

Activate

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[0 : 00] So today we are launching into our second ever round of Activate. This is a chance for us to get connected through community groups. It's a chance to sign up and serve in a whole bunch of ministries across the church.

But as I was preparing my message this week, I was convicted that there was more to say than you should serve. You should serve and God wants you to serve and it's okay to say that.

But this week, and in fact over the past few weeks, God has been impressing something else on my heart. Namely, his heart.

Over the past two weeks, I've had this overwhelming sense that we as a church and me personally need to refocus on the heart of God who gathers us.

We need to stop and realise that in reality, all service, all connection, all relationship, all of that has to begin by understanding the heart of God.

[1 : 04] If we're to reflect on what it means to serve him, we must start with him. We must start with what matters to him. It has to come first. Because if we don't start there, anything that we do for him will just be a job or a task.

Something that we're required to do or a box that we have to tick. If you remember Jonah in the Old Testament, the way he approached his God-given calling. After running away, being rescued by a fish, hearing a second time what God wanted him to do, he goes off dutifully and does his task.

He never stopped to ask, though, why he was being sent to the city of Nineveh. He walked into a large city. He told them all that God was angry, that there was going to be judgment.

It was just a simple transaction for him. And then he wandered out of the city and waited for the fireworks. But he was disappointed when God didn't come through.

He was angry when God's judgment wasn't poured out. He had never stopped to ask, why did God send me? What matters to God in this?

[2 : 15] It was never just a job. God had an agenda the whole time and Jonah lost sight of God's heart. So what is it that consumes God's heart?

What is it that matters to him most? What is it that he's desperate for in any and every circumstance? First and foremost, God is a God who desires his own glory.

And rightly so, because he is glorious. But the way that he seeks his glory tells us a lot about who he is.

From the beginning of creation, if you start with Adam and Eve in the garden, God's agenda, his desire has been for relationships with his people. The thing he's always worked towards has been the goal of dwelling among his people, of having that right relationship with his people.

And as you read what happens with Israel in the desert wanderings, God goes to incredible lengths to create an acceptable dwelling place for him, a sanctuary, a temple where he can be among his unworthy people.

[3 : 26] God is driven by desperation to bring people who are far from him back into a right relationship to find what is lost.

The heart of God, the heart that we as his people must imitate and share, is a heart for lost people. Even what motivates God in his acts of judgment throughout scripture is a heart for lost people.

Look at the way he deals with his children in the Old Testament.

He always starts with a warning. His desire is that they might turn back, that there might be repentance, that he might not have to pour out his judgment, like with Nineveh.

And even when he does pour out his judgment, it's always motivated by love. Take Adam and Eve right at the beginning. They get kicked out of the garden for disobeying God.

[4 : 28] They're kicked out of the perfect place. But why? Because if God leaves them there in the garden, they have access to the tree of life and they could live forever as sinful people separated from God.

God doesn't want that for them. His desire is not that they live forever. His desire is that they have a close, intimate relationship with him. That they know that deep satisfaction.

God wants more for them. And so in his wisdom, he judges them, kicks them out of the garden and begins the greatest rescue mission ever.

Why? Because he loves his people. Because he desperately wants Adam and Eve and us and all of his creation to be in a right relationship with him.

Because God's heart beats for those who don't know him yet. If you look at Jesus, you get a picture of God's heart in human form.

[5 : 35] Jesus is God's heart personified. When you look at his life, you see everything that excites God. Everything that's important to God lived out in our earthly context.

You can sum up Jesus' life and ministry in one word. Compassion. As he spends time on the earth, as he interacts with people, he looks and he sees need and he's moved with compassion to meet that need.

He sees people lost without God. He sees people suffering the effects of a sinful world and his heart is moved with compassion to meet that need. He was deeply aware of the suffering and need around him.

And what fuelled him, what drove his action and his teaching and everything that he did was a desperation to see that suffering relieved. You can see it in every bit of Jesus' life.

Jesus didn't actually come to earth to do miracles. I mean, they're the bit that often gets a lot of coverage, a lot of press, a lot of excitement. He didn't come to earth to impress people with his power and healings.

[6 : 47] But when he saw people in desperate need, his heart went out to them. His compassion was aroused within him and he met needs.

The day he fed the 5,000, that wasn't on his to-do list that day. Jesus was there to teach, but he looked and it says he saw them harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

So he met that need. He fed them and then he spoke God's truth to them. Jesus' whole life and ministry was about meeting the need of people.

The need that they might be restored into a relationship with God. And sure, he spent a lot of his time with his disciples, but even there his agenda was that he would equip the disciples to continue reaching for lost people once he was gone.

The fact that we're sitting here today is a testament to how good he was at equipping them for that ministry. But even in amongst his time spent training the disciples, Jesus couldn't help but be moved by the need that he saw around him.

[8 : 00] He couldn't help but be driven by the urgency for lost people who were living as enemies of God to be brought back into a saving relationship with God.

He looked and saw those who didn't yet know the love of his heavenly Father and he was moved to teach them and to reach out to them.

Because in his own words from Luke 19, the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. In his teaching, Jesus even says this is what motivates him.

The thing that motivated him more than anything else was a desire to see lost people brought back, lost people found. The lost sheep, the lost son, the lost coin, they're all stories of God's heart for that which is far away to be brought close into the love of God.

In Luke 15, he says, I tell you that in the same way, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent.

[9 : 08] God is on a mission to bring lost people back into a relationship with himself. His heart is desperate for the people that we walk past every day.

Maybe the people we live with, maybe our neighbours, maybe those we work with, those that we walk past in the shops or catch the train with. His heart is desperate for lost people.

And in his grace and generosity, he has chosen to include us in the mission that he is on. We are chosen to share God's goal. To share God's heart.

The thing that unites us as a church, the thing that draws us together, isn't sitting together in this time slot. It's not a logo or anything else. It's a common goal or desire.

It's a common heart, a common purpose. It's God's heart. God's heart for his creation, to know him and to glorify him as God. And so this morning, I want to challenge you to reflect on how are we going at that?

[10:17] Together and personally. If we were to give ourselves a health check, would you right now describe yourself as desperate for lost people?

Desperate to see those who don't know Jesus come to discover the grace and hope that is offered in him. Does your heart quicken and get excited when you see an opportunity to talk about Jesus? Is your day and week and year and everything you do driven by the same goal as God? When I was growing up, I used to live for footy.

I think I've told you this before. It's not a big secret. I played AFL as a kid and it was the highlight of my week. My week revolved around Wednesday night training, Saturday games.

I would go to training two hours early just because I liked being at the Oval. No one else was there. I'd just take a football and hang out. I would wake up on Thursday really excited that that meant I was in the closer to the game half of the week.

[11:24] Everything was directed towards that. I would be imagining myself kicking the winning goal. I would be talking about how well I'd played the week before. I was planning my career as a professional AFL player.

Saturdays was easy. That was all about football. I would turn up for the first game of the day, which is like 8am in the morning. My game's somewhere in the middle and I would stay right to the end. I'd be helping put pads up, cook sausages.

I just loved everything football. And then on Sunday I would wake up with my brother to recover from the game the day before, talk about how well I'd played, kick a football and start preparing for the next week again.

I carried a football around instead of a teddy bear. I'd talk about football. I'd force my brother to come and kick a football with me every single afternoon. I loved it.

I lived for it. It was obvious to anyone that football motivated everything I did. I'm not exaggerating. Every time there was a chance to draw a picture in class or wherever I was, it was football related.

[12:22] I wonder right now, what is that thing in your life? What is driving you? If people looked at the way you make decisions, spend your time, use your energy, spend your money, what would they think is your driving desire?

And is it anything like a desire for God to be glorified by lost people coming to know him? Are we as a church desperate to see people come into the kingdom of God?

My guess would be no. This past few weeks, while God has been pushing me on this, it's been quite a challenging and sobering time.

I've reflected on what I was like as a new Christian. Or even just in my early days of serving God in ministry.

I was undivided in my allegiance. Absolute in my commitment. I was happy to take ridicule or discomfort or whatever came my way as long as I got to tell people about Jesus.

[13:40] As long as I could tell them about this incredible love that I had experienced and tasted in my own life. I would catch my friends at lunchtime and not let them go off to play whatever we were playing because they needed to hear about Jesus.

Because there was nothing more important that could happen in that 45 minute break at school. But I'm not like that now. Somewhere over the past 18 years, I've slowly but surely slipped back with the tide.

I've gotten distracted by the responsibilities of life. By worrying about money. Worrying about fitting in.

Worrying about how I might spend the rest of my life. Dreaming about holidays and retirement and whatever else. And what we need to understand and what God has been challenging me on this week is that everything that you have in your life, even the good gifts from God, war for your affection.

They war for your allegiance. And unless we actively draw close to the heart of God that has loved us even when we are sinners, then we are destined for apathy.

[15:08] For mediocrity. Let me share with you two traps that we fall into when it comes to serving God's mission and serving God's church. The first trap is a roster instead of a heart.

Like Jonah, ministry can just become a job that we tick. Something we have to get done. It's about filling a hole rather than a heart that's overflowing in love for God's people.

Every single person is valuable to God and he has called us to get out there and speak to them.

He's called us to be desperate because he was desperate for us.

He was willing to go to any length and he's calling us to love people like he does. Not just to be the name on a spreadsheet or a name on a roster.

A couple of weeks ago I was having a conversation with Candida who's one of our 930 volunteers for welcoming and she came up to me to chat about welcoming and how we might do it better.

[16:14] She had some great ideas but what struck me as I was chatting with her was the reason that she bothered to come up with these ideas because it's not necessarily her job.

If Candida stands at the door and smiles and gives you handouts, helps with collection, she has ticked the box. She's done what's required of her. But the encouragement was it's not a job to her. There is no box to tick for Candida. She just has a heart to see us as a church connect. To see us having rich, deep, Christ-filled relationships.

She wants this to be a community that is so welcoming and so loving that any outsider who walks in easily connects and gets cared for and feels valued. I hope I'm doing justice to her in my paraphrase but I just walked away encouraged and rebuked because for her there was no job.

For her, literally, the roster is irrelevant. This morning, we had a conversation. I said, are you on welcoming? She goes, well, I like to just be here every week. That is a heart that doesn't look at what must be done but a heart that looks like God and loves people who are in need.

[17:36] If serving at church here has become just one of the commitments that you have to get done in your life, could it be that desperation and love has given way to rosters?

Now, don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with a roster itself. It's a good and efficient way for us to organise ourselves but there is something wrong when we have a roster mentality to the way that we serve.

In Ephesians 3, Paul tells us that it's through the church that God has chosen to display his manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished through Christ Jesus.

The church is central to how God is working in the world. It's a key part of his mission. It's not the only place you can serve but it's a key way that God has chosen to work and so you've got to ask yourself the question, if I'm too busy to commit to the people of God and the mission of God through his local church, am I wasting my time on things that are less important?

Now, I want to choose those words carefully. not unimportant, less important. We have a lot of really important things in our lives, valid, valuable things but if this is God's heart, there is nothing more important than this.

[19:22] Maybe it means we need to make some hard decisions. Maybe it means we need to say no to some other things, count the cost and let our heart for God's purpose drive the way that we spend our time and energy and resources.

The first trap for us that we need to be mindful of is that roster or task mentality instead of a heart that shares God's desire for lost people. The second trap for us that can limit our desire to serve, our effectiveness in serving is comparison.

Let me read to you from 1 Corinthians 12 that Tim read out for us from verse 7. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit and He gives them to each just as He determines. Verse 7 is a really key verse for us this morning.

[20:42] Each one has a manifestation of the Spirit. Not some, not most, each one and the same grace that chose you when you didn't deserve it, the same love that reached out to you while you were still a sinner has now empowered you by the Holy Spirit to serve, to be a part of God's mission.

God loves to use inadequate people. God loves to grab hold of people who couldn't do it in their own strength and use them to achieve significant things for His kingdom. Moses was a stutterer yet he would be God's mouthpiece to lead the people out of Egypt.

Any limitation you see within yourself, if you look out at our church community and you think I'm not as articulate as that person, I'm not as friendly as that person, I'm not as energetic as that person, I'm not as strong as that person, I don't have as much money as that person, whatever limitation you see within yourself is an opportunity for God to glorify Himself.

It is a gift for God to show off how powerful He is. But what you have to do is put up your hand and have a go. Be willing to let God use you.

Understand it's not about what you can and can't do. It's about a God who is the God of the impossible. You don't need to know everything about your gifts. You don't need to be able to tell me on the list of spiritual gifts that are in this passage or any other list that someone gives you which ones you have and which ones you don't have.

[22 : 21] Most gifts are discovered by trial and error. Most gifts are discovered by trying something and seeing God use you.

If you're nervous because you're not sure what gifts you have, you're not sure how you could contribute, let me encourage you to wander around over morning tea see what is happening and put your hand up for something because God can and God will surprise you.

You're not signing your life away. It's one of the beauties of Activate is it's six months for you to have a go and see what God will do. Everything we do as a church here is aimed at people coming to know, treasure, and represent Jesus.

so any ministry, absolutely any ministry is a chance for you to share God's heart of lost people coming to know him.

Whether it's morning tea, youth ministry, music ministry, sound, cooking meals for sick people, doing admin in the office, ringing new people to our church, hospitality, visiting people who are unwell, vacuuming the floor, all of it is about God's glory and the joy of all people, lost and found.

[23 : 44] So have a go. Try something, anything, and see what God will do. There's no hierarchy of gifts. It's the great encouragement of 1 Corinthians 12.

We are a diverse body, interdependent, unified, because we've all received the same grace.

Because none of us deserves to be here. None of us has something great to offer God.

But God in his grace empowers us to do great things for him. In his strength, in his power. It's poisonous for churches when people start getting focused on their ministry or their ability or their recognition over and above other ones.

If the youth ministry starts fighting with the music ministry for the best leaders or for the best rooms or for the best resources, we're all in this together.

It's not my mission. It's not your mission. It's God's mission. He has, in his grace, designed this body of his so that we need one another to do what he wants us to do.

[24 : 51] No one is dispensable. We need the attitude of Jesus that says, what I'm part of is bigger than the part I play.

What I'm part of, this whole church on mission for God's glory drawing lost people into the hope and salvation of Jesus is bigger than the bit that I do. It's bigger than any recognition that I get or don't get.

Verse 26 is a key verse here in chapter 12. It says, if one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is on it, every part rejoices with it.

It's shared rejoicing. It's shared struggling. When someone becomes a Christian in our youth ministry, that is a rejoice moment for the person who vacuums the carpet after playgroup on a Tuesday.

When somebody comes here on a Sunday and makes a good relational connection and starts investigating Jesus, that is a rejoice moment for those who are cutting fruit in the kitchen on a Tuesday.

[25 : 56] When somebody joins our Mandarin Bible study on a Sunday because they have come to know the hope and salvation that is in Jesus, that is a rejoice moment for every one of us.

And equally, when somebody loses somebody close to them, regardless of whether we know them or sit next to them or are serving in the same ministry of them, that is a struggle moment for all of us.

We are a body unified. What we are part of, what God is doing is bigger than the part that we play individually. Jesus can work in spite of us and thankfully sometimes he does.

He can work around us or he can work through us. Which one do you think is most beneficial to him? It doesn't matter.

He can achieve the same outcome whether we're involved or not. But which one's most beneficial for us? God has included us for our sake, for our joy, that we might know that joy he talks about in Luke 15, that rejoicing over a sinner who repents, that we might rejoice as his body, as other churches grow, as the gospel goes out, as missionaries bear fruit, he includes us for our sake and for our joy.

[27 : 23] And so what now? If we need to acknowledge and I want to say personally I do and possibly we do, that we are not as desperate as God has been for us, what now?

Two things. And this is cannot be overstated for importance. Remember God's grace to you. Don't walk away feeling guilty because you failed. Don't walk away kicking yourself and trying to self-generate desperation. Remember God's grace to you.

Remember his incredible love. Remember the lengths he went to, to draw you back into a relationship with him. Remember how far away you were.

Maybe like me this week you need to be reminded of what it is to be forgiven by Jesus. What it is to be loved by Jesus unconditionally.

[28 : 30] What it is to have your saviour die in your place and take your punishment and instead offer you freedom and hope and future and eternity. When we know that love, when we know that love that will never be taken away, that love that is doing a work in us and guarantees heaven, then we can look and see the people who are where we used to be.

People who are still far from God. people who are in desperate need and we can accept the joy that God is offering by taking the hope of the gospel to people who are lost and hurting.

Soak in God's word. Get to know his heartbeat again. It's there over and over in scripture. He loves us even while we're sinners.

He chose us before the creation of the world. He loved us enough to send his son, soak in God's word, hear God's heartbeat and then gradually you become more and more like him.

You begin to take joy in what he takes joy in. You begin to be increasingly upset by the things that upset him and you begin to be increasingly desperate for that which he is desperate for.

[29 : 54] People who are lost. We need to remember God's grace. God loves to answer prayers that honor him.

God loves to answer a prayer when you go to him and say, God, I want to be the person you want me to be. God, I want to love what you love more. God, I want to stop being distracted.

I want to stop paying attention to things that are less important. God, I want you to give me your heart. God, I want you to love me. He loves to answer that prayer. He loves to redefine lives and give us purpose as a church so that we might joyfully sacrifice, joyfully pay the cost.

And he loves to empower us to do more than we're capable of on our own. God's desire is not for a big church or a small church or a medium church.

God's desire is for people, for your husband or your wife, for your son or your daughter, for your neighbour or your work colleague, for people you haven't met yet, people who right now live their lives in the shadow of death.

[31 : 10] For those individuals, God's heart breaks. So let's ask God to give us that heart as well. Let's ask him to empower us to resource us, to equip us so that we might be a part of a body that rejoices together and suffers together for his cause.

Let's do that now. Let's do that now. Let's do term verse ■■■ set yours