

# Living in Faithful Community in a Culture of Individualism & Polarization

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Date: 20 October 2024

Preacher: Rev. Andrew Ong

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at [ChristChurchEastBay.org](http://ChristChurchEastBay.org). Good morning.

My name is Joan Benton. I'm a member of the El Cerrito Kensington Community Group, Women Reading Women, and CC Kids.

We are reading a Psalm of David, chapter 122, as printed in your liturgy. I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.

[ 1 : 06 ] That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to praise the name of the Lord, according to the statue given to Israel.

There stand the throne of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, peace be within you.

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity. The grass withers and the flowers fade.

But the word of our God stands forever. Oh, good morning, Christ Church. My name is Andrew, one of the pastors here.

[ 2 : 05 ] And you may have seen me break the door over there just now. Sorry about that distraction. That was a beautiful moment. I totally ruined it. But we'll figure that out later.

I'm a little distracted, so let's come before the Lord in prayer. Father, we're here not to hear from me, but to hear from you.

To hear your voice clearly. To enjoy your presence in the word. To enjoy your presence at this table. To enjoy your presence here in the corporate body of Christ.

We ask that that would happen, Lord. Lord, we ask that you'd give us an appetite for the community that you have so desired to create here on earth.

With people made in your image. And we thank you that you've accomplished that in Christ. And we ask that he'd be lifted up. And that we would behold him.

[ 3 : 14 ] And that we would embody the kind of community that he paid for. And that he's coming again to restore and redeem and rescue. So God, we just ask less of us, more of you.

And we would desire to see Jesus. Make that happen, Holy Spirit. In the preaching of your word.

Amen. Alright, so we are continuing our series through the Psalms in this topic that we're calling the Holy Habits of Grace.

These practices prescribed by God to help us nurture a deepening relationship with him. These are spiritual disciplines that God's people have been practicing for thousands of years.

In order to be formed and shaped to be more like our maker. To be more like Jesus. To help us become the best, most fulfilled, most fruitful versions of ourselves.

That's why we're talking about the Holy Habits of Grace. That's what we want for each of you. To be like a tree planted by streams of water that yield fruit in season. And whatever you do prospers.

[ 4 : 23 ] Right? So today we are going to cover the next Holy Habit. And this next Holy Habit is the Holy Habit of community. Community. This is an essential element of our mission.

It's the kind of church that we want to be. Christ's church exists. What? To lead people into a deeper relationship with Christ and his church through community. And for the city. That's essential to who we want to be here at Christ's church.

We believe that a huge part of growing in a deepening relationship with Christ. Is being in community with his church. And that you can only do that if you're with us.

That if you're communing with us at this table, in our fellowship. That's how we're going to be a blessing to the world. That's how we're going to be a blessing to this city. And that's why the image I've tried to hold out for us throughout this series is not just a single tree planted by the stream of water.

But what a garden. Right? A forest full of Psalm 1 kinds of trees. A community of trees. Right? Bearing fruit together for the good of the world. And we cannot do this.

[ 5 : 26 ] And we cannot be this. Apart from the holy habit of community. Now I don't think I need to persuade most of us here about how important community is.

Particularly in our present cultural moment. Many of you have probably read Vivek Murthy's publications. He's the U.S. Surgeon General. All about the loneliness epidemic. How it's threatening our public health.

You've probably heard about how in Japan and in the U.K. They've hired ministers of loneliness to tackle the problem there in their countries. And Mother Teresa's even said that loneliness is the leprosy of the West.

You're also probably aware of all the literature. Blaming technology. Right? For all the loneliness that we feel. Making us more connected than ever. But also at the same time more lonely than ever. As the MIT sociologist Sherry Turkle likes to say. Technology has given us the illusion of companionship. But without the actual demands of friendship. She gives the example of texting.

[ 6 : 25 ] Texting offers just the right amount of access. Just the right amount of control. Texting puts people not too close. Not too far. But at just the right distance. The world is now full of people who take comfort in being in touch with a lot of people.

Whom they also keep at bay. And yet on the other hand. We're also still looking at technology in many ways to save us in our loneliness. Right? There's a Chicago startup called Pi.

They just raised 11.5 million dollars to fight social isolation. Through its app of curated events around the city of Chicago. Events like dudes getting pancakes.

A more recent event they have coming up is spooky themed show and tell for grownups. And you have this other app called Time Left. It uses an algorithm to place you in a dinner reservation with a group of strangers who have similar feelings as you about political correctness.

And politically correct jokes based on the algorithm. And you know we can make fun of all these apps. And we can criticize technology for the ways it creates like thin connections that never really give us the deep community that we crave and need.

[ 7 : 34 ] But what if the real problem isn't all these attempts to pursue connection and community and friendship through creativity and technology. What if the real problem is a deficient vision of community in the first place?

What if what we needed wasn't some technological solution or even people trying harder to connect and relate. But what if we needed a holy vision of community as it was intended to be.

A holy vision of community that could inspire a holy habit of community. That's what Psalm 122 gives us this morning.

A holy vision of community that inspires a holy habit of community. You know you could say that the whole story of the Bible is the story of community.

It's the story of the triune God. Father, Son, and Spirit seeking to establish a community reflecting His triune image in all of His creation. In the beginning what do you have?

[ 8 : 35 ] In Genesis the very first book of the Bible this God He creates. He creates and He says it's good, it's good, it's good. And then it is not good that man should be alone. Because God's after a community. And so He creates not one but two in His image, male and female.

And they are blessed to fill the earth with the image of God. To spread the reflection of the triune God across every square inch of creation. And then what we find at the end of the story in the last book of the Bible in Revelation is that it ends with a perfect community.

Where the dwelling place of God is with humanity. And all the nations are living in perfect harmony. God has always been after community. That's the whole story of the Bible.

But of course we, just like the psalmist here in Psalm 122, we are living in between that beginning and that end, right? We live in an age of tribalism and polarization and hyper-individualism with far more chaos than peace.

Sin has entered the world and it's disrupted every single human community we could imagine. It started with Adam and Eve. Then it went to Cain and Abel. Then it went to Cain's descendants and Seth's descendants and on and on and on.

[ 9 : 46 ] But God has not given up. He's not given up on His plan to establish a perfect community in the world. And His people, us, the church, those who followed Him by faith, we've been called to pursue and bear witness to this community even as we wait for it.

And that's what King David is doing here in Psalm 122. He's singing of and he's longing for and he's imagining and he's committing himself to the community of God as God intends it.

That's what Psalm 122 is about. Now maybe when you first heard this psalm read by Joan so wonderfully, what you heard was some ancient Hebrew song, right? This ancient song called A Song of Ascent that the ancient Israelites would sing as they made their three pilgrimages per year into the presence of the Lord at Jerusalem, again, once a year.

And you read the song and you read about the tabernacle or the temple, this house of the Lord. You read about this old Jerusalem, the tribes of Israel going up, the thrones of David, and these prayers for peace inside this ancient city.

And you're wondering, well, how does this apply to us? How does this apply to us today? Well, that's the question that we're going to be looking at today. It's a great question because it's true. While this psalm is God's inspired word, and while it has much to offer us, we who live on this side of Christ, of His life and His death and His resurrection, this side of the teachings of the apostles and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we actually have a lot more light from Christ and from His Spirit, light that needs to be shed upon this psalm as we read it.

[ 11 : 25 ] We have far more light and insight from God about the deeper meaning of Psalm 122 than even those who first penned and sang this psalm before the Messiah arrived, right?

See, while the city of Jerusalem, the central place where the Ark of the Covenant and the throne of David rested, while to the ancient Israelites living under the old covenant of Abraham and Moses and David and the prophets, well, that was the place where the localized presence of God dwelt on earth, the central location of God's people as a community.

God, in the new covenant, has brought that location to its transcendent fulfillment in the new covenant of Christ. See, when Jesus came, He announced that what?

He was the true temple, right? Right. Tear this temple down. I'm going to raise it in three days. He was the place where God dwelt among us. The apostle who writes in Hebrews chapter 12, he writes that if we are united with Christ, no matter our physical or geographical location, we have already come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to God, the judge of all, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant.

So you see, everything we read about in Psalm 122, this song that came upon the lips of ancient old covenant people of God, we are to read it as a type and shadow prefiguring Christ and all that Christ accomplished.

[ 12 : 53 ] So while the Ark of the Covenant, the tabernacle, the temple, the city of Jerusalem, the tribes of Jacob truly did enjoy the presence of God in the community of God.

And while we need to take that seriously, we need to take the original historical context seriously, we also need to read this psalm as Christians, as followers of Christ in a Christ-centered way.

We need to understand that all these things in this psalm also pointed beyond themselves to the presence of God in Christ and in His church. So you might say that in Christ, the multinational, universal church is the fulfillment of Jerusalem and David's throne.

All the tribes of God's people that are talked about here, they are fulfilled in the many tribes and tongues and nations of the church. And that's what Psalm 122 is supposed to mean to us living on this side of the cross.

So while the ancient Hebrew singers might have envisioned the tabernacle or Solomon's temple and the 12 tribes of Jacob in the physical city of Jerusalem, we are to sing Psalm 122 as Christians with the eyes of our heart set upon the church.

[ 14 : 04 ] The church and all God's people throughout the world and throughout history. But the one thing that we do share in common, though, is that we sing like King David and we sing like all those people of old, we're to sing Psalm 122, yearning for, imagining, and committing ourselves to the

community of God.

And we can see this community more fully in the light of Christ. Does that make sense? How we read the psalm as new covenant believers. It's so important to get that to understand how we're going to apply this psalm.

Okay, so now what I want to do is I want to show us how to do that. How do we sing this psalm with a vision for God's community as he always intended it to be? Now remember, this is a song of ascents.

And while we new covenant Christians, we do not make three pilgrimages per year to Jerusalem. And while the Holy Spirit's presence actually indwells within every single person who's united with Christ in God's community, God's people still do have a rhythm of heading to the house of the Lord on a regular basis.

Every Sabbath day, every Lord's day, every resurrection Sunday, we go to the house of the Lord. We go to church. We go to the corporate dwelling place of God. God is here where his people are.

[15:21] And my hope is that we come with anticipation. Verse 1, I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord. And my question for us is, do you eagerly look forward to coming to be with the family of God?

When you think about the church, when you think about the community of Christ, do you anticipate an encounter with the Lord and with the Lord's holy people? Or do you just anticipate five songs, maybe some pastries, some religious rituals, right?

And some awkward socializing time. Do we look forward, are our hearts already filled with song, at the prospect of going into the presence of God with our church family, with our church community, where God inhabits the praises of his people?

Do you sense that in our worship? That God is here? Do your kids look forward to coming to church? Do they even know to expect an encounter with God in this place?

Might they say, like it says in verse 2, our feet are standing in your gates, we made it. Like they've arrived at Disneyland, right? Is the church, is it one of your family's favorite, most nostalgic places to be?

[16:43] A destination that your calendar is even built around? Is your calendar built around the rhythms of the church? Or do we only make it to church when it fits our previously determined schedule?

Think about that for a second. How many Lord's days a year do you devote to worshiping him with his people? It is his day. It's the Lord's day. Even if you're on vacation, there are churches to worship in.

And it is his day. To be with the people of God ought to be a priority for the people of God. To be the community that God wants us to be, we need to dedicate gathering together on our calendars.

And we need to prioritize it. You know, my family, we're part of the Alameda community group. We did that awesome yogurt bar last week. We meet twice a month. And we meet at Andy and Jane's house in Alameda.

And one thing I love to hear every Sunday, because my girls can't keep track, is, do we get to go to Uncle Andy's house today? Do we get to go to Uncle Andy's house? And I love that.

[17:44] I love that they look forward to being with the people of God. Eating food, doing life, just being in community, seeing their church uncles and aunties. Because that's the one way, that's one of many ways that we experience the very presence of God in our laughter together.

Oversharing the food on the table, right? In the prayers that we pray for one another. In making fun of each other, right? In me playing video games with the middle schoolers. It's my favorite part about being in the presence of God.

I also want to highlight, you know, the embodied physicality of community here in verse 2. It says, my feet are standing in your gates. Not my eyes are watching from like 20 miles away, on a screen, through the internet.

And this is not to say, this is not to guilt trip you if, you know, you're in crazy sin, if you tune in and you don't make it to church. But it is to say that God's intention for the people of God is to be together in person.

In the flesh. Shoulder to shoulder to hear each other's voices lifted up to the heavens. To see hands raised. To shake that hand and pass the peace of Christ to one another.

[ 18 : 55 ] To hear a hundred other people in this room asking the Lord for the forgiveness of their sins. To hear a hundred other people in this room confessing that they believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

To feel the waters of baptism. To taste the body and blood of Christ upon our lips. To be anointed with oil. To receive the laying on of hands. The community of God is meant to be an embodied analog community.

And not just some spiritual digital community. Being the community of God in the flesh. Having our calendars revolve around worshiping community is a way that we are a countercultural witness. That resists the unholy habits, right? The unholy liturgies of the secular world that deform us into consumeristic, hyper-individualistic, selfish people.

Even people who aren't Christians, you know, they're starting to realize this about Christianity, about organized religion. There's this writer for The Atlantic. His name is Derek Thompson.

[ 19 : 59 ] He wrote this earlier this year. As an agnostic, I've spent most of my life thinking about the decline of faith in America in mostly positive terms. Organized religion seemed to me beset by scandal and entangled and noxious politics.

So I thought, what is there really to mourn? Only in the past few years have I come around to a different view. Maybe religion works a bit like a retaining wall to hold back the destabilizing pressure of American hyper-individualism.

See, Derek Thompson and many others who don't even know Christ are beginning to notice how organized religion provides not only a connection to the divine, but it provides, what, historical narrative of identity?

A set of rituals to organize our time and our weeks and our years around? A community of families to support one another and to raise their children together in a village of shared values?

And he notes that, and he notes how, you know, the ones who are fleeing religion the fastest in our society are also the ones who are seeing the largest and fastest decline in socialization.

[ 21 : 07 ] It's not just about socializing. He says, according to the Pew Research Center, religiously unaffiliated Americans are less likely to volunteer, less likely to feel satisfied with their community and social life, and more likely to say they feel lonely.

He cites another agnostic writer, Jonathan Haidt. Many of you have read *The Coddling of the American Mind*. *The Anxious Generation* is his most recent one, and there in *The Anxious Generation*, Haidt talks about the smartphone as this diabolical opposite to religious ritual, right? He writes, whereas digital life on the internet is disembodied, asynchronous, shallow, and solitary, religious rituals are embodied, synchronous, deep, and collective.

Religious rituals put us in our body requiring some kind of devotional movement and activity. We kneel to pray, right? We lift up our hands to worship. These rituals fix us in time, forcing us to set aside an hour, maybe even set aside a whole day, and they make us make contact with the sacred in the presence of other people, whether in the pew or around a shared prayer at the dinner table. See, this is God's real life, flesh and blood vision for the church as community. And if you have eyes to see the community of the church as God sees it, according to God's vision of community, it's a wonderful sight to behold.

[ 22 : 33 ] In verse 3, the singer pays special attention to how perfectly Jerusalem is built and put together, and he notices the wonderful unity and diversity of the tribes going up to the Lord.

All the different, they're all different, right? In their own ways. They all have their strengths, they all have their limitations, and yet they are united in one thing, in praising the name of the Lord together, and in obedience to the rhythmic commands and statutes that God has given them to observe.

Now, we know in the light of Christ, though, that the diversity spans far beyond Jacob's 12 tribes, right? This is a community from every tribe and tongue and nation. There is no faith, there is no institution in the world, in history, that can express the wonderful unity and diversity of humanity better than the church of Jesus Christ.

This place where poor and rich, red and yellow, black and white, able and disabled, male and female, slave and free, are all one and equal, yet still fully their own unique selves in Christ and in his church community, included simply by humble repentance and bold faith in the same crucified, risen, and returning Savior.

There is nothing like the church in the world. There is nothing like the institution of the church founded upon the rock who is Christ. But my question is, is that what we see when we come here?

[ 23 : 55 ] Is that what we see and celebrate when we come to church, the unity and diversity of the body? People singing and confessing the same words, taking the same bread and wine, upon our lips as us.

People who we'd never come into contact with outside of the walls of this church, apart from our union with Christ. People who were raised differently than us. People who live differently than us. People who vote differently than us.

People who spend and vacation differently than us. And I want to encourage you today to take a moment as we come to this table, right? To just look up.

Don't just focus on yourself in this moment. Yes, it is a moment between you and Christ, but it's a moment between you and Christ and the body of Christ. Take a look up. Look over your shoulder right now and marvel at the kinds of people who are sitting around you.

They're bound to you if they are in Christ in a covenantal relationship. They're covenanted to you. Your Lord and Savior has purchased them with His blood, and He loves them like He loves you.

[ 24 : 55 ] And He wants that for them from your heart as well. People who hear the same words, right, coming around this table, Christ's body given to you. Those aren't just words for you.

You're supposed to hear that when your neighbor's receiving those elements. Christ's blood shed for your sins. I can't wait to see my daughters take that, because I'm going to know every single sin that they're talking about, right?

When they hear that Christ's blood shed for your sins, take that with your spouses. Know that your sins are forgiven. Know that your spouse's sins are forgiven. Enter into that reconciliation together with this family of faith.

These are words for everyone. See, the church is a place where God issues His righteous verdicts over us, justified by faith in Christ.

That's what this image about the throne is about. See, the church is also the place where we confess and stand secure in the righteous judgments and verdicts of God. In a world where all kinds of injustice seem to prevail and go unchecked, the church in and amongst the people of God is where we go to be reminded of who sits on David's throne.

[ 26 : 05 ] Verse 5, There stand the thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David. This is the only institution in the world that proclaims that Jesus is king. And that trust in a final judgment that will right all wrongs and bring all injustice to account.

This is God's vision of the church. And this is what the psalm sings about and celebrates. Now, perhaps you're thinking to yourself, though, well, this is not the church that I'm familiar with.

This sounds quite ideal. This is not the church I know. You've witnessed plenty of injustice in the church, plenty of untrustworthy, judgmental pronouncements by the church.

You may see more chaos and division in the church, more oppressive uniformity than harmonious unity and diversity. And when you look at the lives of many church members, you see plenty of hypocrisy, plenty of church members entrenched in the deformative, unholy habits and liturgies that just make them more enslaved to their consumeristic tendencies, their individualism, their selfishness, and their superficiality.

And honestly, what can I say? You're not wrong. You're not wrong. Just like the Jerusalem that the psalmist sang of in Psalm 122 wasn't ever truly as perfect and ideal as they sang about, neither is the church.

[ 27 : 24 ] Neither is the bride of Christ, and certainly not Christ's church. So how could they sing this song in ancient days of Israel? And how can we sing this song as the church with any kind of genuineness and authenticity?

Well, the answer is that we sing by faith. We sing by faith. See, in one sense, David wasn't singing of what he saw, like, right in front of him. He was singing of the ideal Jerusalem, the ideal community of God to come, that he believed would come.

He had a vision. This is a prophetic song, and so we must sing by faith prophetically as well. We don't sing the song because the church is all perfect and amazing. No, we sing of what the church could be and what it will be because we know how the story ends in Jesus Christ.

The bridegroom, right, who will present his bride spotless on the final day. The bridegroom who will not give up on his bride. That's how we sing this song.

We sing because we believe everything that God desires for his church, and we believe that Christ is able to present us perfect before the throne. We sing because we believe the good news that

now, in Christ, we can be both sinners and saints at the same time.

[ 28 : 39 ] So no sin will ever surprise us in the church. But we also know that no sin in the church is too big for Christ to take care of, to cleanse, and to wipe away. And this is what inspires us to pursue Christian community, the holy habit of community.

Not the perfection of Christ's community, but the perfection of Christ. This is how we can pray and hope for and demand the peace of Christ to one another.

Because the punishment that brought us peace was upon him. And by his wounds, we are healed. This is why the song continues in verse 6.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Pray for it. May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls, and security within your citadels. For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, peace be within you.

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity. This song ends in a prayer for peace. Or if you looked in the Hebrew for shalom. For all the fullness of God's blessings upon the community of God.

[ 29 : 43 ] Because the singers know that we haven't arrived yet. But the thing is, here they are setting their hearts upon this shalom, trusting God for it. And not merely for their own sakes, but for their love, out of their love for the community.

Desiring security and shalom and goodness and prosperity for their family and friends, and for the glory of the Lord, for the house of the Lord. See, to sing a Psalm 122 isn't to be fake, or to sing a song about something that doesn't exist.

To sing Psalm 122 is to express our commitment to the community of God. To see all that it could be, and to devote ourselves to that end. This is what it means to be a healthy and vibrant member of the church.

It's not to ask, what will I get out of the church community? But it's to live to contribute to that community that God is creating. Writing during World War II, the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, right?

Who opposed and resisted Hitler. He writes, he wrote, the person who loves their dream of community will destroy community. But the person who loves those around them will create community.

[ 30 : 51 ] That's our call. We've just gotten it so backwards in our cultural climate of consumerism. You know, local South Bay pastor, Jay Kim, he wrote this book, Analog Church, and he writes, you know, many people want their local church to be customized and crafted to fit their specific needs, desires, and preferences.

The concept of church shopping, it really could only exist in a culture like ours, right? It's crazy what kind of culture we're living in. I just realized, you know, all the shows I used to watch together as a family, these family sitcoms, those things don't exist anymore.

There's a show for each one of my girls, not even both of them together, each one of my girls.

There's a show for my wife, there's a show for me, you know? Whatever happened to watching The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air together, right?

Family Matters, the best, right? That's the culture we live in. It's always tailored so individually to us. But the church of Christ is a counter-community.

We come here even if it doesn't fill us in the same way as it might fill the person next to us, but we come because we love Christ, and we love the body of Christ. So my question is, what if we desired a church after God's heart instead, of a church that's tailored after our own preferences?

[ 32 : 06 ] What if we saw this place as a place where our kids learn to be bored once in a while? That's okay. What if we prayed for this kind of church community, right?

Psalm 122 gives us the words to pray. It's the cry of shalom. And I love the progression here from verse 6 to verse 9. At first, it's just a prayer of peace, right?

May security and peace be within your walls. It's just an ask. It's just a plea. It's just a hope. But then in verse 8, it becomes more forceful, even like a demand. It's no longer an ask, but the singer is now contending, speaking with the authority of God, channeling the very heart of God for the community of God.

Then in verse 9, the prayer takes action. I'm not just asking for it. I'm not just contending for it, but I am actively seeking it. I will seek your prosperity. I'm pursuing it. I'm expecting to find it.

This is when we step into our prayers for the peace of the community of God. We incarnate our prayers and lend our legs to the prayers of our lips. This is what the holy habit of community looks like.

[ 33 : 07 ] It's actively pursuing the shalom of the church. We yearn to experience God's presence among His people. We look forward to it all week. I was glad when they said to me, let's go to the house of the Lord.

I was glad when they said to me, let us go to Uncle Andy's house, right? To be with God's people. And upon arrival, we behold and envision and imagine the church for all it could be, all it will be. And we see it with God's eyes, in the light of Christ, in all its splendor, in all its unity and diversity, not hating on it, but pursuing its full potential. And we commit ourselves to praying for it and living for its shalom, as the writer of Hebrews says, and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another all the more.

Is that what we consider as we come to church? How to stir up others to love and to good works. It has to start with not giving up on gathering together. It starts with a simple ministry of presence, just showing up, building your calendars around the rhythms of the church, considering church membership, committing to a community group and not flaking on them with a little text saying, oh, I just don't want to come tonight.

It's being creative and pursuing hospitality. It's getting to know people who you don't know here. It's connecting with others. It's coming to the prayer meetings. It's worship plus two. That's how we like to talk about it here at Christ Church.

[ 34 : 29 ] Committing to worship with God's people, plus two, plus coming and joining us in the midweek for a community group or having some kind of check-in with someone in the church and also serving.

Worship plus two. And these are just the basics. The basics of seeking the shalom of the church through the simple ministry of presence and participation. And listen, this is not just for ourselves. It's for the world.

My professor, Carl Truman, he writes this. The church actually has a tremendous opportunity. The West is currently engaged in an experiment doomed to fail. Human beings crave real relationships. And there will come a backlash to the isolated wasteland of modern life marked by the frictionless friendships of the online community. After all, nobody on his deathbed wants his loved ones appearing before him by Zoom.

He wants them in the room, holding his hand, speaking to him, interacting with him in real embodied space and time. And when the backlash comes, the real communities that exist will appear vital and attractive.

[ 35 : 28 ] This is what it's like to be a tree. And not just a tree, but a forest of trees. A forest of trees bearing witness to the tree of life for the healing of the nations.

This is what our Father made us for. It's what the Spirit is working to accomplish in and through us. And it's what Jesus died for. Jesus died for the shalom and peace and prosperity of his holy community, the church.

So will we live for what Christ died for? Let's pray. Lord, make it so.

Give us your eyes to see the church and its glory in Christ. And would we commit ourselves to this holy habit of community for the glory of your name, for the good of our neighbors, and for our own joy, for the joy of this place, Christ Church East Bay.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.