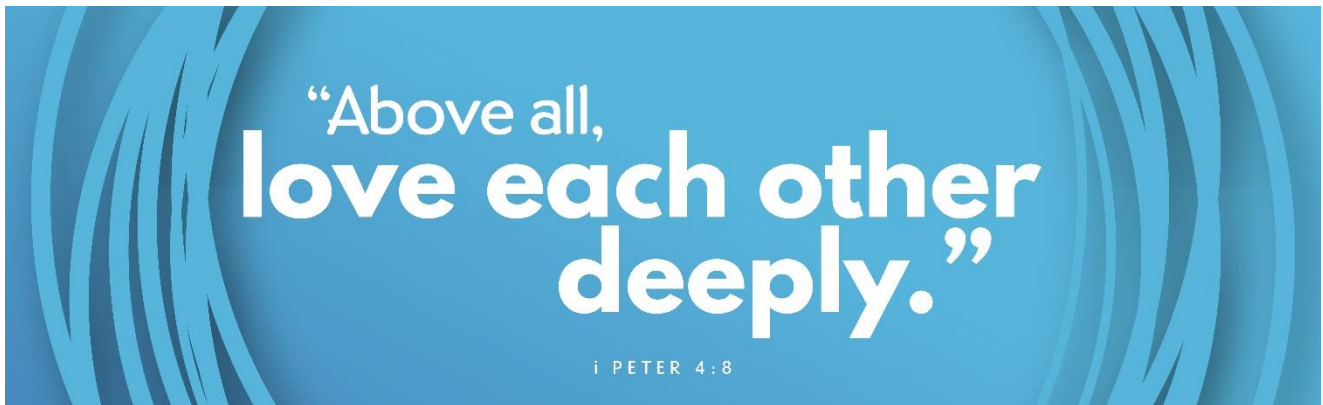


*Text summary of a message delivered by Naomi Cowan at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 12th October 2025.
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Above All, Love Deeply

1 Peter 4:8

I wish you all a long, happy, healthy life. Better than that, I can tell you how to have one.

I was fascinated to read recently of a Harvard study that has been running since 1938. The study has been following people for over 85 years. And through all the data, it shows the secret to a good life is not what most of us are taught to chase.

One truth emerged with stunning clarity: The most important factor in determining your health and happiness in life is: The quality of your relationships. In the early years the researchers could not really believe that warm relationships could protect the heart and mind. But the evidence accumulated over the decades and forced the point: Individuals with strong and supportive relationships exhibit significantly lower rates of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular issues, diabetes, and arthritis. They generally experience improved physical and mental health. They are found to be happier, physically healthier and live longer. Remember it is the **quality** of relationships – not the quantity. It wasn't the number of friends that mattered, but the warmth of one's closest ties that counted.

I have my Spotify playlist set to shuffle so anything can come up and one that has been coming up often lately is this verse put to music: 1 Peter 4:8 combined with Zechariah 7:9. ***Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).***

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***And the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah: “This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’
Zechariah 7:8-10***

Part of fulfilling that command is allowing God to propel us towards other people with real friendship and connection. It gives others that one thing the research says will help them live long, happy, healthy lives – quality connection – and for people with mental health challenges, it can actually genuinely help heal them.

[Video of Yury’s story]

Yury told us how important his colleagues were; they helped heal him from his distress, just by being connected with him. He described God healing him through them.

[Video of Andrew’s story]

When we listened to Andrew’s story, as he described his ongoing journey, living with schizophrenia, did you hear how important those around him were? The ones who connected with him and supported him, like his flatmate, his Dad, his medical team, his friends? When someone is in mental distress, connection with others can be really hard. A sad fact is that as they become unwell, many lose their friendships and relationships. They can withdraw from others, and others withdraw from them. Isolation can easily happen. That’s why I think the MHAW theme is so good this year – **Top Up Together**. Meet with other, be around others, connect with others. Topping up each other’s tanks with love and concern.

I think MHAW is telling us to do what God has already told us to. And if God has asked it of us, he will help us do it. As lovers of God, and as ones who know the love of God, we have the motivation, the resources and the fuel to connect with others and let them know they are seen

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and known. Some people are scared of drawing too close to others because they scared they themselves will become drained, depleted. But we can top them up because God tops us up.

Sometimes courageous connection can have dramatic consequences: Did you read recently about an Australian called Don Ritchie who lived across the road from a cliff top where, sadly, many people came to jump. He would see someone in distress there, cross the road, and ask, “Can I help you in some way?” Then he would invite them back to his place for a cuppa and a chat. He saved over 180 lives. A number of them came back to thank him in subsequent years. Don Ritchie was not a medical professional (he had been a life insurance salesman!) but he cared enough to notice and to reach out with kindness.

I doubt many of you will have opportunities as dramatic as that, but you still live surrounded by people, many of whom would really appreciate your friendship and love. There are times when we ourselves need to be lifted up but today we are focussing especially on those of us with mental health distress. It’s not ok for them to be carrying that alone. It is not ok for us to ignore it. Andrew and Yury have both described to us how important connection with others has been for them as well as their faith. You all know Andrews and Yurys. You might not know that they have distress and confusion in their minds – you might never know – but your interest and friendship might make a huge difference.

As I finish up at Equip, and this will be my last Equip Sunday sharing with you, I want to urge you to look out for one another – not just those here at church, but those around us in our everyday worlds.

At Equip, one of our Core Values is **“We put out faith into action”** and we do that in an incredibly practical way, meeting a need if we can and doing that without coercion, without judgement and without expecting anything in return. We trust that God will do what he wants to through that response. That is the example Jesus set us. Loving and meeting needs.

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We have opportunities to help that you don't... but you actually have opportunities that we don't. We can only reach those in our service – about 1500 people who have been diagnosed and referred – but we can't reach the thousands and thousands of people that this congregation knows. Amongst them will be many who might not have a diagnosis but, visibly or invisibly, they are stressed or anxious or depressed or struggling in some way. Maybe they need professional help, but whatever their problems, genuine loving friendship will be a huge part of their healing. Now more than ever, we need God's love in our communities, showing a different response to judgement hate and isolation.

Let's commit to Topping Up with others and not leading lives that are self-centred or isolated. Let's create connection and let's be open to receiving it. And, by the way, I can't think of a more guaranteed way of getting blessed yourself. That should not be our motive, but what a bonus! See, I told you I'd tell you how to have a long, happy, healthy life – love one another! Amen.

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Reflecting on Sunday 5th October 2025: Last week Grant covered Jesus' lineage and encouraged us to explore our own whakapapa. Have you had the opportunity to learn anything about your ancestry this week? How is that impacting you?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. Think about who you connect most with in your everyday life. Are they largely people who live and think pretty much like you? Do you know you can be totally yourself with them – are they meaningful relationships?
2. How comfortable do you feel about reaching out to someone less in your inner circle if you are aware or wondering if they are ok? Especially if they are quite different to you.
3. Peter says in 1 Peter 4:8 **Above all, love each other deeply**. Discuss when that is easy and when it is challenging.
4. Read Zechariah 7:8-10. How can living up to this work out in our everyday lives?
5. What is one thing you might commit to doing this week to support showing mercy and compassion to one another.

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed**.

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email us here info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. Click here to Top Up with all of MHAW's amazing resources:

<https://mentalhealth.org.nz/our-campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week/mental-health-awareness-week-resources>

2. Naomi shared the incredible story of Don Ritchie. Click here to read the full article about "The Angel of the Gap": <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/death-of-the-angel-of-the-gap-the-man-who-saved-the-suicidal-from-themselves-20120514-1ymle.html>

3. Want to be further equipped to support those facing mental health challenges. Mental Health First Aid (hosted by Equip) gives you the confidence and practical skills to spot early signs of mental health challenges and offer real support. Whether you're leading a team, working with young people, supporting your whānau, or working with the public, this course empowers you to make a genuine difference. You can register your interest for here: <https://www.equip.net.nz/mental-health-first-aid/>