

Involved Together in Ministry: Body Building for the Eternal People of God

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Date: 25 October 2020

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[0 : 00] and he can give you details about all of that. We're going to turn to our Bibles now this evening, and Paul's going to be preaching to us this evening, and we're going to be thinking about, appropriately, what it means to be serving in ministry as part of Christ's church here.

And so we're going to read together in the letter to the Ephesians at chapter 4. Looked briefly at a few of these verses this morning, so it's good that we're coming back to it this evening.

And I'm going to read right through the chapter, and it finishes off really in the first couple of verses of Ephesians chapter 5. So the Apostle Paul says, beginning of chapter 4, I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There's one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men.

[1 : 27] In saying he ascended, what does it mean? But that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth. He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves, carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it's equipped.

When each part is working properly, makes the body grow. So that it builds itself in love. Now this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that's in them due to their hardness of heart. They become callous.

[2 : 59] And they've given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ. Assuming that you have heard him and were taught by him as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.

And to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor. For we're members of one another.

Be angry and do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal.

Rather, let him labor doing honest work with his own hands so that he might have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

[4 : 14] Don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God and Christ forgave you. Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, good evening, and please do have open the Ephesians chapter 4, which we will be referring to at various points this evening.

Now, our great goal as a church, as we've thought about in recent weeks, is to see God glorified, to see him worshipped because of who he is, the creator, the sovereign lord, the king.

But the thing is, many people do not worship him as they ought. And that reality, the reality that many do not worship God as they ought to, that reality requires mission, telling others about who God is, what he's done, and how we must respond to the good news of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 03] That is the key task of the church, isn't it? That witnessing to the gospel, telling others. Witness exists, our mission exists, because worship doesn't.

That is what we're about as a church. But it's not simply about seeing folk begin to follow Jesus. No, it's about making and then growing disciples of Jesus.

That's the task Jesus gave to his church, to make disciples. That's what we're here for. The church is here to make mature disciples of Jesus. And of course that begins, doesn't it, by seeking to reach out, to engage with those who are not yet Christians, telling them about Jesus and seeking to persuade them to respond to repentance and faith.

And for all who do, for all who turn to the Lord, we are to help them to grow as Christians, to grow in their knowledge and love of God, to grow in their love for his people, to grow in their love for the lost, to grow in their service of the church so that others are helped to maturity in Christ.

So the church's task is not only to gain converts, but to build them up so that they give their lives to the work of the church themselves.

[7 : 43] We are to make and to help grow disciples of Jesus. That's what we're about as a church. That's why we exist, to reach out, to make disciples and to help them grow.

But if that's the task of the church, where do I fit in? Where do you fit in to that task? Do I have a meaningful place in God's plans and his church?

One of the TV shows I've enjoyed over the past couple of years is called All or Nothing. And it's about football clubs.

So I don't often go to football analogies, but indulge me. I try to hold back, but football's one of my great passions. So this fit us so well. So here we go. All or Nothing. And the premise is this.

A camera crew go behind the scenes at one of the top sports clubs in the world. And last year, they followed Manchester City, who swept all before them and broke records winning the Premier League.

[8 : 50] And this year, it was Tottenham Hotspur. That's who they followed. And it featured the very charismatic Jose Mourinho. Now, if you know nothing about football, you maybe have heard of Jose Mourinho.

his ego is fairly large, let's say. Now, as a Manchester United fan, I found myself, much to my surprise, rather warming to him.

He comes across quite well. But what is clear in these programs, as they go behind the scenes, is that success in a football club is about more than the 11 players on the pitch.

If a club is to achieve success, there's a whole organization behind it. An organization that's full of people playing their role and committed to the big picture.

And the big picture is winning football matches, winning trophies. So, from the 11 players on the pitch, they are pretty crucial. But you've got the rest of the squad.

[9 : 52] You've got the junior development teams. You've got the coaching staff. You've got the manager. You have the owner. You've got the medical staff. The logistical staff. The management who develop the business and build stadiums and bring in the money that is able to buy more players.

You've got the folk who are dedicated to helping new players who arrive from foreign country to settle in London. You've got the supporters. You've got the bus driver who takes them from the hotel to the ground.

Everyone plays a role. If one person fails to do their job or does it to a poor standard, then that's going to show up on the pitch.

It's a large organization, but it's fixed on a single goal. Everyone is pulling in the same direction. They all know what Tottenham Hotspurs is about.

It's about winning trophies, although they haven't done that for a while, but maybe things will turn around. But everyone knows that that's what the point is. And so it is with the church.

[10 : 58] The work of the church is not undertaken by a select few. Rather, it's all of us pulling together, fulfilling our roles, our eyes on the one task and giving ourselves to it.

There are to be no spectators in the church family. All have a role. All have work to do. So we have three key points this evening as we're thinking about serving together.

This is part of our series, thinking about our church, how we're organized. We've thought about our witness. We've thought about our maturity, our obedience. We've thought about sharing together.

And tonight, we're thinking about our involvement, all of us involved in the work, that task, of the church. church. So three things as we think about how we together make and grow disciples of Jesus.

So here's the first. We are all of us glorifying God as we each play our role in building up the body. Glorifying God as each of us play our role building up the body.

[12 : 12] Now, part of our role as disciples of Jesus is growing ourselves. And key to that is serving others and helping them to grow as disciples of Jesus.

And you see, that is a role for all of us. We all have a vital task. It is not the job of the church staff to do all the disciple making and growing.

Absolutely not. Listen to Ephesians, the chapter we read earlier. Ephesians, chapters 1 to 3, they tell us about how God's plan to create a new humanity gathered around his son.

And the Ephesian church has been saved out of a fractured world dominated by the ruler of the kingdom of the air. And then in chapters 4 to 6, we see how their life is to be shaped together so that they can stand strong against the threats of the world, the flesh, the devil, and grow more and more in the likeness of the Lord Jesus for his glory.

And one of the key things that the Apostle Paul seeks to communicate in chapter 4 is the fact that the church is a body, a body that is being built together.

[13 : 33] Just listen to what he says from chapter 4, verse 11. He says, You see, it is not the task of those who are set aside for full-time ministry to do all the ministry.

That is what Paul is not saying. They are not there to do all the work. Rather, it is the job of the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

So it's the job of those who are set aside in those particular roles to equip all the saints, all those in the church to do the work of ministry.

You see, all of us get the privilege to together do ministry, to be involved in that great task of proclaiming the gospel to the world and helping people grow up to maturity.

All of us are involved in some way in that task. All of us together as a body do the work of the church. You see, no individual does it by themselves.

[15 : 09] No particular group within the church do it. No. All of us together. And God calls each of us to take part and do the work of ministry.

All of us are involved. And that doesn't mean that all our roles are identical. We're not clones. the apostle Paul, doesn't he, he uses the language of a body being built up.

It's, the church is a body. Now think about your body. It's made up of countless parts, isn't it? Too many to mention. But each has a unique and specific role.

All of which are crucial. All of which are needed if the body is to do what it's meant to do. If your lungs decided to stop working for 10 minutes, you'd be in trouble, wouldn't you?

If your heart decided to half its output, well, you'd be in trouble. Every part of your body has to be working together if the body's to grow and to do what it's meant to do.

[16 : 17] And so it is with the church. Every person must be playing their role which they've been equipped for so that the body is built up. Now, you may not think it, but all of us here tonight are bodybuilders.

We are bodybuilders building the church. I was hoping that Craig would be here tonight. He's our resident strongman. He's actually a bodybuilder and it would be great to have him here just to have an illustration of what we all are in reality.

Now, we may not look like it, but we're all bodybuilders together building the church. Now, just think of all the elements that go into this very service.

What's happening right now? Heating, lighting, cleanliness, a well-managed booking system, a welcome team, a sound team, musicians, someone to lead the service, someone to preach.

If one of those things fails, then we have a problem, don't we? All of those teams, all of those people are key to what is happening here.

[17 : 27] All are contributing in one way or another to that great task of reaching the lost and growing disciples of Jesus Christ. And that's just one example.

This service is just one element of what we do as a church. Think about all the things that happen through the week. So many different elements, so many teams, so many ministries.

All of those, together, are contributing to building the church, doing that work of reaching and saving the lost. And so, that reality that we are a bodybuilding team, that all of us are involved together, that changes.

it transforms how we think about the ministry team or the teams that we're involved with week by week. It elevates it, doesn't it?

Think about Tottenham. Those folk are not just cleaning the dressing room. They're winning trophies. That's what they're doing.

[18 : 30] And so, each of us, we're not just doing a particular task. No, we are building the body. We are taking part in that great task in one way or another.

So, if you're part of a cleaning team here, the job is not simply to clean the floors and toilets. No, the job is to create a welcoming, clean environment so that folk who come through the doors feel comfortable at home and therefore not distracted from listening to the word as it's preached.

If you're on a welcome team, you're not simply here to say hello to folk and show them to their seats. No, we want to give everybody who comes through those doors the opportunity to be part of the church family so that they come to Christ, so that they're built up and grown in Him.

If you're part of the creche team, your role is not simply to look after babies. No, the job is to care for those children so that the parents can be freed up to join with those others in the service so they hear the word of God so they can be built up and encouraged.

All of us in all these different ministry teams that we are part of are in some way contributing to the great task of making and growing disciples in Jesus Christ's name in ever greater numbers.

[19 : 56] That is what we're about. Each of those teams has a role. But our role in being bodybuilders is not just in these formal teams that we may be part of.

There is informal bodybuilding that goes on as well. And by informal, I mean the sort of ministry work that we just don't do as part of a formal team.

It's the conversations you have with folk at church. It's spotting the newcomer and going out of your way to chat to them and make them feel welcome. It's following up with them, inviting them for a walk or a coffee around to your house for Sunday lunch.

It's spotting a younger man in the church and getting alongside them, passing on wisdom, showing great interest and care. It's the student adoption program we have where students get paired up with other folk in the church.

It's spotting a young mum in the church if you're an older woman and getting alongside her. As Titus 2 would urge us, teach them what is good. Train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and so on.

[21 : 10] It's those informal, often unseen relationships and mentoring that goes on that are so key. It's all those many small interactions that we have with one another which help each of us to maturity in Christ.

Now we don't need to be part of a formal team to get on with that work. We don't need an invitation, we just do it. Think about the people you know and rub shoulders with regularly in the church.

How can you help them grow? how can you help them be built up to maturity in Christ? How can you be involved in their lives to help them?

I think about my own Christian walk over the years and it often wasn't the formal institutions that were so crucial, it was the informal kind of organic relationships that were so crucial for me.

And I'm sure that's true for you as well. don't neglect those ways in which we can help each other grow to maturity. Perhaps there's somebody in the church you're aware of and they just have no real handle on their finances and so their giving to the church isn't what it ought to be or could be.

[22 : 33] Could you sit down with them? Walk through a budget with them? Think about savings and sorting their money out, that sort of thing. That will help them won't it? To grow in maturity. Not just for their finances but their giving to the church.

Could you do something like that? Perhaps there's somebody else that you know and rather than make the prayer meeting a priority twice a month, they're rather going to the cinema taking advantage of the half price Wednesday thing at Cineworld or whatever.

Could you gently challenge them and help them see that their priorities in that particular matter are earthly and short-sighted not heavenly or eternal.

Just a small conversation like that, that could be a huge turning point for somebody to help them grow in their maturity for Christ. You see, we can all play a role in these informal ways.

These conversations that happen in those moments after the church service or when somebody's around at your house for lunch. even something as insignificant as where we sit in church.

[23 : 45] That can be a huge thing. A few years ago, quite a few of us in the church read a great little article called Ministry of the Pew, which is really all about these informal bodybuilding opportunities that we have that each of us ought to take responsibility for.

And one simple question they pose in that article is this. Do you pray about where you sit before you come to church? Do you pray about where you sit?

Just thinking about that transforms about how we approach Sundays. If you're praying about where you're going to sit, you're thinking about, okay, who am I sat next to?

How could I encourage them after the service? How could I engage them in a conversation and begin to help them? Perhaps it's something in the sermon I could pick up, a particular point. Maybe ask them about their responsibilities in life, the pressures they're under at the moment.

Perhaps you could talk about those things, help them. It might lead to a fruitful conversation. It's a bit different at the moment, isn't it, with COVID and we're kind of told where to sit. But even praying about that, that those who are studying were directly to the right place and the conversation you have afterwards would be a helpful one.

[25 : 02] But there's a million different ways that we can, in the informal ways, we can help serve and be involved in the lives of others in the church, build them up for the sake of the gospel.

So that's the first thing. There's lots more examples we could give. But think about the formal ways that we serve, the formal ways we're involved, the teams we're in, the creche team, the Sunday school team, the welcome team, whatever it might be.

And if you're not already serving in one of those teams, then can I encourage you to get involved in some way? Come and chat to me. We'd love to get you involved in a formal ministry team somehow. out. But in addition to that, we can all be serving and helping other people grow in informal ways, glorifying God as we together are building up the body.

So that's the first thing. We all have a role. All of us are involved. Second, we glorify God as we do this, as we give of our best.

We glorify God as we give of our best. We've seen that all of us have a role to play. All of us are being equipped so that we are together, working together in ministry.

[26 : 18] And that service, that body building that Paul talks about in the church is a great privilege, isn't it? To be involved in the church, it is the privilege of our lives.

It's not a bonus add-on, this is it, this is the great thing we are doing in our lives, it's building up the church which will last for all eternity. And that is therefore not something that we give our second best to.

It can't be that, can it? It can't just be whatever's left. It can't be that. If we've really grasped what the church is, what it's doing, if we've really grasped what God is doing through his church for all eternity, then we can't possibly see it as a sort of nice, cozy club that makes me feel better about myself.

It can't be that, can it? No, we must understand the supreme importance of the church for the destiny of the whole world, the supreme importance of the church in our own lives.

God is building something here for all eternity and you and I get to play a role in that. And so we need to increasingly realize, don't we, that our lives are about God's glory and serving him and his church.

[27 : 39] church. And so that must mean that we give of our best to the church and joyfully so. Our lives are about God and his glory, not about me or my glory or about some other institution and its glory, a football club, Tottenham Hotspur.

It's not about that. It's not about a political issue and its resolution. No. We are about God and his glory and seeing his church builds.

But you see, the world would tell us the opposite, wouldn't it? The world would tell us to build and invest in anything else but the church.

The world says invest in anything but God and his glory. it. Just listen again to Ephesians chapter 4. Pick it up from verse 17.

The apostle Paul says this, Now I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.

[28 : 53] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them. Due to their hardness of heart, they have become callous, given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

But that is not the way you learned in Christ. Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus to put off your old self which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Now we do need to hear Paul's warning here. It is a warning against worldliness to no longer walk as the Gentiles do.

Put that old life away, says Paul. Don't live with the values of the world as your priority. rather put on Christ and pursue and prioritize righteousness and holiness.

And that must surely begin, mustn't it, with our commitment to what God is doing in his world through his church. If we think in a worldly way, then the things of this world, wealth and health, pleasure, those things, if we think in the way we used to live, then those things are going to get the best of our time and talents and treasure.

[30 : 39] But we can't think that way, can we? If we've grasped the magnitude of the gospel and the task that God has given us, then it is the church family, the church body, that must get the best of our time and talents and treasure.

Now, it's not to say that all our contributions are to look identical, of course not. Some of us will have more time at our disposal, others will have more treasure, and our talents are not the same either, are they?

Each of us have been uniquely gifted. So, we are to think through what the Lord is asking, of us individually, with all that I have, with all that God has given me, how can I be most useful for the gospel?

How can I be most useful for what God is doing in his world through his church? And as we grow and mature, there will be a growing commitment to give of our resources for the growth of the kingdom.

We will increasingly see that that is the most important thing we can give ourselves to with our lives. Because only that, only what God is doing through his church will last for all eternity.

[32 : 05] As we grow and understand more and more what the Bible is teaching, we will see everything through that lens, won't we? We will see our world and our lives through that lens.

We will know where things are headed. it. We know what is truly important and it's not my own health or wealth or comfort. No, what is truly important is what is spiritual and eternal.

And so I must give, mustn't I? If that's what I understand to be true, then I must give my best of my time and talents and treasure for that work, for what truly lasts, for what is eternal.

And that's so hard, isn't it? Because all the time we're being pulled towards what is visible and temporary and right in front of our eyes.

I feel that. I'm sure you do too. We are constantly being pulled down our horizons, getting lifted to what is eternal and lasting. But then we get through to Tuesday and we're being consumed by the immediate and the seen.

[33 : 18] So we must keep our eyes fixed, mustn't we, together on what is truly important, what is truly eternal, so that we do give of our best for the work that God's given us.

So it's worth asking the question, it's a challenging question, but am I giving Christ's church the best? Is the church getting the best of my time, my talents, my treasure?

So that's the second thing. We glorify God by giving him our best. And third and final, this task of being involved together.

All of us are involved, he asks our best, but it's about loving people, isn't it? We are glorifying God together as we love each other, as we love people.

The great concern of our hearts, it must be real gospel growth, and that means a growing concern for others, a growing concern and love for people, that they be saved and then disciple, they be growing in the faith.

[34 : 33] So there's a concern for others, but there's also a growing concern to grow ourselves, to be more useful for Christ and his church. So we'll think about those two things as we close, a growing concern for others, see them grow, but also a concern for ourselves, that we too would grow.

So first, a growing concern to grow others. We are called fundamentally to grow others, to help them mature in faith.

so we're not merely, when we're thinking about our involvement in the life of the church, our service, we're not merely thinking about doing a job or filling a rota, it means growing other people.

That's what we're really about. It's a love for others, a concern for them, that they would grow in the gospel, that we would see each person in the church being equipped and built together, working properly so that together we all grow up in love.

That's what the apostle Paul's talking about here, isn't it? Building each other up in love, growing in love for Christ and growing in love for one another. You see, church, by its very nature, is not a personal, individual experience, it's a corporate one, we are growing together.

[36 : 10] And according to the New Testament, the key attitude we should bring with us to church is love, that desire to build each other up, to edify each other, to see the welfare of others being met.

And when we grasp all that God has done for us and all that he continues to do for us, we will find ourselves more and more looking outwards, looking to others, wanting the same for them, wanting them to know and experience what God has done for us.

We will long, won't we, to see others coming to Christ, growing in Christ. And that is God's great priority for our lives, for mine, and for yours, that we would all be active and participating in what he is doing in his world, saving sinners for all eternity.

And that is a great privilege, isn't it, to be involved in that work, to be involved in what he is doing. And when I grasp that, when I grasp what God is doing in his world, then we'll be all the more eager, won't we, to invite our friends to come and hear for themselves, to read the Bible one-to-one, to bring them to church, to invite them to things that we're putting on.

We'll be looking out for newcomers in church. So we are to come to church, not so much for our own sake, but for the sake of others.

[37 : 44] We come, not so much to be built up ourselves, but to build up other people. That's our outlook as we come to church. I'm here to serve.

To give, to help others grow. Now that's a bit of a mind shift, isn't it? To go from church consumer, what can I get out of church today, to a church contributor.

Now of course we do gain, don't we? We do get stuff as we come to church, but primarily our mindset is to be on others and seeing them grow. through. So we go from consumers to contributors.

That's the mind shift that the Bible would urge us to have. But it's a shift that we need to make if the church is to be the church. If each of us comes to church as a consumer, then we'll gradually die off.

But we come as contributors, then we will see healthy growth in the life of others as we seek to help others, to see them grow. So a growing concern to grow others, that's how we're to approach church, that's key.

[39 : 03] But we also have a growing concern to grow ourselves. If we're to be more helpful, if we are to help others, then we must be growing ourselves. That's the final thing. As we understand with greater clarity what our task is, then we'll find ourselves wanting to be better and better equipped for the work God has given us to do, won't we?

And so we will want to be at church Sunday by Sunday, as often as we possibly can, morning and evening, so that we're sitting under the preached word of God, being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

We plug into our growth groups, release the word groups, as often as they meet. And we'll make the most of the opportunities that we have to be equipped for the particular ministry teams that we're in, the various training sessions that are organized by team leaders.

Those are here to help me, to help you to grow, so that you can then help to grow others. So whether it's your youth team training or growth group leaders training or witness reps training or whatever it is, it's there to help you grow, to help you develop, so that you can then in turn help others and help them to grow.

That's what those things are for. So what we're about as a church, what we're doing is the most significant, enduring, vital task we could possibly give ourselves to.

[40 : 37] we are part of a body that is being built up by God who through his spirit is at work in the likes of you and me.

It's being built up at this very moment here and in every church across the globe. He is building his church through people like you and me. And that seems extraordinary, doesn't it, that he would use people like us.

But that's what we're doing. We all have a role to play. And it's a body that we only see in part now. This is only one small part of the body that he is building all across the globe.

We see it in part now, but one day, one day we will see it in glory, in all its reality. One day we will see not only the Lord Jesus Christ, but also his bride, the church.

On that great day, in that great multitude of people who gather, we will see it, we will see what he's been building, and it will be astonishing. We all know then that every effort we've expended now for the sake of building the church will have been worth it.

[41 : 53] Every effort now, we will one day see the fruits, and it will have been worth it. to each of us. Each of us has a role to play.

So let's each of us do what we can, do what God has equipped you to do, give the best of ourselves for the sake of others, and ultimately we do it, that God will be glorified, that his name we praise and worship, worships, and we get to take part in that task.

Isn't that a great privilege? Well, let's pray before we sing our final hymn. Father God, we do thank you for the great vision you give your church of what you are doing in your worlds.

And Lord, so often we feel discouraged. We see such a small part of it, a small part of what you are doing. But Lord, please encourage us to be reminded of what you are doing and what you are building for all eternity.

And encourage us with the great privilege that you've given us, each of us, to be involved in that task. So would you help us, Lord? Help us in the mundane, day-to-day, week-to-week.

[43 : 23] Help us to be reminded of what you are building. Help us to see our role in it and encourage us to keep going with our eyes fixed on that great goal, that great day when we will see what you are building.

So Lord, please help us and encourage us, each one of us, before we ask it. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.