

Service Pack for 4th January 2026

Talk: Keeping in Touch with God Through Jesus

We're starting the year with a short series on keeping in touch with God: this week the focus is keeping in touch with God through Jesus, next week through prayer, and the following Sunday through reading our Bibles.

We have a quiet vision for our churches to see God's Kingdom becoming more present in three dimensions: deepening our discipleship, bringing us closer together and widening our horizons to embrace our whole community and our networks in God's love, and it's Jesus who is at the centre.

We grow in faith and intimacy with God by letting Jesus shape our whole lives; we grow in closeness as we follow Jesus who draws together disciples across social, religious and cultural boundaries; we hear the voice of Jesus calling us to go wider, to show God's love creatively, practically, generously, tirelessly.

These three dimensions are vital, and they are united in Jesus Christ. Healthy discipleship means allowing Jesus to draw us deeper into God, closer in community and wider in mission and loving service.

In our Bible readings today, the writer to the Hebrews showed us Jesus the sympathetic high priest, and Matthew showed us Jesus who is Immanuel, God with us, who draws worship from the nations.

Let's start with the few verses we read from Hebrews. The writer tells us that "the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

We're bound to hear this first in relation to the Bible. After reading from the Bible Elaine said, "this is the word of the Lord," and we responded, "thanks be to God." But the true and eternal Word is Jesus, the Son. When we read Holy Scripture together, we expect that the Holy Spirit will work in us to form the mind and character of Christ in us. Nothing is hidden from God, so all that we are is open to

judgement. We have no secrets. We have no excuses. What we do have, thank God, is “a great high priest who has ascended into heaven.”

Jesus is God’s son; Jesus is truly human; Jesus feels sympathy for our weaknesses, and leads us to God’s throne of Grace where we will find mercy and grace.

How do we draw close to God with Jesus? In this picture, Jesus is simply and profoundly the one who makes it possible for us to approach God’s throne. He is the sinless one, and so as the “great high priest” we can have confidence that, in God’s presence, we will find what we need so very urgently: mercy and grace, forgiveness and welcome, peace and hope. We will be renewed, revived, and our lives will be meaningful and full of purpose.

What’s one practical way we can embed this in our lives? Why not, each day, bring to God’s throne one thing that’s unedited. A need, a hurt, a temptation, a confession, a broken relationship, a habit that binds us, a hope that’s dwindling. Each day, one thing, trusting that Jesus is sympathetic towards us and sufficient for us. Will you try it?

This spiritual practice is grounded in the “deeper” dimension: we keep in touch with God through Jesus. But it will bear fruit in closeness with one another, as we share our stories, as we open the Bible together, as we grow in courage to pray for one another and to go beyond our cosy cliques and build loving relationships with those we don’t always agree with. And, if we allow its effects to ripple out, it will make us more attentive to needs in the wider community, create opportunities for us to show love in our homes and families, to our neighbours and beyond.

This sounds amazing, but how do we get there?

Matthew grounds the birth of Jesus in Biblical prophecy. He looks back to the time of King Ahaz, a time of uncertainty and military threat, and recalls words from Isaiah. Here’s the quote from Isaiah chapter 7 with a little more context.

¹⁰Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹‘Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.’¹²But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.’

¹³Then Isaiah said, ‘Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord

himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. ¹⁵He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, ¹⁶for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

Matthew sees how a word spoken from God into a crisis generations ago, seen through Jesus the Messiah, has been woven into a story of salvation that breaks every barrier. There is a strange gathering: Mary and Joseph, people from the village, and strange visitors “from the East” who all gather around Jesus.

And Jesus continues to form surprising communities around himself. When we draw near to worship Immanuel, we are very often in strange and unexpected company.

True worship always embraces the three dimensions: our own deepening praise, drawing closer to those around us as together we press in to know more of God, and discovering that the true fruit of worship is expressed as we go out from the place of sanctuary to find that the whole world is the Lord’s and he calls us into his loving purpose to bring freedom and justice, love, joy and peace.

In the account of the Magi, Matthew shows us that God is already at work reaching far beyond Israel. Those outsiders were inspired to see the source of the wonders they found in events in the heavens, they brought gifts and they found a welcome. We know little of their story, but we know that God was at work, and Jesus was at the centre. Matthew encourages us to remember that God’s plans aren’t limited by us, but that God graciously invites us to follow, to seek, to give and to go.

Today I want to encourage us all to “Stay in touch with God by coming to Jesus, who deepens our faith, knits us closer, and sends us wider.”

Hebrews reassures us that we are invited to approach the throne of grace with Jesus, our great high priest. Matthew reminds us that Jesus Christ the King has already shown himself to be “God with us” and is already drawing the nations to witness, to wonder and to worship.

Let’s make this a shared resolution for a year full both of uncertainty and of promise: to bring, each day, one true, unfiltered, unedited thing from our lives to God through Jesus, trusting in him.

Are you willing to take another step? Why not ask someone you don't know so well, "How may I pray for you?" And be willing to answer such a question with honesty and vulnerability, so that we might grow closer.

And on this day when we recall the mystery of the Magi, would you spend time in prayerful reflection asking God who, from the edge of your life, might God be drawing into the story of salvation? And then ask God for the creativity and courage to offer that person an act of service or a generous invitation in Jesus's name?

Let's pray. Father God, thank you for sending Jesus. Thank you for drawing all people to yourself as Jesus was revealed as the Christ, Immanuel, God with us. Help us to grow deeper in our faith, closer in our relationships and wider in our service, in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit and to the glory of the Father. Amen.

Bible Readings

Hebrews 4:12–16

¹²For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Jesus the great high priest

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Matthew 1:22–23; 2:1–11

²²All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us').

The Magi visit the Messiah

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ²and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'

³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."

⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.'

⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen

when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary,

and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh