



ENTER God's presence

Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

-Proverbs 21:1-3

Heavenly Father, your word has a lot to say about who we are as your people and who you are as our God. As we gather around your word again today, reset and renew our understanding of who we are in Christ and the new identity we have as your chosen and redeemed people. In Jesus name, 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 are the main factors that make you 'you'?**
- 4. If you could only share one detail or fact about yourself, what would you most want people to know?**

It's something that we have all done before, some more than others! Stand in front of a mirror. What do you see reflected back? Who do you see when looking in the mirror. Over time we internalise an image of ourselves, and our perception of that image becomes part of our identity. Where identity used to be established by family roots, cultural heritage and its ceremonies and rites of passage...more & more it's by group, party, ideology, or society's value of our achievement & occupation. Even the media plays a major role in how we perceive ourselves. And sometimes that perception is a distorted image that doesn't reflect reality. We're treating this year like the "re-set" button on an electronic device: the "on/off" switch that brings everything back to 0 – starts over. We're asking God to re-set our lives to his will – our hearts to his way – our path to his purpose – our identity to his people and our direction to his destiny....because we trust that in every day and in every step along the way 'the Lord will reign forever and ever!

Week beginning:
Sunday 17th January 2021

Worship series:

RESET



VERSE for the week

In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.

Exodus 15:13



REMEMBER this week

Only when you have an accurate picture of who God really is, can you discover your true identity. It will transform the direction of your life and give you the freedom to truly live...no matter the circumstances.



LISTEN attentively

Read Exodus 15:1-21

- 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 can you hear this song saying about who God is? What does it say about who the Israelites are?**

This particular passage of Exodus is often overlooked as just a song of praise and rejoicing after the people crossed the Red Sea, finally escaping from Egypt and Pharaoh. People tend to want to move on with the continuing drama of the escape of the Israelites from Egypt and their journey to the land which God had promised to their forefathers. That's not really surprising, it is a unique and compelling story. Yet there are significant claims made in this song of praise that are significant to us as well as to the newly freed and redeemed people of Israel. In order to understand the significance of this song, we need to go back to the beginning of the Exodus story. Go back and have a read of Exodus 1:1-11 and Exodus 2:23-25. This story begins by identifying all the members of Jacob's family; in other words, it identifies all the people who were recipients of God's promises, the family and descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That is how we should identify them, as linked to the promises of God. As a result, even in Egypt, they were blessed by God and lived fruitful and productive lives. Then a new Pharaoh takes over, and suddenly the situation changes. But notice God has not changed, he still causes the Israelites to be fruitful and multiply. Every attempt that Pharaoh makes to quell the growing number of Israelites is thwarted by God. However, skip a few decades ahead, the baby Moses has grown up and is on the verge of his encounter with God in the burning bush and the people are crying out to God 'because of their slavery'. Notice that they are not calling out because they remember that he is their God or that they are his chosen people, they call out because they have come to identify themselves as slaves. In their minds, they are no longer God's chosen and blessed people they are the oppressed and abused slaves of Pharaoh.

- 8. How have you allowed your situation to influence or define your identity? How have you allowed the situation or circumstances of others to influence the way you define or identify them?**
- 9. There are many factors which the world says determine our identity. Race, gender, sexuality, occupation, age, nationality, political ideals, religion, these are just a few. Which of these, or any others you might think of, are significant for you and how you think about your identity and who you are?**

What is interesting, particularly in Exodus 2:24, is that while the Israelites had lost sight of their identity, God had not forgotten his promise to them and to their ancestors. While the Israelites had lost sight of their identity as God's chosen people, it did not stop them from being God's chosen people. God still loved and cared for them because they were his. Often one of the biggest challenges for us is to remember that we belong to God even when our circumstances and the things around us make it very hard to see how or where God is at work in our lives. This was true for the Israelites also. In chapter 4 of Exodus, the elders of the Israelites hear what God has told Moses and they see the miracles God has enabled Moses to perform and they believe. However, by the end of chapter 5 when Pharaoh has increased their labour and worsened their working conditions, they are again full of doubt. Living in our identity as God's people is a continual struggle. It was for the Israelites, not only in Egypt, but also as they wandered in the desert, and throughout their history in the promised land. It is also an ongoing struggle for us. It was only as they came to experience the fullness of their freedom and escape from Pharaoh on the far shore of the Red Sea, that the people were able to sing and to declare with confidence that their God was faithful in delivering his promises, that he had delivered them from their enemies, that he was not just the God of their fathers, he was also their God and they belonged to him.

- 10. Think back over your life, can you share a time when you have been extraordinarily aware of God's care or protection of you or your family? How did/does this affect the way you think about your relationship with God?**
- 11. Can you recall the point in time when your faith truly became yours, not that of your friends or family who might have introduced you to Jesus, but truly yours? How did your reality and identity change at that point?**



GROW deeper

Take a look at Romans 5:6-8

Just as the Israelites rediscovered their identity in the redeeming and saving work of God on their behalf, so too our new identity is found in the redeeming and saving work of Jesus Christ. So often we base our identity on what we do. For example, when we introduce ourselves we usually lead with our name and then our occupation. “Hi I’m Dan and I’m a doctor at ...” or “Hi I’m Liz and work in the accounting firm just down the road”. Perhaps the most obvious place it happens is between kids in schools. It usually doesn’t take to long for a new student at a school to be labelled as either a ‘sporty’ kid, a ‘nerd’ or ‘geek’, ‘teacher’s pet’ or ‘class clown’. The things we do, the way we behave define us. This is why the Bible can so readily describe us as sinners because our rebellious attitude and actions toward God and his designs and plans for us identify our sin; and yet, God’s love is most radically displayed for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Our identity is no longer based on what we do, it is determined by what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. In John 1:12, we hear our new identity spelled out clearly, in Christ we are children of God. No longer are we defined by our rebellion, but by Christ’s righteousness. No longer, sinners but saints. Yes, we still have a struggle living fully in that new identity. Yes, we still sin and lose sight of God and his promises on a daily basis, but these things no longer have the power to define who we are because Christ has overcome them all. When we accept all that he has done for us, the only identification that we need, in fact the only identity we have is that of a child of God.

12. What are the things in your life that sometimes get in the way of you claiming or living in your identity as a loved and redeemed child of God?

13. Have there been times when you have wanted to hide your identity as God’s child? What were the situations that made you feel that way? What did you do?



LIVE purposefully

There are many Christians who have accepted the salvation that Jesus offers and yet live lives that hide, or cover up, or diminish their new identity in Christ. A bit like walking around in disguise, they are one thing on the inside, but they cover that up and try to seem like something else. There are lots of situations, particularly in our modern/post-modern western culture where being a child of God draws ridicule, antagonism, sometimes even hatred. Just like the disciple Peter, it can be tempting to deny our identity as one of Jesus followers and pretend we are just like everyone else. But we are not, we have a freedom in Christ that the rest of the world needs, the freedom to be defined and loved not by what we do but by the saving and redeeming action of the one who created us.

14. What can you do to be constantly reminded of your new identity in Christ?

15. How does the knowledge that your new identity is completely established by Jesus and not by anything you do change the way you think about yourself and others?



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for loving us and making us his children.
- Thank Jesus for restoring our identity as children of God.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be identified as a place where people can encounter the love of Jesus.



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], you belong to Christ forever and ever. Amen.