials unity in non-essentials liberty in non-essentials liberty and in all things charity helpful so when it comes down to the essentials you might come back and say well what are the essentials and that's a whole that's all night isn't it but certainly we know what some of the essentials are the

triune nature of our God not nature the triune person of our God not nature the Christ one person two natures human and divine the son of God these things are absolute but we don't have a common denominator kind of faith where we just reduce it as hugely essential as those are there are other things we believe as a church but certainly inessential so we can meet other Christians that might have differing views on baptisms one isn't it unity in the gospel Sussex gospel partnership how many brothers and sisters do we come across who are Anglicans who we just have such a closeness to so and I'll just end by saying as I was thinking about this as we seek unity and Ruth has so helpfully touched on this we're not seeking uniformity we're not all seeking to be exactly the same a little kind of cardboard cookie cut outs of each other and just we're all unique and different in so many ways what binds us together is the gospel and we're all growing together as well aren't we so not uniformity but let's take some of these matters and let's well let's sing first we're going to sing and then we'll just close out with some prayer okay then all we're praying and we've covered such a wide range of topics and I thought tonight we could think a little bit about things that we've prayed and continue on some of the themes that we've been thinking about and certainly be praying for us as a church in terms of unity pray for us as elders and leaders do pray something that the Lord has put on my heart really is that we would grow the eldership team and the deacons as well we're seeing visitors we've got people that are expressing an interest in membership something that's quite interesting about Calvary is we seem to attract quite a lot of internationals so we're seeing a real kind of cross section of different demographics different nations different ethnicities and now different ages as well more so lots to be thankful for so can I just ask one or two just to and whatever comes to mind for you in terms of what we've been praying for and particularly to be thinking about wisdom for us as a church going forward it's helpful to know what's the spirits leading for us as a church where would

[46:00] God have us to be and let's have a time of prayer to think about those things yes Lord we do ask you Lord for much wisdom as a church we thank you for the degree of unity we have in the body of Christ here and we pray that that will continue as we go forward we thank you that we are of one accord doctrinally Lord that we believe in justification through faith through Christ alone through grace alone and pray that would continue throughout the course of this church's life we pray that you would raise up leaders Lord elders and deacons Lord to further the gospel in this city we thank you so much for the elders and deacons Lord pray that you bless them and we we ask

Lord that you would show us much grace Lord as we have to go through life Lord there are certain areas where things do get tricky and we need to discuss Lord help us to have a listening ear listen to each other Lord and base our decisions on your word Lord and we pray Lord as we come across different people with different ideas Lord that we would be gracious to one another Lord and we would bear one another and show love Lord to one another preferring others needs to our own we ask in Jesus name Amen some of the ministries that we were considering last week just to remind people because I know there was so much information we were talking about the prospect of a toddler group there was talking about the prospect of some kind of English speaking cafe or an opportunity for people to learn or practice

English conversations at an English conversation cafe and there's things like CY and there's things like Sunday club ministry so think of all those things Father God I do thank you for your mercy and your grace Lord that's extended to us from your throne room I thank you Lord that in the time that I've been in Calvary there have been occasions where possibly a disunity would come in Lord but by your grace and your mercy Lord you have kept us united Lord and it is only through your Holy Spirit Lord and we do not take it lightly Lord and we do acknowledge that we do need you continuously to keep us in that place Lord and we pray

Father for the ongoing of this fellowship Lord that you would lead and guide and direct the elders and the deacons Lord in the way that we should go and Lord I pray that amen dear Lord we come to these summaries so many prayers over the week thank you for the things that we we've been able to pray about in the meetings we've had and maybe when we've been just praying individually Lord we want to thank you that we've been blessed by doing this Lord we know that we're speaking to a mighty

God we're not just deciding things or coming to conclusions in and of ourselves Lord as we bring these matters to you Lord we know that you you see our needs you see our understanding Lord you see where we need to change or we need to understand so Lord we pray you continue to help us when we're thinking about this year ahead Lord the way we should maybe step out into things we haven't been doing or things that we have done in the past maybe we could revisit just bring to you this mention made the other day about outreach to mums and dads and toddlers and little ones maybe an open session for people in the community to gather and bring their little ones along and having a space where that could happen and Lord we pray you'd clarify for us what's right for this year in relation to that and how it might work how it might be staffed how it might be advertised or people being made aware of it and

[52:00] Lord we just leave this in your hands Lord we don't want to go ahead of you we don't want to assume and presume anything or do something in our own strength but Lord that you would direct and give a desire in our hearts for that project or ministry that you want to happen Lord we thank you that Lord you've encouraged us as we said a few minutes ago with people coming into contact with the church just off the street or maybe it's through seeing publicity around Christmas but Lord you know and again Lord we pray that your will would be done and that you would use your word to be fruitful in this place and

Lord people would respond to the gospel respond to the truth and the light and the life that is in Christ in their own lives Lord that you would gather in the harvest in Brighton or through the ministry of churches Lord if you're pleased to use us we would ask you to use us not because we're anything but because of your grace Amen how you have been bringing so many new faces to our church and I'm mindful how many of those faces are men of a certain age bracket men who are single and live alone Lord it would seem Father that you are doing something in terms of those who are lonely those who are wanting community those who are wanting connections and wanting something that the world out there can't really offer

Lord that real sense of belonging that sense of acceptance Lord I pray if that's something as a church you would have us to be more and more help us to be a place of sanctuary a place of safety a place of love unconditionally!

a place where people who are lonely can find very real and meaningful connections we can't underestimate the power of just human connections and conversations and touch and care Lord as Christians as those who love the gospel and who have been transformed by the gospel that should be our business of reaching out to people like that because that was once us alienated and lonely and struggling with our sin and in many ways struggling with all that afflicted us in life and it was only by your grace that you lifted us out of that pit so Lord help us as a church as elders and as members and regular folk here to think how we can reach out to folk like that Lord I do just lift up to you as well our sisters!

who are pregnant in the congregation I think specifically of Becky and Evelyn who are nearing the time to give birth Lord that you would just be with them and be looking after them and they would be healthy and they would be very much kept safe in your loving hands at this time in Jesus name Amen Dear Lord I do pray for all the people who are these internet sources of knowledge Lord I do pray that when people do look out for answers in spirit and religion internet is a source that's being available right now and I do pray for all these personalities and I do pray essentially they do keep the truth and their faith in you in Jesus Christ and look at all the opinions and not look at them as factual evidences but look at all the opinions and then come to church essentially there are people here within fellowship and ask questions

[56:47] Lord not questions of doubt but questions of curiosity and again finally going into the scripture and keeping the scripture as the faithful source to come up to a conclusion Lord and I do pray for all these personalities in different forms and in different sources be it in videos or podcasts or audios I do pray you do give them wisdom and let your Holy Spirit act on them and eventually bring them and turn them to your faith those need those need need to need to to reach to a lot of audience, Lord, and essentially leading them to go to a church and forming a connection there and not just be deprived from and disconnected

from those sources.

In Jesus' name, amen. We've been praying for students for some time and we are so grateful to have students among us. And we just pray that that would be a growing ministry.

Pray that you would draw many more to us, Lord, and they would be very much knitted into this church family. In Jesus' name, amen. Father God, I just want to bring the children of the church before you, Lord.

I thank you that they do get good teaching, Lord. They do have parents that care and teach them as well, Lord. But I pray, Father, for more than that, Lord.

I pray your Holy Spirit would lead and guide and direct them, Lord, that they might be able to come to a place where they give their lives to you, Lord. That you bring them to a place where you give them that gift of salvation, Lord, and that you would keep them, Lord, in their journey through life.

[58:37] In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Lord, I just want to commit our full-time elder, Daniel and Becky, to you, Lord, at this such a crucial time in their life as they're about to have a little one.

Lord, just pray that you would uphold Daniel in his ministry. Lord, keep him faithful. Lord, keep him strengthened in you. Help Becky as well at this time.

And I pray that this wouldn't be a time of total overwhelm and utter exhaustion for them. I pray it be a time of great joy. Of course, they will be tired and there'll be huge changes.

We acknowledge that, Lord. But we pray that they would be able to manage this well and pray that we can support them as a church. Lord, I do just commit Margaret to you. We heard this morning that Margaret has been very unwell and is with her, I believe, her son or daughter in Worthing.

Please be with her at this time, Lord, and comfort and help her in her healing and help Park Hill in such a vulnerable place. And in many ways, Margaret is so kind of pivotal to that church and for her to be unwell and her to be out of action, so to speak, is going to have huge ramifications, Lord.

[59:56] You know all the ins and outs of what goes on with Park Hill, Lord. I pray that you would be a very present help in a time of trouble. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, I am aware of the time.

It's nearly quarter to two, so I think we'll close the praying now. But do please continue to pray prayers in your own time for us as a church, for us as elders, and all the matters that we've been thinking about.

Shall we close with our one last song? His mercy is more. It's becoming well known to us, this one. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.