



FROM THE 2020 NEW YEARS RETREAT

Becoming TOGETHER

LECTURE 1

REV. IN KEE KIM



Welcome

Welcome:


I look forward to having this time every year. It is one of my favourite times. Even though it was a painful process preparing for it, it is time to be away, time to pray, time to be quiet and reflect and time to have fellowship with you.

This year's theme is
BECOMING TOGETHER.





God Called Us Together



As I reflected on the first Sunday of the New Year, I believe that we have come to this community and have relationships with each other because **God has called us**. It is an act of God's providence. It wasn't just our human choice. God brought us here together. Nobody can say to others that **you don't belong here**. We should rather have this attitude. I have not chosen you, but **I appreciate that we have met like this**.


Say to each other: I am glad that I have met you.

Since it is God who has brought us here together, we should treat each other with **respect and honour**. They are God-sent people. We should treat each and every one with love and appreciation. We **value** every person that we meet in this community.

As we live our lives, treating each person we meet with respect and honour, that **changes us**. That kind of attitude **builds and forms** a certain character within us. It is a **spiritual character**. This spiritual character cannot be formed **in isolation**, all by ourselves.

Proverbs said: *"Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another." (Proverbs 27:17)* We sharpen each other. We shape each other.

Dostoyevsky said: *"The true security is to be found in social solidarity rather than in isolated individual effort."*





The Way We Treat Others Reflects What's Inside

How we treat people we meet determines **what kind of person we become**. Do we treat people with contempt? Or do we treat them with affection? Are we indifferent to what's going on in others? Or do we care? How we treat others forms a certain character within us.

Also, when we see how people treat others, we can see **what kind of life they live**. If you live with **negative attitude** towards life, then you will treat people with negative attitude. If you

live selfishly only thinking about yourself, then you will think about people only for your own benefit. If you really **do not care about your life**, you won't care about others. If you live your life with **fear and cynicism**, your relationship with others will be very guarded and you will see others cynically.

So, **what's in you and how you treat others are very much connected**.

Beauty of a person is not just about physical appearance. **Beauty of a person comes from inside**. As you treat each person as **beautiful**, you become beautiful. You will have **warmth, depth, deep care, affection, and dignity**. As you are **unhappy inside**, it shows on the outside, either on your face or on your relationship with others.

St. Paul gave this advice. ***"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."*** (Philippians 2:3, 4)

Spiritual Community




As we treat each other with respect, love, care and interest, as a result, **a community will be formed.**

Spiritual community is not a **visible institution**, but it is the way people interact with each other. It's **about how we treat each other.** In the spiritual community, people feel cared and loved. The spiritual community has beauty, depth, and maturity. A famous anthropologist, **Margaret Mead**, asked the students in her lecture. *What is the first sign of civilization? Is it a clay pot? Iron? Their tools? Or the beginning of agriculture? No: it is the healed leg-bone.*

That is the first sign of civilization. In that bone, you see human beings caring for other human beings. Spiritual community is not a system but the attitude of caring for each other.

Spiritual community is different from **institution**. The institution is where people gather together for their **self-interests**. The institution **exists** for each person's self-interest. If a person's self-interest is not met, they **leave**. Spiritual community exists **not just to serve one's own interests but to serve others' interests**. Jesus said; I came not to be served but to serve. Self-interest is not the **highest goal of** our life. In fact, serving others was the highest goal of Jesus' life and we should follow Jesus' example. That's what spiritual community is. That's why in the spiritual community, there is **healing and transformation**. Healing and transformation happen when one receives care and love.

DISCUSSION

1. Discuss in what way, our interactions with others shape us.
 2. Share your story of being shaped by the interactions you have with others.
- 



God's Love Forms Spiritual Community

I believe that the spiritual community is formed not by our love but **by God's love**. When a person experiences God's love, that love is **translated** into love for others. When we love others with our own love, **we will get frustrated**. We will be easily **burned out**. We **don't have that much love within us**. In our reservoir, in our heart, not much love. We will soon experience how little love we have. We get easily **depleted** and have no more desire to love. We need to be **connected with the source of love**. We need to be supplied with love and that is where God's love comes in.



Receiving God's Love

Each person needs to receive God's love. How do you receive God's love? Receiving God's love is our **spiritual discipline**. You experience God's love through spiritual discipline. The **ultimate spiritual discipline** is to experience God's love. And it is the **hardest discipline**. That was what Jesus said. There is only one commandment: Love your God and Love your neighbours – They are so deeply connected that it is like one commandment.

So, **what we do when we gather together is not as important** as what we do when we are alone. **When we are alone**, we need to fill ourselves up with God's love through daily reflection and meditation. Daily we need to

meditate on how God loves us. When we are bankrupt with love, we have nothing to offer when we get together. **When we don't grow in experiencing God's love, the community cannot grow.** It's not that I am here, and the community is there. **I am the community.** When I don't grow, the community doesn't grow. When I am selfish, the community will become selfish.

No one has that much love to care for others. **We are busy taking care of ourselves.** We are so wrapped up with our own survival. Daily routine, busy schedule consumes all our energies. We become numb. We don't feel life anymore. We don't even know how we feel about others. When we get home, we have no energy left. We have to do something for ourselves to release our stress. To recover from stress. We just have to take our minds off, watching TV, playing



games, just doing nothing.

We have **no room for others**. We are victims of this mindless, heartless, dehumanizing lifestyle. Caring for others seems like at the bottom of our agenda. Is that the only lifestyle we want? Are we happy doing that? We need to experience God's caring love. For our own sake – For our own happiness. But also, to **restore our basic humanity of caring** for others. Only when we experience God's caring love, then we can practice that caring love for others.

Becoming together will not happen just **because we say let us try it**. It won't happen because of programs we plan. If we try too hard, it will just **make people uncomfortable and burdensome**. When each person experiences God's love and lives out that love in their life, becoming together **comes as the result**.



Not By Human Strength Alone

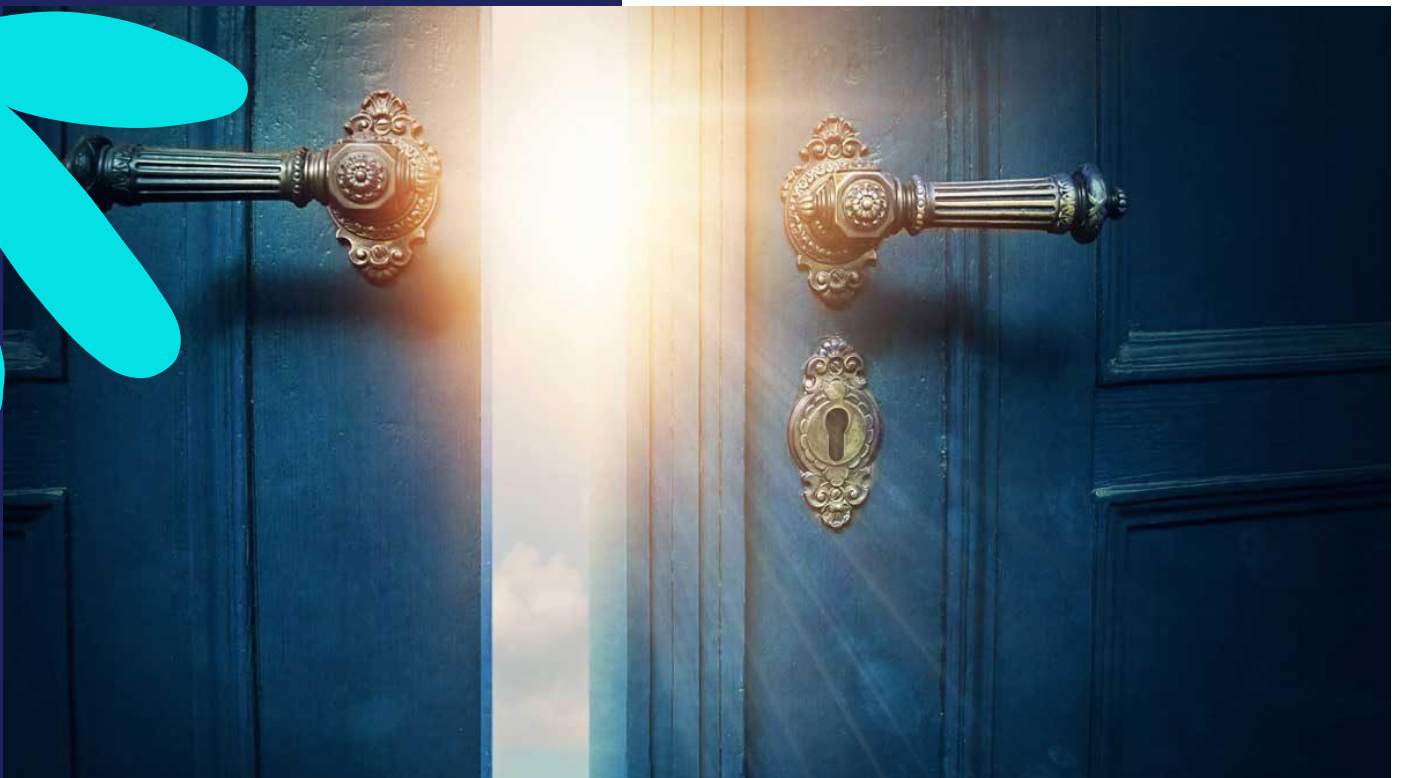


Spiritual community is not the gathering of people who have the **same ideology, same political beliefs, same hobbies, and same interests.**

These things are not what unite us. It is not because of these same things that we share but **in spite of** our differences about these things, we become together.

Underneath this community, there is Jesus' great teaching, **LOVE YOUR ENEMIES.** That means we should love those who are on the opposite pole of the spectrum. We don't love them because they are our enemies, but we love them **in spite of the fact that they are our enemies.** If we don't have enemies at all, then that will be the ultimate love you have. But too bad, no one is that holy and loving. This love Jesus taught us is the **engine** that runs the spiritual community.

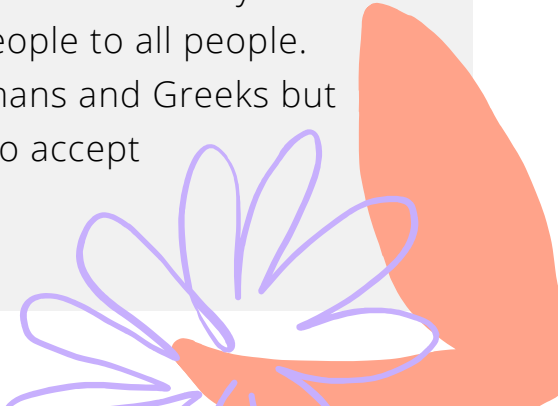
So, this community is **not possible with our human effort** or human power. When each person takes the **spiritual journey** with God's help, and understands the truth of loving one's enemies, and goes through transformation, we will see the shape of the spiritual community being



formed. Jesus welcomed **Judas** who betrayed him and Peter who denied him and all the disciples who deserted him. That love should be on the basis of the spiritual community. We can never build the spiritual community with our love but **only on God's love.**

That was what St. Paul had to fight. St. Paul experienced that the Spirit formed this community. I explained to you about Pentecost. St. Paul's previous understanding of God's people and the spiritual community was **Jewish community.** But he realized that God opened the door and formed the new people of God. A New Community. And this new community goes beyond the Jewish community. From one people to all people.

So, St. Paul said it was not any more the **circumcision** that brought them together. It was not their **food law** that untied them. It was not their **Jewishness** that made them community. It was extremely difficult for this community to move from one people to all people. St. Paul experienced **persecution** not from Romans and Greeks but from his own people. His message was difficult to accept for Jews.



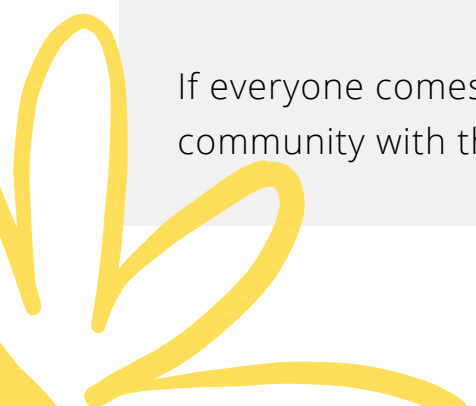
Why We Are Brought Together



What binds us together is God's grace that saves us.

It is God's grace that brings us together to encourage each other, to empower each other, to experience joy with each other. It is **not special intimate, or out of the world experience** that we are seeking. Spiritual community is spiritual reality, not psychic reality. We are simply seeking God's grace. It is God's grace that forgives our sins. **Bonhoeffer** said, *"God's word in Jesus Christ pronounces him guilty, even when he does not feel his guilt, and God's Word in Jesus Christ pronounces him not guilty and righteous, even when he does not feel that he is righteous at all."*

If everyone comes to this community with the attitude



of **"What's in it for me?"**, then, the spiritual community is not possible. Spiritual community exists to serve one another and care for one another. That's what humanity is and that's what civilization is. **God has brought you here so that I can serve you.** We are created not to be an island. We human beings cannot exist in isolation. We are created to live with each other. This communal life is possible only when we have the attitude of serving one another. For example, Heaven and Hell: Long spoon – feed each other.

MEDITATION

1. I want you to be happy.
2. I want you to be strong.
3. I want you to feel that you belong,



Loving Others Despite Differences

We need God's Word **not because it has a lot of information, rules, laws and doctrines**, but because in God's Word, there is **power to make us a loving person**. It has power to transform us, broaden our hearts and more than anything else, make us a loving person.

Spiritual community is hard because **we are all so different**. We have not chosen the members. God has called all of us. If we have chosen, we might have chosen **more lovable, more intelligent, more like us**. If it were not this community, we might have not met, and we might have nothing to do with each other. But since God has

called all of us, we are here together and do things together, and get connected. So, we are all so different.

I am going to talk about how our differences play out in the spiritual community tomorrow.

DISCUSSION

1. In what way do you want to be shaped by this community?
2. What can you do to build this community to be a spiritual community?