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# Coming Together to Know Jesus

*Faithfully Forward Series*

**1 John 1:1-4**

Pastor Ryan Harmon

Last week, if you were with us, we began a four-week series that we're going to walk through before we resume our study of the book of Acts in September. We're calling that series *Faithfully Forward*, and you'll recall that last week we talked about how God has been so faithful to us as a church. He has been so faithful as He has built this church over the course of six decades, and we celebrated that. But we also talked about how we don't want to just rest on the past; we also want to build towards the future, because we believe that God has called us to even more, to build upon the strong foundation that He has laid. And so this week, and then for the next two weeks, we want to talk about: How do we see God calling us forward?.

In order to do that, we're going to look at the vision statement that we talked about last summer. You might recall that we launched a vision statement that we called *Renewed*. And we said that *we want to be a people coming together to know Jesus, become more like Him, and help others do the same.*

This week we want to focus just on the first part of that phrase—we want to be a people coming together to know Jesus—*Coming together to know Jesus.* Now, inherent in that, in that statement *coming together,* is this idea of community, isn't it? And over the past 15 years, I've been on a bit of a search to understand community. What is it? How does one discover it? Why is it so hard to find? This search really began in earnest 14 years ago, when I first stepped on staff here at Lincoln Berean. I began as a young adults pastor, which meant I was working with people that had just graduated from college, and what I was finding over and over again, was those years—post college—those 20-something years, were incredibly difficult for people. And loneliness and isolation was something that more and more people that I was interacting with at that time, they were calling that a significant problem in their lives. What was astounding is, some of the people that were most connected at this church, were also saying, "I just don't have community."

Now, what began 15 years ago for me, has continued to this day because I think it's safe to say that loneliness and isolation have become an epidemic in our culture, hasn't it? If you look at studies of Millennials and Gen Z-ers, 7 out of 10, or 8 out of 10 of them would say that isolation or loneliness is a significant problem for them, causing significant disruption in their lives. We are a people, a generation, in this moment, we are more connected than ever. Thousands of Facebook friends—if you still have Facebook—and yet more isolated than ever, lacking community. As I've been thinking about this, I've come to the conclusion that I think we've been going about it entirely wrong. We've been so busy chasing after community that it actually has become elusive for us. But I think Scripture provides an answer, an answer to how we can experience deep community together. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning.

In order to do that, we're going to look at 1 John, just the first four verses of 1 John, Chapter 1. So, if you have your Bibles, open with me there. If you don't have your Bibles, you do have your

phones, so you can open your apps. We're going to look at 1 John, just the prologue here. So, beginning in verse 1, John says this:

> **What was from the beginning...** (*NASB, 1 John 1:1a)

We're going to stop right there. **What was from the beginning**. Now, in less than a year ago, it was right around November, December that Bryan concluded our study of the book of John. And here we have the same John, the Apostle John, now older, wiser from following Jesus for decades, writing once again, and he's writing a small community. But you can still hear that tone in his voice. It still sounds like John. I don't know if you remember it, but the way the Gospel of John opens, is this. It says, "*In the beginning was*…" what? "*Was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* And right here, in this epistle that John is writing to a small group of Christians, it almost reads like a sermon. He's beginning the same way and he's making a profound statement about who Jesus is. He was **from the beginning**. He is the eternal Son of God—that which was from the beginning—the beginning, had no start. Jesus didn't. But he doesn't stop there in John, and in the Gospel of John, he says, **"The Word became flesh**." He tells us more about Jesus, and that's just what he does here in verse one as well. So…

> **What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—** (Vs. 1)

The eternal Son of God put on flesh. And John is saying, "We were right there, up close and personal," and I just imagine the old Apostle John is now reflecting on his life with Jesus. The One that he followed for those three years when Jesus was in His physical ministry on earth, and then the One that for decades John has followed. Giving up everything to follow the One that he is still going to follow and it is going to take him into exile on the island of Patmos. And there he's going to have the heavens open up, and he's going to write this incredible book of Revelation. And he's reflecting on all these moments with Jesus, and he's describing all of his experience with Jesus in a very tangible way, tactile way, sensory way. The one we **heard**, the one we **saw**, the one we **touched with our hands**. In other words, this wasn't knowing at a distance; this is up-close, personal, relational knowledge.

Have you ever thought about how you know something? We say that our vision is to **come together to know Jesus**. How do you come *to know* something? Well, of course you come to know things by thinking about them, by learning. But there's also this element of knowledge that is based on experience, by interacting. We know something by thinking. We also know by experiencing, by interacting. That's precisely what John is talking about. He didn't just know the facts about Jesus. He knew Jesus up close and personal.

As an example, I could say that I know Garth Brooks. I don't know if there are any Garth Brooks fans here, but 90,000 of them gathered last week at Memorial Stadium, in this incredible scene. I know of Garth Brooks, I have owned a few of Garth Brooks' CDs. I could sing a few songs for you if I was more confident. I'll spare you. But I know Garth Brooks. But certainly we could also say that I don't know him at all. I know *of him*. I know some facts *about him*. I could recite some things that might be on his Wikipedia page. But I don't know him. I don't interact with him. I don't

know him as his family would, his friends would, his spouse would. I don't have deep, intimate interaction with Garth Brooks, such that I know him deeply.

And John is saying this Jesus—this One that is eternal—he knew up close and personal. This Jesus that he knows, he then describes as the **Word of Life**. That Greek word that is behind our translation **Word**, we're all familiar with it because it's so common. It's *logos*. Essentially, logos means *intelligent* or *rational communication*, an *intelligent message.* And John says He is the **Word of Life**. He is the one that illuminates what life is all about. He is the one that is the symbol of what life is supposed to look like. He is the one that makes sense of life. Jesus is the Word of Life, the one that gives life meaning. Then John continues in verse 2:

> **—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—**

So, this life that is Jesus was **manifested**. Manifested simply means *displayed, made known, was brought before us, was shown to us.* And John interacted with Jesus. And what he saw in Jesus was an entirely different kind of life—a life like no one has ever lived—the greatest person that's ever walked this earth, a life that shined like a light.

I'm sure you're familiar with Albert Einstein. He was an extraordinary physicist, and he had a really crazy hairdo. He wasn't a believer, but he was fascinated with Jesus, and he often called Jesus that luminous Nazarene. Luminous…shined. Jesus' life was radiant, and John was right up close and personal, and he saw it with his very own eyes. He goes on to describe it as the **eternal life**. **We have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life.** And, of course, we always think of eternal life as unending, and that's absolutely what it is. But there's also an aspect of Jesus' life that is eternal in terms of quality. It's of a completely different quality. The way he lived is unlike everything we see, that is constantly given over to decay. Jesus lived an eternal life in duration; it will never end, but also in quality. John took that in and followed Jesus all those days. And now he's proclaiming this Jesus to this group of believers. That's what he says in verse 3:

> **—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.**

So now, here in the third verse, we finally get to the main point, the main verb of the whole text. Everything that's come before this has been one long run-on sentence. And, essentially, John has been over and over again saying, "I want you to know this One that I knew so intimately." And the question is, "Why?" **So that you too may have fellowship with us.**

Now, fellowship is a word that we don't use real often. It was a few years back that I was on stage, and I was announcing that there was something up in D 203, and I called it *The Fellowship Hall*. Everyone kind of laughed at me, and the directional team said, "We don't have a fellowship hall," and I said, "We used to; we used to call it The Fellowship Hall." A good synonym for the word fellowship is just *community*. It speaks to this interactive, dynamic giving and receiving, relational dynamic: Fellowship. When we gather together, when we say *we want to be a people coming together*, what do we mean? What we mean is that we want to enter into fellowship with one

another—participatory relationship with one another. Not consumption. We're not here as consumers; we're here to experience fellowship with one another.

And John wants these believers to step into fellowship with him, and he says the way that they can do that is to what? Is to know Jesus. Knowing Jesus is the key to fellowship. See, we were made for community. It is hardwired into us because we are made in the image of God, and God in Himself exists as community. Father, Son, and Spirit, living in community together, and that is precisely what God intends for us to step into. We say *coming together to know Jesus*. Community is something we long for so much that it would almost be tempting in our little statement there to underline that *coming together* and make that the point. But our design team did it just right. It's not about the coming together, it is about the *knowing Jesus*.

Christian community, I think for so many of us, has become a goal. It's something we chase after. But what I'm coming to realize is that Christian community is not a goal; it is a byproduct that comes because you are pursuing after Jesus. It comes because you are coming to know Jesus. We as a people are so prone, aren't we, to start to think, "You know, the people that I can be in community with are the people that are just like me." And so they're okay, but they don't have the same passion. We don't share enough in common. And so we start to gather around affinities. We say, "Well, I'm a car person." "I'm a coffee person." "I'm a cat person. I'm a cat lover and I only hang with other cat people." "Dog people are okay, but I don't want them in my life group, thank you very much, because we don't share cats in common."

We do that, don't we? But what's John saying? What's the key? Pursue Jesus, chase after Jesus, come to know Jesus, live interactively with Jesus. And as you're doing just that, look to your right and look to your left and see that others are caught up in that pursuit with you, and suddenly there is a tie that binds us together because we share a common passion, a common pursuit. We are following and coming to know the same person. It's all about Jesus. Community is not a goal; it is a byproduct. And what happens, as we do that, is you start to say, "Well, they're not a cat person." And then you say, "It doesn't matter. They're a Jesus person." Republican, Democrat, doesn't matter. We're pursuing Jesus together. Jesus is the point; Jesus is the goal. He is the one that our life and our focus is centered on.

Every time I'm going to talk about community or think about community, I always go back to a book that was written years and years ago by Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was a pastor during World War II. His little book called *Life Together* is a classic on Christian community. I'd highly recommend it; it's a short read. But as I was reviewing it, I came across this quote. "*The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more everything else between us will recede. And the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and His work become the one and only thing that is alive between us."* Jesus Christ and His work—the only thing that is alive between us!

I mentioned last week that the driving passion of this church has always been Jesus Christ. To make Him known is always going to remain the driving passion of this church. Our focus is on coming together. Why? In order to know Jesus. He is our focus. He is the one that we pursue. He is the one that we know the world needs to know. And we want to step into a knowledge of Him that is deep, just as John described. A knowledge that is interactive.

As John closes this prologue—this is just the prologue…four verses—there's so much in here. Ten years ago, Bryan walked through the entire book of 1 John, and it was on authentic community. I'd highly recommend going back and just reviewing those messages. But, as John closes this prologue, he closes it really as only an older, wiser leader could. He says this:

**These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.** (Vs. 4)

John tells this congregation that, throughout the rest of the letter, he's going to call them little children, as only a spiritual parent could, and he wants them to step into fellowship so that he can experience the joy of deep fellowship with them, fellowship that can only be found in and through and because of Jesus Christ. And, Church, this is what we are called to; we are called to be a community that is united under Christ. I think for so long, we've made community a goal, and we've chased after it, and as we've chased after it, it has become more elusive. And I think it's because we've made the main thing, secondary. Jesus Christ is the main thing. Pursue Him; come to know Him, and then suddenly, we start to experience fellowship together.

So where does this leave us? It's all about knowing Jesus. Does that mean we should go up in the corner, go find a corner of the building and just open our Bibles and try to know Jesus on an individual basis? The answer is, "Well, of course not…of course not!" There's this dynamic that God has brought about that, as we gather together in order to know Jesus, we come to know Him more, and as we come to know Him more, then He does this incredible thing where we are more woven together as a people. And our experience of community deepens and, because He is at work through His Spirit in us, we also are deepening community, as we come to know Him even more. There's this dynamic cycle that God brings about through His Spirit as we gather together to know Him. That's what we want to be all about. When we walk into this building, we want to make Jesus known. When we gather in this room, we want to worship Jesus and make Him known.

We thought, as we were closing our time together today, it would be good to share a little bit about how we see that coming together and happening in the days to come. There's so much that happens here, and there's so much thought that goes behind it, we want to make that known to you. So, when we gather in this building, how are we doing that in a way that will make Jesus known?

So, I'm going to invite Rosie Pinkerman up on stage. Rosie has been with us for some time. She's worked in our kid's ministry. You might know her from there, but she most recently has stepped in and she's now our Director of Guest Experiences and Connections. Rosie's passion is Jesus Christ, and she wants to make Him known. So, she's going to tell us a little bit about how she and her teams are thinking about how coming to this place, how gathering together is intended to help us come to know Jesus more. So, Rosie.

*Rosie*: Thank you, Ryan. Good morning. Well, we've been talking about moving faithfully forward as a church, and I want to share a bit about how we see that playing out with our guest experience and connections here at Lincoln Berean. I have the privilege of leading 11 different teams that uniquely serve to create exceptional environments, where people feel welcomed, cared for, and come to know Jesus. You've hopefully seen men, women, teens, and kids serving as ushers and greeters…even in our parking lot, welcoming you into our services. Our info center, library, and publication teams love to provide resources and info on how you can become more like Jesus and

connect to our church. Our free coffee, and Commons coffee shop areas seek to serve with warmth and hospitality. The communion team serves in a tangible way that reminds us of the gift of Jesus' death and resurrection. Every team member on every team serves a really important role in our church's mission and vision. We believe that every person's experience and connection at a church is so important. We should do everything we can through the leading of the Holy Spirit to help people take their next step in their relationship with Jesus.

We want you to feel that you matter to us and to God when you are here during our weekend services and during the week. Before any song is sung or any message preached, people begin to be impacted by our church, just by walking through our doors. Our mission as a church is to help people see Jesus more clearly, by the way we serve them. And guess what? I said I have 11 guest experience teams, and *you* are the 12th team—the 12th man so to speak. You as the church body serve such a significant role in the way this all plays out. You make a notable impact on how our team wins, and the win is to draw people to Jesus. As we grow and move forward in faith, we want to continue to challenge each member of this body to be intentional, even when we enter into this place, to have the very mindset of Jesus Himself. The Gospels record Him declaring to His followers that *even He came to serve and not to be served*.

I'm a pretty outgoing and welcoming person, but even still, I have to work on this myself and ask, "Are the weekend services set up to serve me and people like me? Or are they set up so that everyone, no matter who you are, no matter where you come from, can see Jesus on display and are invited to engage with Him?" Whether it's your first Sunday or you've been here a thousand times, we want to make sure that everyone feels welcomed into this family of faith. To truly be a church on mission, we have to continue to resist the temptation of thinking, "What's in it for me?" and instead think, "Who is the Holy Spirit asking me to befriend?"

Take time to look around you. Even in the section where you're sitting right now there are people just like you who are on this journey of life, and who have come here to the house of God to worship. You can serve alongside your section hosts by greeting someone, giving them a smile, asking them how they're doing, and maybe even praying with someone. I believe the Lord has incredible things in store for our church. And as we move forward, we can serve together to help people see the grace of Jesus lived out in our lives. In a time of so much division and conflict in our world, let's not forget the fragrant aroma of grace.

When we come together, we want people to see a difference in our lives. That's part of why we created *Belong* which we will launch this September. This gathering will welcome new guests into our church so that they know that there is a place for them in the family of God, and that we want them plugged into our church family. This will be held on the first and third Sundays of every month, so that there's a regular and consistent opportunity for new people, those who are coming back to church, for them to feel welcomed into our church family. We are the family of God and hospitality, hosting, caring, is just part of what we do for His glory and for His honor. Saying hello, giving someone a smile, asking how they're doing could be a transformational moment in their lives. When people walk into this gathering, I pray they're coming to know Jesus, and we want to do everything we can to see that happen.

I took some time recently to think about Philippians 2:1-18, and how it connects to the ways that my teams and I serve. As I've been in ministry for a few years now, God has brought this passage over and over again to me in my times with Him. And I'm just so thankful for what He's teaching me through it. This passage reminds me that Jesus Christ Himself lived a life of service, compassion, unity, joy, love, and it was all complete. Even with His majesty, and even with being God, He did nothing to His own advantage. He made Himself humble, obedient, full of grace, and all for us, and all to the glory of the Father, that every person would declare that *Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*. We as a church can shine like stars in the city of Lincoln and beyond, as we point people to how amazing our God is. So, let's continue to hold firmly to Him and to each other as we move faithfully forward. (*applause*)

*Ryan*: Thanks, Rosie. Rosie and her team are aiming each week to figure out, "How do we execute this plan to make Jesus known when people come into this place?" But it's not just that. You might remember last year with Josh, when we were walking through this renewed vision, Josh reminded us that we aren't merely a crowd, we are a congregation; we are a fellowship. We're community under Christ. You think, "What would it be like if, when people interact with the people of Lincoln Berean, they see Jesus, and they come to know Him more?" That's just what we want to do. So we want to make sure that when people come and we're out in the foyers, and they are coming to classes, that when they come in, they are known, they're not merely anonymous. But we also know that when we come in here, we want to continue to lift up Jesus' name. We want to continue to come to know Him. When walking into this room, we are not walking into a concert. We're walking into worship, to worship the One that is worthy of worship.

We're going to have the worship team and Jon Sauer come up on stage here. We are led each week by such a talented group. But it's not just their talent, it's the thought and the intentionality they put into making sure that Jesus is the One that is our focus when we worship. So, you know Natalie and Rich, our worship directors, but you might not be familiar with Jon. Jon is our Director of Worship Arts. He's also our manager that oversees all that we do when we come together at our weekend services. So, these guys are going to share a bit with us.

*Jon Sauer*: Thanks, Ryan. Good morning. I don't know about you, but I think I'd be willing to pay a little bit of money to watch Pastors Ryan and Bryan Clark sing a Garth Brooks duet. What about you? I really would not pay money to see that, but it'd be entertaining. Well, this weekend we're focusing on coming together to know Jesus, and we just want to talk to you a little bit about how we do that in our corporate worship services. So, every weekend we come together to lift praises to our God who is so worthy, and, essentially what we're doing is celebrating the gospel—that those of us who didn't know Jesus have been able to know Jesus through the gospel—and that there is a way for others to know Jesus. And so, essentially, we just celebrate that every weekend.

Martin Luther once said, "*Let God speak directly to His people through the Scriptures, and let His people respond with grateful songs of praise.*" So, we come together to learn the Scriptures to know about Jesus. And if you know Jesus, His Spirit takes that truth, and it applies it to your heart so that you can be changed and transformed into His image. There are over 400 references in Scripture to singing, in 50 direct commands. Does anybody know any of this? So, *"Sing to the Lord a new song."* "*Shout for joy, all the earth."* "*Lift high the name of Jesus."* Those are just a few, and one of my favorites, "*Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you, teaching and*

*admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God."* In Zephaniah, we see that God exalts over his people with loud singing. What a beautiful picture! So, we sing with thankfulness in our hearts to God, and God sings over us. It's an amazing truth! I work with these two, and a larger team each week, to think through how to help you guys know Jesus better in our corporate gatherings. We're so skillfully and genuinely led each week, and I'm very grateful for these guys and the teams up here each weekend. So, I'm going to have them talk to you a little bit about how they seek for you to know Jesus better by cultivating a heart of worship, and how God has helped them know Him better as they've led worship.

*Rich Confer*: Awesome. Well, thanks, John. Well, to love God, to worship God, is to know God. By His Spirit, He reveals Himself to us through His Word and through each other, as we gather in His name. Once we learn truth about Him, the next step in knowing is remembering, and singing songs together is part of that process of remembering. And one reason that we do sing together, is to remember. Your melody is kind of like a Dewey Decimal System for our memories. For me, Alan Jackson's rendition of *In the Garden*, takes me right back to hanging out with my grandpa, Ernie. Or *Nothing Fancy* by Dave Barnes puts me back in the arms of my bride during our first dance on our wedding day. Or Amy Grant's first Christmas album can pretty much make the entire room smell like a pine tree for me.

But when we come together, and when we sing together in this context, we're doing so much more than just triggering good memories or feeling good. We're linking truth with melody in order to store it in our minds. We're engaging the emotional response to music that God hardwired into each one of us, in order to write it on our hearts. And we're reminding ourselves of the single most important and wonderful moment in history when Jesus died on the cross, conquering sin and death on our behalf. We're loving God by seeking to know Him with our minds and with our hearts through song, and we're encountering Him as we sing together.

So, a great song matches melody and feeling to the message in a way that properly represents the message, holds it up, and solidifies it in our memories. *Oh come, Oh come, Emmanuel* is a great example of this as the song transitions back and forth from minor to major keys, as we go from longing to rejoicing, properly representing that message. And earlier in the service today, as we were about to sing of Christ's triumphant return in *All Creatures of our God and King*, we modulated up in a triumphant way musically in order to match that message. When it comes to psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for us to choose from, there's a vast number of great options. And each song we choose to sing when we're gathered corporately here at LBC, is done with great intentionality and purpose. I've got the privilege of being under Natalie's leadership, as she and I and Carey, who is playing keys this weekend, plan these weekend services together. So, she's going to share more with you about that process.

*Natalie Roesch*: Yes, so when we meet together as a team to plan the services, we consider a lot of different things. But the main focus is on the Scripture that's going to be taught on that specific weekend. We want the songs to enhance what the teaching pastor is going to share with all of us. Some other things that we consider are the lyrics. We want to make sure that the lyrics of the songs line up with what the Bible is actually saying. We look at vertical and horizontal songs; we want a mix of both of those. So, the vertical songs are the ones that we sing to God, and the horizontal

songs are the ones that we sing to each other. We think about the melodies. We want songs that are pretty easy to catch on to. So simple, predictable melodies work best, because we want everyone to participate. Like Rich mentioned, we want the songs to be memorable. We want to call them back as we're going throughout our week.

Another thing is that we choose different styles. I love that about our church, that they have made the decision to make all of the services on one given weekend the same. So, though we come from different backgrounds, and we all prefer different styles, we're able to come together and sing different styles, different songs, and the focus isn't on that, but it's on the lyrics, and it's on praising God, and I feel like that's really unified our body over the years.

Another thing I've been thinking about when it comes to musical worship is, I believe that when we sing, we are praying. So those lyrics that feel more difficult to sing, maybe we're struggling to believe what's true of God, or what's true of us. I believe that when we choose to lift our voice in song and sing along those lyrics, that God begins to do a work. So even earlier in the service we were singing some lyrics, "*I will build my life upon Your love. I will trust in You alone.*" Those lyrics are not always true of my life, but it is definitely who I want to be. So, I'm choosing to sing those out to essentially pray those and say, "God, I want that to be true of me. I want to trust in You alone," and then I believe that God does a work.

Many years ago, before I was on staff, I was a part of the worship team, and I was asked to sing the song *Gratitude*. That song is about being grateful to God, no matter the circumstance. And at the time in my life, I was really struggling. I was longing to be a mom. My husband and I had been trying to have a child, and it just wasn't happening for us. So, I was not thankful in my heart. I was not feeling content. But as I practiced that song, and I sang those lyrics over and over again, the Lord started to work in my heart. And He reminded me that I was loved. And He reminded me that he had His best in mind for me, and that I could trust Him. And I believe that's what worship does. When we choose to sing out, when we choose to lift our voices, it aligns our hearts with truth, and it allows us to surrender to His will. It does!

So, as a team, we really do want to create moments where we're growing as worshipers. And one of the ways that we're doing that is through our worship nights. We haven't been able to have one of those for a while, but we have one coming up the end of September. These nights are held once a month. They're on Friday nights; they're here in the auditorium, and it is about an hour or so of singing and praying and reading Scripture together. And it is an awesome time. So, I encourage you to invite a friend and come be a part of those nights, as we continue to seek to grow and know Jesus through our worship. Thanks. *(Applause)*

*Ryan*: Thank you, guys. So it's so helpful for me to hear the thought and the intentionality that goes into the way they're designing our services. You know, it's easy to think, "Oh, it's just pick some songs." That's not it at all. How do these songs bring out the truth of Scripture? How does even the way that we sing the song, match what we are trying to say about who Jesus is, who our God is, and it matches the value and the worth that God is deserving of. So thankful for that team.

There's one more area that we would like to talk about when we think about our gatherings on the weekends. It's an area that's been a passion for this church since its inception, and that is our next

generation. The Next Generation Ministry has always been a focus of Lincoln Berean and is going to remain a focus. I'm going to show you a picture here of our Next Generation Team in just a minute. This team stretches all the way from birth up through those young adult years. There they are. That crew is so passionate about making Jesus known to all those that are part of the next generation. Now Brad Van Genderen is the manager that oversees this entire area. He also serves as our youth pastor, and he is helping that team make sure they are aligned, so that all that we do in that next generation area is aimed at making Jesus known, because that is absolutely critical to our future as a church. I'm so thankful for all that happens in that next generation area from middle school to high school, what our young adult team is doing.

I know that this morning, there are some college students here because school starts tomorrow. I see the gentlemen from AGS are here. We're thankful to have them with us. Cody and Lindsay and Lauren and the college team have put together some incredible things for this year because we know that pouring into our college students is so critical because we need them to know Jesus. That's such an area of ministry in the city that I think we haven't really done a good job as a community of Christians, of really pouring into our college students.

With the last few minutes, I want to talk about our Kids' Ministry. Our Kids' Ministry is so important to us. And one thing that we know for sure is that a faith that is rooted early in life, a fascination, a love for, a knowledge of Jesus that begins early in life, has an impact over an entire lifetime. Often it impacts the entire family. And over this past year, we've had to face some realities in terms of kids' ministry. COVID was a weird thing. No one was expecting it. But what it resulted in is—as Natalie alluded to with the worship nights—is that we had to stop doing some things. And now as we start to return to some semblance of normalcy and rhythm, we are having to make some difficult decisions, strategic decisions about how do we start resuming that which took place prior to COVID? And the honest fact is, the simple fact is, that we can't do everything we were doing pre-2020. And one of the difficult decisions we had to make—and you may have received a letter from me, or an email from me—is that we made the decision that this fall, we aren't going to resume our Wednesday night programming for our kids. That is not a decision because we don't believe it's important. It's not a philosophical decision. It's a strategic decision. We're in a moment where we are having to rebuild things, rebuild our kids' team, recast vision so that people would come and serve. It's a little bit like taking a year and a half off from a gym. You know, then you try to go in again, and you try to start back where you were, and you're really sore. You can barely walk the next day. As we relaunch things, we are making strategic decisions about how we do that in an order, in a structured way, a way that makes sense.

One of the things that we want to really challenge you with, and call you to, is to consider serving in that area. You might not know this, but did you know that for our weekend gatherings, it takes 375 people serving, and that's not counting staff. Three hundred seventy-five people is the minimum number that I'm told we have to have in order to do all that we do when we come together. And a large portion of those serving are serving with our kids' ministry and our youth ministry. So I just want to challenge you and ask you to ask God, "Would He have you serve in that area?" because one thing I can promise is, "You would never regret it!" I'm pretty confident it would bring a lot of joy to you to interact with, especially with those kids in basically walker's, kindergarten, all the way up through fifth grade. It's such a critical time of life. Jesus loved kids, didn't He? And kids loved Him!

I can still remember the adults that poured into my life when I was growing up. I can name them by name: Susie Alford, Ron Gresham, John Alford, Mark Bristol, Chad Ralphs. I can name them; they mean nothing to you. But you know what? They mean a lot to me. These are adults that I looked at, and I saw Jesus in them, and they cared about me.

And I wonder whether or not God is calling you to step into the joy of pouring into the life of these kids that need-to-know Jesus, to speak a timely word, to help them to see Him differently, start to grow in their love and their appreciation for Him. If we're going to be a church that thinks about moving faithfully forward, there's no generation that is more critical that we think about, than this youngest generation who is the future. They are the future Lincoln Berean Church, and we want to help them come to know Jesus.

So, I want to challenge you to consider that. Ask God, "Would He have you serve there?" And if He would, if He's prompting you, you can go to our website and see on our Serve Page, there will be ways for you to serve. But a much easier step for you will be right when we are finished here, to step out into the foyer, and at the spotlight booth, there are people that can tell you a little bit about ways that you can join in with what we are doing in our kids' ministry, because that generation, those precious lives, are so important to us. And we want to see them come to know Jesus.

That's our driving passion. Jesus is our focus. Community church doesn't come by thinking more and more about community. Community comes by pursuing Jesus Christ, by coming to know Him, and not knowing mere facts about Him—not passing Bible trivia, not knowing Him at a distance—but knowing Him intimately, entering into an interactive relationship with Jesus, the One that we serve, the One that we love, the One who came and walked this earth, showed us how to live, the eternal **Word of Life**. But not just that, but the One who went to the cross, to do for us that which we could not do for ourselves, that we might become children of God. He is the One it is about. We are a church coming together to know Jesus, and that will never change.

As we were thinking about how we should close our time together, we thought there's no better way to do that than participating in communion together. It's an interesting word, isn't it? We call it communion. Why? Well, because it's the cross that allows us to have communion together. We're partaking of the same cup; we're eating the same bread essentially, joining together under the cross because we are a people united only because of Jesus and because of His Spirit. So, when you walked in, you hopefully grabbed the elements. If you didn't, would you raise your hand, and an usher can pass those to you. I see that you're very familiar with how to tear off the cellophane for I can hear the cellophane. But if you haven't used these before, you tear off the top portion. That gives you access to the bread. So, on the night that Jesus was betrayed, He gathered together in that upper room with His disciples, and He took the bread, and He gave thanks for it. And then He gave it to them. And He said, "This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." (Pause) In the same way, He took the cup, and, again, lifting it up and giving thanks for it, He turned to His disciples and said, "This is the blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you do this, whenever you drink of it, do this in remembrance of Me." (Pause)

*Our Lord Jesus, you are the One that we want to know. You are the only reason that we can be united together, and we thank You for that. We praise You, that You went to the cross; You paid the debt we could not pay, making a way for us to enter into fellowship with You and with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, and ultimately to experience fellowship together. And we lift Your name up; we magnify Your name. We want to make You and Your name and Your glory known throughout this place. So, help us as we come to know You, that we may let others know You more. We thank You and we praise You and we do all this in the powerful name of You, Jesus. Amen.*

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