



ENTER God's presence

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

- Psalm 133

Lord God, we come together now united by your word. Bless our time together today and pour your Holy Spirit out upon us again like precious oil. May your Spirit and your Word soak into every fibre of our being, transforming and renewing us to become more and more the people who you created us to be. Amen.



SHARE life together

1. How have you seen Jesus at work in your life this week, in your highs and your lows?
2. Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?
3. Share a time when you have experienced or witnessed the very best of a community.
4. What has your experience of Covid-19 lockdowns taught you about your local community?

The moment...you rediscover something great in the bottom of the drawer that you had long forgotten about. The moment...you come across a photo from years ago that brings the memories flooding back. It's the story behind the story that triggers the emotions, reconnects you to your roots, re-establishes your present and reorients your future. For the people of Israel, this is the moment. The walls have been rebuilt, their hearts are being renewed. But it is only as they reengage the Word of God, that the real journey on the Road to Recovery comes into focus. For when people gather to hear the Word of God and understand it in the context of their lives, they discover the story behind the story; a story that revives their appetite for God, reinvigorates their worship and restores their community. And that community is commissioned to live from overflowing joy that releases healing, blessing & life to the world. Joy healing blessing & life equal to the crying need in our hearts & in our community right now.

Worship series:
Road to Recovery



VERSE for the week
Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Nehemiah 8:10



REMEMBER this week

True community is built on the Word of God.
For in every situation, the joy of the Lord is our strength for today and our hope for tomorrow.



LISTEN attentively

Read Nehemiah 8

5. **What stands out for you in this text? What questions does it raise for you?**
6. **What do you think it was about hearing scripture read and taught to them that led the people to tears and mourning?**
7. **What parts of scripture have moved you to tears in the past?**

In the previous chapter of Nehemiah, the work of rebuilding the walls was completed; the doors and gates had all been hung and the city was secure. You might think that after months of continuous, back breaking, manual labour, the people might have just wanted to take a break. Yet they seem to be driven towards something else. While you and I might be drawn towards the television, or a video game or a bit of quiet time with a sudoku or crossword puzzle for some rest and relaxation, through their work on the wall, the people of Israel had developed a deep hunger and desire for the Word of God.

Notice that it is not Nehemiah or Ezra that tell the people they need to hear God's word. Look closely at Nehemiah 8:1, it is actually the people who ask for God's word to be read to them!!! It is as if they have rediscovered a long forgotten treasure hidden in the back of the sock drawer and have rediscovered the joy and meaning that it brought to their lives. Now they simply want to sit with it and come to understand it all over again.

8. **Have you ever experienced a long period of time in which you have not read your Bible or heard God's word proclaimed at church? What happened during that time?**
9. **Have you ever experienced a period of time when reading the Bible was one of the most rewarding parts of your day and you just couldn't get enough of it?**
10. **What do you think it is about God's word that can make it both the most rewarding book to read but also at the same time the most difficult book to read?**

As the people of Israel rediscovered the significance of God's story for them as his people; and rediscovered the generous love and faithfulness of God to his people and his promises to them, they also rediscovered something about themselves. They rediscovered their complete and utter dependence on God. They came face to face with the reality of their failure to uphold their end of the covenant God had made with them. God's law convicted them of their sinfulness and unfaithfulness to him. It showed them what life with God had been like and what they had lost by walking away from that. It showed them what it meant to be the people of God and it showed them how far away from that ideal they had strayed. While God's law was undoubtedly directed at governing how God's people related to and cared for each other, it was also supposed to help identify them as a people set apart by God; a holy people set apart for God's purpose – the salvation of all humanity. All of this, God's plan, his purpose for the Israelites, and his faithfulness to his promises was all spelled out in scripture. Despite all the wall building, character building, and nation building which Nehemiah had been attending to, it was ultimately the word of God which re-established the Israelite community.

11. **Think about your local community and also your church community. How would someone from outside discern a difference between the two?**



GROW deeper

Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17

How does a community develop? Simply living in the same local government area does not make you part of a community. Community develops around a group of people with things in common; common worldviews, common problems, common goals or agendas. A Christian community is developed on common belief, common problems, and common purpose. All of these are revealed to us in God's Word. Our common problem is sin – a Christian community, while not simply accepting sin, should be a place where it is okay to be a sinner. If there is a group of people with whom it should feel safe and comfortable

to be who we are, warts and all, it should be the church where we acknowledge that we all have the same problem.

12. Has your experience of Christian community been one of grace and forgiveness for sinners or one of self righteous indignation and judgement of those who struggle with sin?

Our common belief is that of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus alone. God's word clearly explains that our only shot at salvation comes through faith in the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

13. Has your experience of Christian community been one of Christ centered salvation or of striving for self righteousness through works and deeds? Has that experience led to joy or despair? Explain.

Our common purpose is to serve others with the grace and love of God through the power of the Holy Spirit who is at work in us and through us.

14. Has your experience of Christian community been one of self sacrifice and service to others outside of the church or has it been driven by self service and self interest? Explain.



LIVE purposefully

Regular time in God's word keeps a Christian community together. In fact, without regularly being reminded and rediscovering the promises God makes to us and the purpose that he has for us, our church, our Christian community falls apart. When we think we have everything under control, God's word reminds us that he is the one in control. If we are really committed to being God's people then we really are committing to being people who live each day in the Word of God.

15. What strategies have you used in the past to try and spend some time each day in God's word?

16. Sometimes accountability helps us stick to a goal. Who is someone you could regularly read scripture with? When will you do it this week?



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his faithfulness to his people despite our failings.
- Pray for the church around the world, that we would not be drawn to look inward during these times of global pandemic and periods of isolation but that we would be inspired to remain focused on his mission to share the good news of the resurrection throughout the world.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to grow in you a renewed hunger for the word of God.
- Pray for Christians and all those trying to leave Afganistan after the Taliban takeover. Pray for peace in that country.
- Pray for the people of Haiti as they rebuild their lives.



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], the joy of Christ is in you. Amen.