

[00:00:00] So New Year, it's a time, I guess, when we tend to reflect on the year that's gone and we look forward to the coming year.

[00:00:09] It's kind of one of those natural breaks in kind of our rhythm of life. Quite a lot of us get a fair break off from work over Christmas and we spend family time and we just kind of step out of the day to day normal, which is a great thing. And I think as well for us in Scotland, it's that point where those shorter and shorter days suddenly start to just eek out a little bit as well. And so you kind of look with Hope into the new year for the spring that's coming as well.

[00:00:43] One of the things that people like to do at this time of year is make New Year's resolutions.

[00:00:47] So polls this year suggested that 76% of adults in, in the UK were planning on making New Year's resolutions.

[00:00:56] Now that sounds great.

[00:00:59] You know, they might be financial goals, you know, getting out of saving or getting out of debt. They might be health goals of eating more, healthily, drinking less or whatever. They might be spiritual goals, maybe reading the Bible more, praying more.

[00:01:14] But actually, statistics are not on the side of New Year's resolutions.

[00:01:19] Within the first week, only 77% are still going with them. And in fact only about 8 to 9% of people actually succeed in their New Year's resolutions for a whole year. So it's kind of one of those things you take with kind of pinch of salt and all the rest of it maybe need to be more realistic in our expectations.

[00:01:42] But you know, for us as a community, you know, what are the things we, you know, we're thinking about as we kind of transition from one year to another?

[00:01:51] You know, 25 was actually a pretty positive year, I think, for Hope Church. You've seen a growing sense of community among us, which has been incredible.

[00:02:01] We've seen incredible generous giving, sustaining all the things that we're doing.

[00:02:06] We've seen a successful leadership transition as Andy and Teresa have stepped out into their ministry and myself, Mark and Jan have taken on leading the church. And that's no mean feat, actually. I think when you look around at succession in churches, it's not always a very pretty thing.

[00:02:28] So something to be celebrated.

[00:02:31] We had an amazing time at Love Knightswood and just a real sense of greater openness as kind of guys have been involved there.

[00:02:40] And of course, as we look into 2026, there's hope and expectation for all that God's going to do. As John and Rachel join us And John gets involved in our leadership team. Just a real sense that this is going to be a time when God is going to do something very special. Just as Jan was sharing that word of encouragement a moment ago, I just had this real sense. God has amazing time for us this year.

[00:03:09] So how do we take these steps forward into the new year? How do we ensure that

our hopes and dreams, our resolutions, if you like, don't just evaporate and fall by the wayside in the busyness of life?

[00:03:26] Well, we're beginning a series of changes, teaching, working our way through the book of Luke. And actually I believe that this passage that we've got for today actually kind of speaks into this whole thing.

[00:03:40] So we're walking from Nazareth to Emmaus. Jan started off with the Christmas story from Luke back just on the 21st of December.

[00:03:50] And just as we started to dip into that, and there's a reading plan, if you haven't seen it already, really encourage you to. It's on your Hope Speaks email. So get in there and look at that. And the small groups will be kind of diving into this a little bit as well and reading together and so on.

[00:04:07] So we're going to work our way through Luke's gospel and we're going to see the teaching of Jesus, who's really our forerunner in the faith. As Hebrews put it, he was the firstborn among many brothers, so he is kind of our model and what we are aiming for as Christians.

[00:04:27] And as we follow this journey through Luke, we're going to be enriched by the wisdom of his words.

[00:04:33] We're going to have our faith and expectation just stirred up as we see the incredible miracles that he did and be inspired to action, by the way, that actually included the lost and the broken and the marginalized that he encountered.

[00:04:51] So as I say, excited for this series. I think it's going to be an amazing time as we share this journey together.

[00:04:59] So let's get into today's passage. So we're in Luke 2 today.

[00:05:03] So there's a couple of stories there.

[00:05:06] There's some of the Christmas story that Jan touched on last time, and then there's the story of Jesus being presented at the temple kind of when he was we. It was kind of a part of the Hebrew tradition. But I wanted to kind of home in on the end part of the chapter. And this is a story I think we know well. It's when Jesus actually goes up to the temple. So I'm going to read this little passage from Luke and then we'll take a few thoughts from there. Okay. So every year Jesus parents. Sorry, it's Luke 2:41, by the way, if you're following it, that every year Jesus parents went up to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.

[00:05:49] When he was 12 years old, they went up to the festival. According to the custom, after the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But they were unaware of it.

[00:06:03] Every parent's nightmare.

[00:06:05] Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. And then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.

[00:06:12] And when they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

[00:06:17] And after three days, imagine that, three days of looking for your missing, probably 12

year old, they reckon.

[00:06:26] Yeah, you'd be kind of probably tearing your hair out a little bit at that point.

[00:06:31] After three days, they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

[00:06:39] Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

[00:06:43] When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. Masterful understatement there, I think.

[00:06:56] Why were you searching for me? He asked.

[00:06:59] Didn't you know I had to be in my father's house?

[00:07:03] But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

[00:07:06] Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all those things in her heart.

[00:07:14] And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature in favor with God and men.

[00:07:20] Brilliant. I love that story. It's one that I remember actually, as a kid. It's kind of always held a very special kind of place in my heart, really. And so I want to focus in on this story. And just as I was reading this and thinking, okay, God, what do you want to say? Through this, God kind of dropped a number of things in. I've got three main points. Like, you know, a good sermon should.

[00:07:45] So there's three things that God highlighted me to me out of this story.

[00:07:51] And the first one, I've just given the heading faith, rhythm.

[00:07:57] So it struck me that actually this trip they were going out to celebrate the Passover as part of their rhythm, if you like, of their religious observance. It was their custom to do this every year to mark this event. And actually, when you look at it, this must have been pretty inconvenient.

[00:08:18] I looked it up. It's about 90 miles by road from Nazareth to Jerusalem, which in that time was, you know, probably five days travel, something like that. It was, you know, a pretty major undertaking in a hot, dry, dusty country.

[00:08:36] So, you know, this was no minor thing, no minor undertaking, but they had it written into that calendar. Year after year, they would go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, God's deliverance of Israel.

[00:08:51] And so, as I say, this idea of just kind of our religious, our faith rhythms was kind of what God spoke to me. And for us to grow and thrive, we actually need those faith rhythms.

[00:09:05] You know, we speak about freedom and grace a great deal, and rightly so, but we can so easily use that as kind of an excuse not to just get into that rhythm of life with God. You know, it can lead to us thinking, I just can't be bothered, or I don't have the capacity, I don't have the

time.

[00:09:26] But actually our spiritual rhythms are something that we shouldn't neglect. You know, we have the kind of dates in the church calendar. We have Christmas that we just celebrated, which is so much fun. We have Easter, we have Pentecost. And traditionally in the church we often celebrate things like harvest and a whole bunch of different kind of points through the year. And these actually give us a framework, but they also fix our attention on aspects of God's character and aspects of his heart towards us as well.

[00:10:00] But then we also have those kind of shorter term rhythms, our personal, day by day and week by week rhythms of faith, our gathering with our church community, our time spent in personal prayer, worship and study. These are all things that take us beyond just surviving or treading water, but which actually help us to move forward. They give us an impetus into all that the Father has for us.

[00:10:29] So our faith rhythms are just really a key thing, those kind of habits that we develop. And we'll see in my next point. Actually it's not something that's easy to do on our own, but actually we need people to cheer us on.

[00:10:46] So the second point then was that God highlighted to me about this story was that actually this was a community thing. You know, Mary and Joseph and Jesus, they were traveling with friends and with family.

[00:10:58] You know, they were had this sense that it was a community project. You could always imagine planning the journey and the food they were going to take, the places they were going to stay, over how they were going to divvy up the childcare among themselves. So they all got a bit of a break.

[00:11:15] You know, we used to travel south down to Southampton with four kids. And that was bad enough sometimes, but you can imagine, you know, they're probably with donkeys and all kinds of stuff, carrying all the stuff for all these people. So, you know, pretty major undertaking. But it was a communal thing, wasn't 100% successful. They did manage to leave Jesus behind in the temple, but actually, you know, there was just the assumption, you know, he's with Uncle Jeremiah and Aunt whoever and his cousins. But anyway, there was this sense, though, of just security, traveling in a group.

[00:11:52] And again, we need community.

[00:11:55] You know, it's very easy for us to retreat into our shells, into our own little corners and all the rest of it. But actually, community is a key thing to obviously being part of God's family. But also it's key for our growth as well, because actually, as we have people around us, that spurs us on to be the best us, really.

[00:12:21] So we're made for community. The picture of the early church was actually of people meeting from home to home, breaking bread together, eating together, sharing the apostles, teaching together, and just that they were readying themselves to turn the world upside down. We saw, we see in history how that small group of people, initially 150 or whatever, 120 in the upper room, grew to many thousands in Jerusalem and then spread out across the whole Roman Empire, really over a century or so.

[00:13:00] And actually at the heart of that was just this sense of community together, encouraging each other again in those spiritual disciplines together, breaking bread, prayer, absorbing the apostles, teaching.

[00:13:18] You know, solo spiritual journeys are generally quite dangerous.

[00:13:25] If you have no accountability, you have no people around you supporting you, praying for you, it's a lonely place to be. And, you know, we need to throw ourselves into community.

[00:13:41] One of the highlights for 2025 for me was actually our church weekend away. It was just absolutely beautiful, seeing everybody mucking in, all the kids and the teens being involved.

[00:13:52] And yeah, for me, it kind of embodied that idea of community and body ministry. We heard from, you know, people that we don't often hear from, you know, in the teaching.

[00:14:03] Gideon was amazing. I saw him somewhere.

[00:14:06] He was amazing. Just sharing on how we pursue God together and so many beautiful things.

[00:14:16] So let's keep going for community.

[00:14:19] I kind of feel like there is that sense of community among us, but let's not be complacent on that one. Let's keep on pushing in. It's going to be a firm foundation for us as we grow, as new people come in. We need those structures to bring people into all that we've experienced.

[00:14:41] And then the third thing is just Jesus response. He said, where else would I be other than in the Father's house.

[00:14:51] And this one just has always resonated with me.

[00:14:58] I kind of hope that will be my epitaph. In a way. He loved the Father's house.

[00:15:03] You know, there are many connotations to the idea of the Father's house. You know, for Jesus and his contemporaries, there's actually a physical temple in Jerusalem.

[00:15:12] And this temple was the center of worship. It was where they marked these kind of key ceremony, ceremonial moments, Passover and the Feast of Booths and all these different things that they would celebrate together.

[00:15:31] But it was more than that as well. It was kind of the center of their national spiritual identity as well.

[00:15:40] And even under Roman occupation, as they were at Jesus time, this was kind of a central place that was key to the children of Israel.

[00:15:51] And to the extent that finally, in about A.D. 70, the Romans actually knocked the temple down, kind of as a final act of oppression, really, over the Israelites.

[00:16:05] But what's the Father's house for us?

[00:16:08] Well, to me, the Father's house is the place where he dwells.

[00:16:12] You know, we as individuals, we host his presence.

[00:16:17] It talks about us being the aroma of Christ to those who are being saved.

[00:16:23] Each one host his presence.

[00:16:26] But then as well, God's people together. The church is the house of God.

[00:16:32] We often say church isn't the building, it's the people.

[00:16:35] In 1 Corinthians 3, it tells us, do you not know that you yourselves are God's temple and God's spirit dwells within you?

[00:16:44] You know, God chose, as he revealed himself to the Israelites, to actually almost restrict himself. You know, he came in the Ark of the Covenant and in the Tent of meeting right back with Moses. And then in the temple, we read of God's presence just coming in such a powerful way as they dedicated the temple and God's presence came in.

[00:17:11] But as I say, God didn't want to be forever stuck in a particular building or whatever. He wanted a people who expressed and carried his presence wherever they went.

[00:17:28] So do you not know you yourselves are God's temple, and God's spirit dwells in your midst? We are the Father's house.

[00:17:38] The Father's house is where he's present.

[00:17:41] I don't know if you remember a few years back, if you were with us then Julian Adams brought a message to us, and he talked about it not being a time of God's visitation, but God's habitation.

[00:17:53] You know, revivals have come and have gone, and God's presence has flowed in powerfully for a time. But actually God wants a Place where he can continually go dwell. And that's really our heart as a community, that actually we would be a place where God is pleased to dwell.

[00:18:15] He comes in, he does rearrange the furniture a little bit. That was, I think Andy's catchphrase a few years back. And he asserts his priorities so that what people experience when they come in and touch us is his fiery, life changing, healing, restoring presence.

[00:18:37] And that's really what we've set our stool out as a community is to pursue that, to pursue his presence among us.

[00:18:44] Like the Israelites in the desert, they set up a camp with the tent of the meeting and the Ark of the Covenant right at the center of the camp. And then everybody camped around that. And every evening Moses would go into the tent, God's presence would come down and the cloud would lead them at night during the day, and the pillar of fire at night.

[00:19:09] And there was just that sense of gathering around the presence of God.

[00:19:16] So that's who we are with this presence central gathering around him and his glory. And as we touch the presence and glory, we're transformed. And his miracle working power is released among us.

[00:19:32] And as we pursue him and his kingdom first, all the other things we need are going to be added to us.

[00:19:40] So let's be a people who love the Father's house.

[00:19:44] Let's ask him to stir a fresh hunger for him, for his presence, for his presence and his people. That outshines really everything else in our lives.

[00:19:58] There's a cost sometimes for our comfort, our time, our resources. But actually that cost brings us a reward, a fullness of life in him.

[00:20:11] So that's our three points. But actually there was a wee bonus thing as well.

[00:20:16] Just the last thing that I felt God highlight was actually Mary's response as well.

[00:20:21] She'd been through this ordeal. She'd been frantically looking for her son, not knowing where he'd gone.

[00:20:29] But at the end of that passage it says, but his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

[00:20:35] Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and favor with God and men.

[00:20:40] We too, we need to treasure in our hearts the things that God has been doing and is doing among us.

[00:20:48] You know, Andy, a few weeks back shared a little bit just about the power of our testimonies and how we need to keep on remembering all the things that have happened in our history as a church family.

[00:21:03] You know, we've had those stories of where God has broken in with overwhelming us in his presence.

[00:21:10] When we've seen incredible healings where we've seen incredible Provision, supernatural provision from God.

[00:21:19] I think what I'd say is let's not let our hearts grow cold, cynical or unbelieving over the things from our past.

[00:21:28] You know, there's more for us actually. And how we steward what we've already had will actually either limit the outpouring of God or actually be a catalyst for greater blessing.

[00:21:41] So, you know, we tell stories, we tell testimonies, and it's not, you know, just for the sake of it, but actually we want to catch something of what God is doing and whether it be, you know, an incredible healing, whether it be God breaking in and you know, providing financially, whatever that might be, whether it be God just touching somebody in their place of depression or addiction or whatever God. Actually those stories are our lifeblood. They're the things which remind us that God is working among us.

[00:22:21] So we need to treasure in our hearts all the things that God has been doing.

[00:22:28] So how do we succeed in our hopes and dreams for 2026?

[00:22:34] Well, I think those three points really will take us a long way.

[00:22:39] Establish again or nurture those that are already present those spiritual rhythms in our lives.

[00:22:47] They're the compass needle that swings to true north. They're the things that guide our decisions. They're things that set our priorities really.

[00:22:57] And so let's get into those spiritual rhythms again, not out of sense of duty or fear, but let's delight in a Father who loves us and who wants us to grow and to thrive and to deepen our communion with him in the Godhead.

[00:23:17] Secondly, we need to dig deep into community.

[00:23:20] The people around us actually are the ones who will help us, cheer us on to the goals that we have in our lives.

[00:23:28] You know, those who are sold out for his presence committed, it says how good and pleasant it is where brothers dwell in unity. There the Lord commands the blessing.

[00:23:42] And you know, as we dwell together in unity. And actually God can't help but put his hand of blessing on us. And it says this, by this will all men know that we're his disciples by a love for one another. So it's not just a self serving thing, but actually it's us becoming a demonstration of God's kingdom to those who haven't yet experienced it.

[00:24:07] And then lastly, we need to become lovers of the Father's house.

[00:24:11] Those who are sold out for his presence, committed to being built into that living temple, becoming that beautiful representation of the Father's heart to those around us who don't yet know him.

[00:24:25] So 2026, bring it on. I have a real sense that this is going to be a year of great growth. A year when we're going to look back this time next year and think, oh my goodness, God, you have been so good.

[00:24:40] And yeah, I just want to encourage you to stir your hearts, to just take a fresh moment, just to allow God in. Allow God to just touch your heart, stir that fire once again.

[00:24:59] So I'd love us actually to close now by worshipping just to express his love for his house and inviting Holy Spirit just to birth a fresh love for him and for his house in us at the outset of this new year.

[00:25:16] God, let us be a people found where your presence is. Let us be people who pursue just your presence, your glory, the place where you are, God, as we touch you, God, we are changed. And as we touch you, God, we touch those around us, God, we have encounters with you so that we can bring encounters to others.

[00:25:44] And so, God, I just pray you'll stir our hearts, God, as we embark in this new year, God, stir our hearts for you.

[00:25:52] Set a fresh fire down in our soul, God, set afresh longing and yearning for you, God, set a fresh compassion and heart for the lost.

[00:26:07] Yeah, God, God, we just invite you in right now. Holy Spirit, come and touch us.

[00:26:14] Come and change us. Come prepare us for this coming year.