



## **ENTER** God's presence

**Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.**

**-Psalm 29:1-2**

Heavenly Father, so majestic are your ways in all the earth. Your ways are so far above us, yet you have given us your word so that we might know you and all that you have done for us. Open our ears and hearts to the truth of your word as we gather today. Amen.



## **SHARE** life together

- 1. Share your highs and lows with each other?**
- 2. Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
- 3. What would you consider to be the 'best days of your life'?**
- 4. Has your past ever stopped you from being able to fully embrace and enjoy your present? How?**

Have you ever come to the realisation that you are lost when driving or hiking, with no idea of where you are? Have you ever been dumped by a wave and can't work out which way is up or down? Have you ever woken up after an intense dream and not known where you are? Losing reference points can be scary, disorienting and confusing. Without good reference points, we lose our sense of direction and what's up and what's down. When life is unsure, uncertain and uncomfortable, when we feel anxious, overwhelmed, or challenged, we long for solid anchor points to keep us safe and re-orient our lives in the right direction. The people of God knew what that was like. After 70 years in exile, they finally were able to return home to reform, rebuild, reimagine and reset their lives. It began with re-attaching themselves to an anchor point that could hold their past, stabilise and secure their present and move them forward into the future with hope. It's that same anchor point that gives us direction today, restoring our lives, reclaiming our hearts and reaffirming our destiny. Let God reset your worship and give you an anchor point that holds no matter how crazy life gets.

Week beginning:  
Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Worship series:

**RESET**



## **VERSE** for the week

With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord:

“He is good; his love toward Israel endures forever.”

**Ezra 3:11a**



## **REMEMBER** this week

**Worship carries the weight of our past, our hopes and dreams of our future and anchors it in the unchanging and steadfast love of God, bringing a stability, security and confidence to our lives in the present.**



**LISTEN** attentively

Read Ezra 2:68-70 and 3:1-13

5. **What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?**
6. **What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?**
7. **What was your reaction to being able to return to face-to-face worship after Covid-19 lockdowns last year? In what ways might that experience parallel the experience of the returning Israelite exiles?**

'Worship' can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people. The definition of the English word 'worship' simply means to ascribe worth, value or glory to something. There are a number of different Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible that get translated into English as the word 'worship'. Some have to do with bowing down or lying prostrate on the ground in humility and reverence before an king or god. Some have to do with freely offering your work or service to another. Others are more akin to our English word which mean to proclaim the glory or majesty of someone and to hold them in reverence or high regard. All of these words describe an element of what worship should be. However, true worship is even more than the sum of all these parts. True, God centred, worship grounds us and connects us to the past and all the promises God has made to his people. It stabilises our present as we recognise the reality of who and whose we are, and it propels us forward into a future of hope.

8. **Have you ever heard people say things like, "I'm just not in a worshipping frame of mind", or perhaps, "I'm just not 'feeling it' today"? What role do feelings play for you in worship?**
9. **Have you ever had a 'worshipping experience' where you felt particularly close to God or sensed his presence more closely than usual?**

Worship was one of the identifying features of God's people, the Israelites. If you go back to the books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, you hear the account of a series of Israelite Kings who neglected the worship of God, some who tried to re-establish proper worship, and then more who did evil and again turned to worship other gods. With regular and proper worship missing from the community, they quickly confused their identity as God's chosen people and were eventually carried off into exile by the Babylonians. Prior to their captivity, and even during it, God sent them prophets who instructed and warned them about the dangers of being unfaithful in their worship. So perhaps it is no wonder that one of the first things the people do when they return from exile is to rebuilt the altar of the Lord and offer the sacrifices that were prescribed by God to Moses. Even before they go and resettle in the land, the leaders offer significant donations to the rebuilding of the temple. After the altar, they worked on the temple – these things were reminders of God's presence with them and of their identity as his chosen people. Keep in mind, they have just returned from 70 years captivity, they have not even rebuilt their homes yet. If you ask me, this seems like the kind of time you can legitimately say, 'We'll rebuild the temple once we get ourselves sorted out'. But their first priority is to give to rebuilding the temple, even before they begin rebuilding their lives. Their identity as God's people was what they knew they needed to build their lives on and so the altar and temple were top priorities.

10. **How do people identify you as a Christian? When people look at your priorities, what would they say is the subject of your worship and devotion?**
11. **You probably noticed that not all of the people were happy about the rebuilding efforts, some longed for what had been and mourned the loss of the first temple. What changes have you seen in church and church worship over your lifetime? What changes do you mourn? What new things do you celebrate?**



**GROW** deeper

One of the things we have been forced to do in these season of pandemic restrictions, is to find new ways to worship. Given the technology most of us have access to, we have been able to continue to tune in and hear God's word proclaimed to us each week, even though we have not been in a church. What many of us have noticed though is the decline in our sense of community and togetherness while we have not been able to meet

face-to-face. One of the things the people of Israel did was to assemble together in Jerusalem to work on the altar and temple reconstruction together. They had only been back for about 7 months in their own land, resetting and rebuilding their lives when they all come together in Jerusalem to get to work on God's house. There is something powerful about the people of God gathered together as one in worship. It is true that we can praise God, sing worship songs, read our Bibles and pray to him in the privacy of our own home, but part of Christian worship is about God bringing and connecting us together as his Body. Not only does worship connect us and ground us in the story of God's ongoing creative and redemptive acts, it also grounds us and connects us with each other. In community, our burdens are shared, but so too are our joys and successes. As we gather in community to worship God, he resets and recreates us into his people, a people through whom he wants to bring blessing to all the world.

- 12. How have you found the relative isolation and solitude of Covid-19 restrictions? What have you learned about the value of community?**
- 13. How does your participation and experience of corporate worship differ from your experience of personal quiet times or devotional times?**



**LIVE** purposefully

#### **Have a look at John 4:19-24 and Romans 12:1-8**

For the Israelites, the temple was a physical reminder and tangible expression of God's presence with them. This is what defined them and grounded them in their identity and purpose as God's people, simply the fact that he had chosen to be with them and to bless the world through them. Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of that promise. In Christ, God physically came to be with his people 'in the flesh'. Through his death and resurrection all of creation was blessed and had access to a restored relationship with God. Through the promise of the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God is now present to the world in and through us, his people. We still are called to gather together (Heb 10:24-25) but now worship is not confined only to a church or to a temple. The truth of God's word and the presence and revelation of that word by the Holy Spirit leads us into worship. When our lives are grounded and anchored to the reality that God loves us, made us, died for us, redeemed us and now is alive and at work in us, then our bodies, our whole lives become a true act of worship.

- 14. How does your life communicate everything that God is and has done for you?**
- 15. How does knowing that you are God's and that he loves you and that he died for you and redeemed you stabilise your day to day life in the present?**
- 16. How might a life of everyday worship (not just Sunday worship) change the world around you?**



**PRAY** intentionally

- Praise God for the generosity of his presence with us.
- Thank Jesus for his redemptive sacrifice.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you live a life of worship every day.



**BLESS** one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

**[Name], God's love for you endures forever. Amen.**