

# The Hour that changes **EVERYTHING**



Small Group Booklet  
May / June 2015

# THE HOUR THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

*How worship forms us into the people God wants us to be - by John van de Laar.  
A 50 Day Journey.*

John van de Laar gave us permission to adapt his words into our format.  
If you would like to read the book please visit [www.sacredise.com](http://www.sacredise.com) and order your copy.

Week 1: An Invitation to Intimacy.	Page 3
Week 2: Welcome to a New World.	Page 6
Week 3: Becoming Holy.	Page 11
Week 4: Becoming True.	Page 16
Week 5: Becoming Beautiful.	Page 21
Week 6: Becoming Loving.	Page 26
Week 7: Becoming Purposeful.	Page 31

**Worship is the quest to enter into a deeply authentic engagement with God by which we discover, recover, and uncover the soul of our humanity.** Worship helps us find our true identity; more fully comprehend the purpose of life; and become rededicated to our ultimate destiny. None of this happens unless we encounter God in worship. It is the central act of the Christian faith. Worship, fully understood, embodies, determines and expresses the quality of our spirituality. We have to practice worship in ways that lead people into deeper and more life encompassing spirituality. It needs to challenge, transform and inspire. What we do in Church is intended to lead us into a life of honouring God in all we do. It is not simply singing a few songs and listening to a sermon. Worship must impact every moment, every circumstance, and every interaction in our lives. Worship is a lifestyle - everything we do is worship. If we seek to change how the Church is viewed and experienced both by those who attend and those who don't, we need to take our Sunday services far more seriously – not merely as ministers and worship leaders who construct and facilitate the experience, but as worshippers who partake of and participate in it. The act of worship in the Scriptures is a spiritual discipline that is essential to the growth of God's people in faith and righteousness. The idea that worship is simply a "filling station", where we come to "get something out" each week, is completely foreign to both the Scriptures and the Church's history. Equally foreign is the idea that worship can be merged into the rest of our daily lives without a regular, intentional, corporate sharing in acts of worship. **Worship is an act that leads us into a transforming encounter with God from which mission, compassion, and justice flow.**

The way we worship defines the way we live. We strive for worship to transform us so that we live lifestyles of Christ-likeness. It is not the practices and experiences of worship, but **the transformation that worship creates in us** that we seek to bring into our everyday routines. The result of the act of worship, is that we find ourselves automatically living in a Cross-carrying, Christ-following, contributing and compassionate way, because we have encountered the crucified, selfless, eternally-loving Christ in our worship, and we are becoming a little more like this Jesus each day. In this sense, the worship service is at the very heart of the Church's mission, identity and work of spiritual formation.

This series will be a practical manual, designed not only to offer ideas about worship, but also to take us on a journey into a new experience of worship. The whole experience takes 50 days in total, and promises to lead us into a deeper experience of worship, and a different way of living as a result. *William Temple said: "The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members."* Here is how he expressed his understanding of worship: **"To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."**

We will attempt to understand what we mean by 'worship' and how our Sunday activity seeks to embody this meaning (week one). Then we need to understand the difference our worship makes to how we inhabit our world, and how we relate to the people in it (week two). Then, from week three to seven, we explore in turn the five statements of Temple's definition above, recognising how worship facilitates the changes within us that he describes. This is the 'internal' change that worship brings. We will learn that worship is neither a purely internal activity, nor a purely individual one.

*I pray that in these pages you may find some treasure, some pearls of great value. I pray that you will feel that the work and the journey, the wrestling and the searching have been worth the effort. But, most of all, I pray that as a result of this quest, your experience and participation in worship will be deeper and more transforming, and that you will enter the daily details of your life and relationships with a new passion, and new commitment to compassion and grace. And I pray that as a result of the change in you, your world will be a little more whole.*

**John Van Der Laar**





## WEEK 1:

# AN INVITATION TO INTIMACY

MAIN SCRIPTURE: JOHN 17: 21-23

*That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

MAIN MESSAGE: AN INTIMATE UNION WITH GOD



BACKGROUND:

What we do on Sunday is intended for one purpose, and one purpose only – to bring human beings into deep, passionate, life-changing encounters with the God who made us and to whom we long to return. Our singing, praying, sacraments, rituals, music, banners, Scripture reading and other worship acts are simply the outward expressions of our inner, intimate, spiritual connection with God. The act of worship has become completely disconnected from a whole person commitment to God, and to God's people. The outward expression of it – doesn't work on its own. Without the connection, the intimacy, the giving of your whole self to God and God's people, and the receiving of God's Spirit, and the love of a community in return, the act becomes meaningless and unsatisfying – or even destructive. And so, too many of us find ourselves hollow inside. It's like we've become focused on the packaging and forgotten the gift inside.

Intimacy with God is **the experience of growing in our awareness of God's knowing of us**. Worship invites us into particular actions and practices that enable us to know and express this intimacy with God. All intimacy – whether with God or with another human being – is really only mutual self-disclosure – the honest and vulnerable opening of our true selves to each other.

**There are three 'movements' - that lead us to intimacy:**

- The first movement in the process of becoming intimate is **attentive listening**. In order for people to find a deep connection, their 'stories' must be told. The act of listening is an act of faith, believing that the 'story' is more than information or words; it is the vehicle through which the other person's deepest self is being shared. Worship invites us to listen to **God's story**. There are certain practices each week that are designed to draw us into God's story.

- The second movement in the process of becoming intimate is **vulnerable sharing** – or **my story**. Intimacy is a two-way process, a dialogue, and so intimacy-seekers need to share themselves through their stories. In worship we come to share **our story** with God. It is not that God doesn't know our story. It is, rather, that we need to know that God knows our story. We do this with confession and intercession, when we baptise our children, join lovers in marriage and grieve with the bereaved, in our preaching, banners, testimonies and pulpit notices. The telling of our story leads us into intimacy with God, because our spirits reach out to God's Spirit through the words, actions and symbols. We bring our true selves into the sanctuary, and allow our worship to facilitate the telling of our stories, because when we do this, our stories are transformed by the God who always chooses to enter – to be incarnated – into them. In worship we aren't responding to circumstances and situations in the church or in the world, or to values such as goodness and mercy, we are not even responding to life itself. Our response is to God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This response is an awesome and holy aspect of worship.
- The final movement in the process of intimacy is the element of **time** – **history**. Intimacy takes time to develop, and as the sharing of stories continues over the years so intimacy grows. Worship is not about creating stirring experiences each week or goose bump raising experiences so much as it is about the routine: the discipline of continually sharing with God, and growing gradually deeper in intimacy with the divine.

We are faced with a choice: we can decide that this is all too much work, and we can continue to attend worship as an act of going through the motions – or walk away from Sunday services all together, or we can choose to answer the call, and embrace the journey of worship as the most significant act of our lives, allowing intimacy with God to be our primary quest, and seeking for all that we do and are, to be an expression of this intimacy.

Sundays will become a very different day for us. In place of the longing, the desperation, the emptiness and frustration, we will be consumed by what Richard Foster calls a 'holy expectancy'. We will gather in the church grateful for these companions who challenge and support us. We will enter the sanctuary with excitement and openness, waiting to see what God has in store. And we will leave, knowing that we are different because we have intentionally basked in God's presence, and have heard God speak.





## SMALL GROUP SESSION WEEK 1

### WELCOME

Can you remember the first time you fell in love, or the first time you noticed someone who was deeply in love? Describe the experience to your group.

### WORSHIP

Begin with an open time of prayer, in which group members are invited to offer prayers of love and devotion to God, either silently or out loud.

When you feel that enough time has been allowed for prayer, read Psalm 63: 1-8 (if the members of your group are comfortable reading out loud, ask them to read one verse each in turn). Then spend some time singing. An example could be “*Here I am to worship*” (*Hillsongs Australia*):



*Light of the world You stepped down into darkness*

*Open my eyes let me see. Beauty that made this heart adore You*

*Hope of a life spent with You*

***Chorus: Here I am to worship. Here I am to bow down***

***Here I am to say that You're my God. You're altogether lovely***

***Altogether worthy. Altogether wonderful to me***

*King of all days Oh so highly exalted, glorious in heaven above*

*Humbly You came to the earth You created All for love's sake became poor*

***Chorus & Bridge: I'll never know how much it cost (x4)***

***To see my sin upon that cross***

**Scripture Reference(s): Hebrews 2:7-8, John 8:12**

When the music is finished spend a few moments in silence inviting God to make you aware of God's love for you, and offer your love in return. Then think about people and situations you know where God's love is needed and lift them to God in prayers of intercession. Close with a short time of sharing how you experienced God's love during this time of worship, and give thanks together.

### WORD & QUESTIONS

Read John 17: 21-23 and discuss the following questions together.

1. What do you think Jesus meant when he prayed that God was in him, and he was in God, so we would be in God? (Vs.21).

2. When have you been aware of a longing for God within you? What made you aware of it?
3. How have you experienced being one with God?
4. In what ways does worship help you to experience your unity with God, and then live your life out of that unity?



## WEEK 2:

# WELCOME TO A NEW WORLD

### MAIN SCRIPTURES: REVELATION 1:9-18

*I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*



## BACKGROUND

The act of worship can change those of us who embrace it and the world in which we live. We struggle with the way things are. We continue to long for more, for a better world, for a better self. We can continue to go through the motions, reacting to the struggles that life throws at us, or we can choose to grow spiritually. We need to follow Jesus into change and we can do this in the act of worship. **If the quest of worship is to encounter God intimately, the consequence is that we leave the sanctuary different from the way we entered it.** We cannot spend time consciously opening ourselves to the presence of God without being changed, and this transformation must overflow into every facet of our lives. This series is about the changes that God works in us as we worship. It deals with the way our inner world is completely remade as a result of encounter with God, leading to different behavior, relationships and attitudes.

The actions of worship are designed to transform us into people for whom the primary context of life is love for God and neighbour. The most profound change that worship brings about is in our relationship with God. Because worship is primarily the act of intimacy with God, the context for our lives is created by our understanding and experience of the God with whom we connect. As Richard Rohr notes, “*You become the God you worship*”. When worship is true our perception of God changes from the distant, separate deity of the theist, to the present, connected and creation-filling God. Once we begin to recognise the world as contained in and filled with God, everything changes for us – it becomes a whole different world. God is not separate from creation, but expressed through it.

Worship transforms us by giving us a different context for our lives, and this flows into specific changes in at least three elements: **space, time and people**:

- If we begin to see the world, not only as a place for us to live for a while, but as also the dwelling place of God, as a sacred creation that is filled with the presence of God, we begin to live differently in it. The act – and the environment – of worship is what creates this change in our understanding and experience of the spaces in which we live. **Worship is always connected to the gathering of a community, and for this gathering to happen, a place needs to be set aside.** Every time someone has encountered God, it has been in a particular place. The sanctuary – the place of worship in a church building – is meant to remind us of this truth. Our sanctuaries can speak to us about the God who meets us in the ordinary, geographical spaces of our lives.
- The next important facet of the context in which we choose to live, is **time**. The pressure-cooker way of living arises from what the ancient Greeks would call a *chronos* sense of time. *Chronos* is linear time – hours slipping by as events follow one



another in sequence, with each moment equal in value to the next. In this sense, once passed, time is forever lost. Inevitably, we find ourselves cramming as much into each second as we can, and rationing time for each part of our lives according to how important we feel each activity is. Christian worship proclaims confidently that time is also where we encounter God. The gift of worship is that it opens us to this God who is encountered in time, and simultaneously offers us a completely different filter through which to experience time – what the Scriptures call *kairos*. The *kairos* is time with significance, appointed time, time when God’s purpose and presence break into our time-enslaved world. It is a moment in which eternity takes centre stage and the ticking of the clock ceases, for a while, to matter. **Worship teaches us to move our mindfulness of eternity from the edges of our being to its very heart; to begin to honour the time we have as a gift, and to be open to its flexibility in order to readily make space when eternity chooses to “break in”.** Sabbath is about learning to recognise the significance of moments in time. It is about learning to recognize God’s tempo and pattern for us, our community and our world, and it is about matching our pace with these eternal rhythms. This enables us to be more creative and caring people. It frees us from the tyranny of the expedient in which we do things as quickly as possible in order to get the best return on our investment. It frees us from the impatience that characterises much of our lives, and from the temptation to measure everything, from success to relationships, according to short-term criteria. This God-changed view of time, leads us into the gracious rhythms of patience, simplicity, authenticity and collaboration.

- The **people** we interact with, pass by, love and wrestle with all contribute to and shape the world in which we live. If we need anything, we need a new way of seeing, understanding and interacting with one another, or we might actually cause our own extinction. So, the need for worship to transform our relationships as people, then, goes beyond merely teaching us to get along with other people in our home church. It impacts everything - how we relate to one another as people with different nationalities, religions, values and priorities. **The miracle of worship, though, is starting with a small community of people, we are changed in how we experience and relate to all people.** For Jesus, there is no solitary faith. We are called not simply to follow Jesus, but to become part of a community – a body of diverse people (those who look different, think differently, believe differently and worship differently from us). But as we are forced into relationship with these others, we begin to recognise that every person is created in the image of God, and that every person is loved by God. We begin to recognise that we are all connected through our common humanity and our common status as recipients of God’s love.

Worship transforms us, then, by changing the people (or our understanding and experience of them) who inhabit our world. While much of this transformation happens “externally” as a change of the context – the time, space and people that create our world – this external change must create and be created by a corresponding internal one. It is to this internal transformation that William Temple points in his definition. And that is what the rest of this series is all about.



## SMALL GROUP SESSION WEEK 2

### WELCOME

When have you experienced a time of great change? What was good and what was difficult about that experience?

### WORSHIP

Start by singing together a hymn or song of praise, like “Blessed be your name” (Matt Redman):



Blessed Be Your Name in the land that is plentiful  
Where Your streams of abundance flow Blessed be Your name.  
Blessed Be Your name when I'm found in the desert place  
Though I walk through the wilderness Blessed Be Your name  
Every blessing You pour out, I'll turn back to praise.  
When the darkness closes in Lord still I will say:

**Chorus: Blessed be the name of the Lord, Blessed be Your name  
Blessed be the name of the Lord, Blessed be Your glorious name**

Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me  
When the world's 'all as it should be' Blessed be Your name  
Blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering  
Though there's pain in the offering Blessed be Your name  
Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise  
When the darkness closes in Lord still I will say:

**Chorus x 2**

You give and take away, You give and take away  
My heart will choose to say, Lord, blessed be Your name

Scripture Reference(s): Genesis 14:20, Psalms 9:1-2

In a moment of silence, think of an area in your life where God has helped you to change for the better. Give thanks either in silence or, if you are comfortable to do so, out loud. Then move back to silence, and reflect on areas in your life where you feel you still need to change. Silently offer your confession to God, and open yourself to God's Spirit to work in those areas of your life. Close this prayer time with one or more people offering short prayers of thanksgiving for God's gracious work of change in our lives.

Go around the group and speak about people or places that need God's grace and love to bring about healing, transformation, peace or new life. In an open time of prayer, lift these situations to God.

Close with a hymn of thanksgiving like "Give Thanks" (Don Moen):



Give thanks with a grateful heart  
Give thanks to the Holy One  
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son  
Give thanks with a grateful heart  
Give thanks to the Holy One  
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son  
**And now let the weak say, "I am strong"**  
**Let the poor say, "I am rich"**  
**Because of what the Lord has done for us"**  
**And now let the weak say, "I am strong"**  
**Let the poor say, "I am rich"**  
**Because of what the Lord has done for us"**  
Give thanks with a grateful heart  
Give thanks to the Holy One  
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son  
Give thanks with a grateful heart  
Give thanks to the Holy One  
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son  
**And now let the weak say, "I am strong"**  
**Let the poor say, "I am rich"**  
**Because of what the Lord has done for us"**  
**And now let the weak say, "I am strong"**  
**Let the poor say, "I am rich"**  
**Because of what the Lord has done for us"**  
Give thanks  
We give thanks to You oh Lord  
We give thanks

---

## WORD & QUESTIONS

Read Revelation 1:9-18 and discuss the following questions together:

1. What do you learn about Jesus from John's vision in the passage you just read? Try to think of various elements symbolically rather than literally.
2. How do you feel about the idea that worship is meant to transform us? What transformation do you think God might be seeking to create in you as you worship?

3. What is the main “context” for your life? How would you change if you made living in the context of God’s presence your priority?
4. How do you usually think about time and space? What are your happiest moments, and your happiest places to be? How can worship help you to find God in every time and every place?
5. Who are the people you struggle most to be with? How can worship help you to be more open to others – especially strangers, people who are different from you, and people with whom you disagree?



## WEEK 3:

# *BECOMING HOLY*

### MAIN SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 6:1-8

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”*



### BACKGROUND



Corruption, abuse, and deceit simply confirm our sense that conscience is a limited resource in our society, and it affects every one of us. We all know the shame of betraying our convictions, of being “caught out” in deception, or of hurting those we love. We know that we need to change, that our world needs to change if we are to become the people we long to be, and that we know we are capable of being. If we want to awaken our consciences – bring them back to vibrant life – we need a vision of God’s holiness.

Temple says “***Worship quickens the conscience by the holiness of God***”. In a world that suffers from a crisis of conscience, we need God’s holiness to confront us. When we are faced with a vision of God, we cannot help but see our own deep brokenness and our own glorious potential to be holy. We are at once convicted and called, and the result is a transformation in which we seek to become whole and to bring wholeness wherever we are.

Often when we speak of holiness, we can find ourselves referring to something that is very far removed from it – being “holier than thou”. This may perhaps have something to do with our tendency to view holiness in legalistic terms, as in obeying a set of puritanical, God-ordained laws. Holiness is far more than merely following a set of rules – even if the rules are the Ten Commandments – because God is more than a mere rule-maker. When it comes to Jesus, we see a different picture. Holiness is not a legalistic, boring, religiosity, but a vibrant, warm and welcoming life of compassion and wholeness.

The literal meaning of both the Greek and Hebrew words for holiness, *orto* be holy, is to be **set apart**. The meaning is best described by our English term to **sanctify**, and the idea is to separate the holy object or person out **for a special purpose**. Ironically, we have tended to view holiness as being set apart **from**, not **for**. Wesley said there is no holiness but “social holiness”, and he defined holiness as “perfect love”. In worship we receive a vision of God’s holiness, and this makes us people who are more just, more ethical, more companionate, more hospitable and more filled with integrity. Our conscience - the voice that tells us what is right and wrong – is formed, shaped and made alive in our worship.

Temple suggests that it is in our worship that we are opened to this holiness of God. In this sense, worship can be thought of as being therapeutic – a wholeness-bringing activity. This therapeutic nature of worship can be intentionally fostered in our service when we stop pretending that we’re all alright and begin to be honest and open about our pain. When we make space for our grief and brokenness – and acknowledge our struggles – in prayers of confession, lament and intercession, we open ourselves to God’s wholeness and compassion.

When we ensure that our sanctuaries and worship services are **welcoming** for those who are visibly broken, like people in wheelchairs, we create an environment in which we are all able to bring our brokenness to God. We nurture therapeutic encounters with God's whole-iness when we create specific times of ministry, through altar calls, healing services, or simple moments of prayer for healing and comfort. When we open ourselves to God's healing power intentionally in worship, we create the environment for transformation and healing to happen. In **authentic worship** we are opened to a vision of God's compassionate holiness that calls us to a higher, more compassionate way of living, while simultaneously leading us into the wholeness that makes such living possible. The invitation, then, is simply for us to mindfully and intentionally engage in the act of worship, and allow the vision of God's holiness to take root in our souls.

There are some practices that are particularly useful in confronting us with the divine holiness that quickens our conscience:

- **Adoration** is traditionally the first movement in prayer, closely followed by,
- **Confession** is the vision of God and God's glory that praise offers that makes us aware of our own shortcomings and need of transformation. And confession is always accompanied by **the assurance of forgiveness**, which inevitably challenges us to "*forgive those who sin against us*", to bring to others the wholeness we have received from God's grace toward us.
- **Intercession** and **petition** ("the prayers of request"), in which we pray for others and ourselves, when practiced with honesty and vulnerability, also offer us a vision of God's holiness. All that we ask for relates, in some way, to brokenness – a lack of wholeness – in us, in others, or in our world. As we bring these needs to God, we are asking that God's presence and activity would transform, restore, and heal us – that God's "whole-iness" would lead us to "whole-iness". It is impossible to authentically practice the prayers of request without growing more humble, more compassionate, and more concerned for justice in the world.
- **The Scripture reading:** in many monastic traditions, large portions of the Bible are read at every daily worship gathering, and the Revised Common Lectionary (the interdenominational guide of Bible readings for each Sunday of the year) lists four readings for every week – an Old Testament 'lesson', a Psalm, an Epistle reading, and a Gospel passage. The Scriptures are still an important feature of Christian worship.
- **The symbols, sacraments, art and architecture** of our worship, we open ourselves to God's holiness. God's glory and holiness are beyond our ability to understand or describe, and so the prophets and psalmists often employ poetic descriptions, surprising metaphors and even disturbing images as they try to communicate what they have experienced. When we share in the sacraments – particularly **Holy Communion** – we engage the Divine Presence with our whole selves. The limitations, justifications and objections of the mind are bypassed and our spirits are filled with a sense of God's glory, and a longing to reflect that glory through our fragile lives.

Will we choose to be courageous and mindful enough that worship will quicken our consciences and transform us by the glorious vision of our Holy God?



## SMALL GROUP SESSION WEEK 3

### WELCOME

Describe your earliest memory of thinking about God. What pictures of God did you hold in your mind? What words did you use when you first started speaking or thinking about God?

### WORSHIP

Begin with a moment of silence. Sing together: “*Indescribable*” - Chris Tomlin.



From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea  
Creation's revealing Your majesty

From the colors of fall to the fragrance of spring

Every creature unique in the song that it sings. All exclaiming:

**Chorus: Indescribable, uncontainable,**

**You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name**

**You are amazing God**

**All powerful, untamable, awestruck we fall to our knees as we  
humbly proclaim.**

**You are amazing God**

Who has told every lightning bolt where it should go

Or seen heavenly storehouses laden with snow

Who imagined the sun and gives source to its light

Yet conceals it to bring us the coolness of night. None can fathom

**Chorus:**

You are amazing God

You are amazing God

Scripture Reference(s): Psalms 147:4-5, Psalms 95:4-5

Share in a time of open prayer, encouraging each member of the group to speak out one image or word from the song you have just sung as their prayer. Move into a time of confession in which you acknowledge the ways you fail to express those same words and images in your own lives. Give thanks for the assurance of God's grace, forgiveness and wholeness. Invite the group to think about the events of the world that have been reported in the news this past week. Invite each person to pray silently, or out loud, for God's wholeness to be manifested in these situations.

Sing together “*Make Me A Channel Of Your Peace*” Author: A Prayer of St. Francis, written by Johann Sebastian von Tempelhoff.



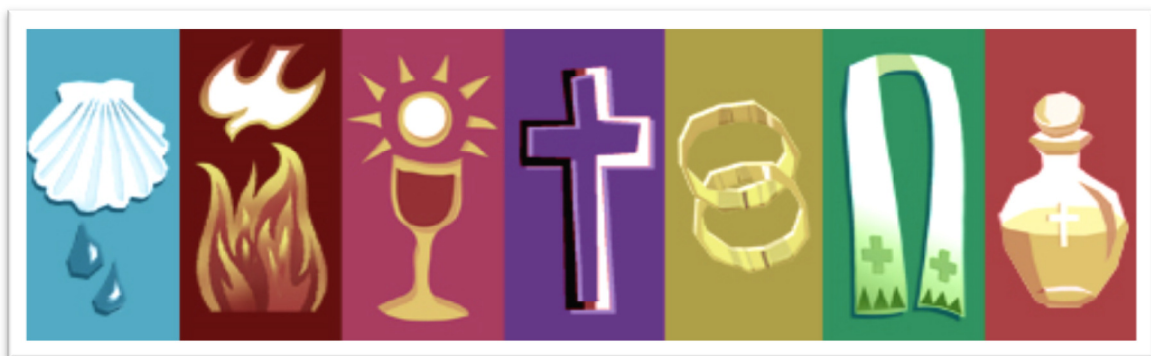
Make me a channel of your peace:  
Where there is hatred, let me bring you love  
Where there is injury, your healing power  
And where there's doubt, true faith in you  
Make me a channel of your peace:  
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope  
Where there is darkness, - only light  
And where there's sadness, ever joy  
O Spirit, grant that I may never seek  
So much to be consoled as to console  
To be understood as to understand  
To be loved as to love with all my soul  
Make me a channel of your peace  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned  
In giving to all that we receive  
And in dying that we're born to eternal life

Reference: Prayer of St. Francis

## WORD & QUESTIONS

Read Isaiah 6:1-8 and discuss the following questions together?

1. What were the main elements of Isaiah's experience here? How was he changed by experiencing God's holiness?
2. When have you had a new insight into God's glory or holiness in worship? How did that affect you and the way you live?
3. Before the Sermon on Sunday how would you have described "holiness"? How would you explain it now?
4. Where, in the world around you, or in your own life, do you see a need for the "quickenings of conscience"?
5. What one thing can you do this week to live a more "whole-y" life?





## WEEK 4:

# BECOMING TRUE

MAIN SCRIPTURE: JOHN 4:21-24

*“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”*

MAIN MESSAGE: THE TRUTH IN BEING, LIVING AND DOING

### BACKGROUND



What we call ‘truth’ may not always be as true as we believe. Something can be true and untrue depending on your perspective. We are influenced by what we believe to be true. In the realm of faith, the struggle for truth infiltrates every facet of our lives from how we read the Bible, to who is included or excluded; from how we deal with economic inequalities, to how power is appropriately employed, from whether we believe that our planet is under threat to whether we should fear people from other religions or geographical regions. **How we understand truth – and what we believe to be true – forms the foundation for every part of our being and our living.** Our truth creates our world, and determines the way we act and interact in it. The second statement in William Temple’s definition of worship makes this claim: ***To worship is to feed the mind with the truth of God.***

Temple insists that worship gives us access to truth beyond ourselves and our limited human existence – God’s truth. As we encounter God intimately through the spiritual act of worship, we are drawn into God’s truth. Our minds hold such life-directing power; there can be few disciplines as urgent and important as constantly renewing our minds. Perception of truth is not only about what we observe, to see things truthfully is not merely getting the right information about what we experience, but also rightly interpreting what that data means. That’s why Paul strongly encourages believers to strive to possess “the mind of Christ.” If we can begin to perceive the world through God’s “eyes”, and understand the world as God does, even in some small measure, our ability to navigate that world, to live abundantly and to bring life to others is dramatically enhanced.

William Temple suggests that it is in our worship that we receive this “divine mind”. In order to perceive and interpret truthfully, our minds need to be fed, and the nourishment we feed them greatly affects the influence our minds have on us – both consciously and sub-consciously.

When we release our obsession with facts, we open ourselves to the surprising adventure of truth. When we search the Bible for an understanding of truth, the answer, it turns out, is rather surprising. Biblical truth is primarily a person. This is why Jesus boldly proclaims, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me.*” What this means for us is that our primary access to God’s truth is the person and work of Jesus. When we feed our minds with the stories, teachings, images and events of Jesus’ life, we feed our minds with God’s truth. When we enter into a relationship with, a “knowing” of, Jesus, we are nourished with God’s truth. And, as Jesus explained, we connect with him through the Spirit of truth, who teaches us and leads us ever deeper into the truth he embodies. In order to see the world clearly, in order to interpret it rightly, in order to develop the “*mind of Christ*” we need to experience truth constantly encountering the Risen Christ. Truth is all about how we choose to live. The search for truth is a constant and crucial ingredient for a life of joy, abundance, contribution and purpose, and it is in worship that this quest is best undertaken. The moment we step into the sanctuary, we take the first step on a journey into God’s truth.

Everything we do in our worship is designed to captivate our minds, and to express and communicate the truth that feeds them. In this sense, then, worship can be thought of as **didactic** – teaching us to know, experience and live out God’s truth as revealed in the person of Jesus and the way of Jesus. This is why worship is prepared carefully, prayerfully and thematically. When the preaching, the music, the prayers, the symbols and the liturgical actions all speak the same message, our faith is strengthened and we learn God’s truth.

In our worship and preaching, we want to allow times for **symbols, rituals and stories** to speak without explanation, inviting us to exercise our minds, and do the work of learning God’s truth. It must take its educational role seriously, but offers teaching in entertaining ways: that engages the mind and holds the attention. These are practices that are regular parts of our worship are particularly effective at facilitating our experience of truth. In worship, this work is done intentionally through **Scripture reading**. The discipline of Bible reading is for our minds like the eating of staple foods for our bodies – both necessary and nourishing, we encourage you to engage more actively when the Bible is read in your church. The sacrament of **Holy Communion** also invites us to be fed with God’s truth. Through the bread and wine, God’s truth is enacted and proclaimed, allowing us to use both the left- and right-brain to bring together the symbolism, the experience of the presence of God, and the message of truth. It is a true feeding, both literally and figuratively, that enables God’s truth to reach into and transform the deepest parts of our beings. **The Creeds** - historical statements of faith, describe truths by which we are called to live. Closely linked with these practices are the “rites of entry” which every church practices. These include **baptism** or **dedication**, **confirmation** and **the welcoming of new**

**members.** These rituals are more than simply bringing people into a church, a religion, or even a community. When we make our commitment to belong to a church, we are actually committing to the way of Jesus. We acknowledge that it is a way that needs the support and strength of companionship, and we promise to help each other to live the truth daily. As I watch and pray for those who are baptised or confirmed, I am reminded of what my commitment to Jesus means, and of **the way** that I seek to live. Then I am able to renew my own vows and commitments, and give thanks for my companions who help me to stay true. Two other regular and simple practices that form part of almost every worship service are **confession** and the **offertory**. Both actions bring our lives under the scrutiny of God's truth. In confession we are reminded of what it means to live the way of Jesus, and of how Jesus lived, died and was raised in order to give us the example and the power to live this way. We acknowledge those places in our lives where truth is not our way, and we commit to truth again. In the offertory we bring our money – which really represents all that we are and all that we have – and we offer it for the work of God. The act of giving reminds us that we are not in control of our lives, and that we can only live abundantly when we place our trust in God and God's way of truth.

If we mindfully and wholeheartedly embrace the acts of Scripture reading and Communion, if we renew our commitment to Jesus and his way through sharing in rites of entry, if we constantly remember the truth that is communicated through our creeds, if we confess our untruths, and if we give ourselves to the way of Jesus through the offertory, we will find our minds growing strong and alive. And when our minds are strong, so are our bodies, our relationships, our communities and the contribution we make to the world.





## SMALL GROUP SESSION WEEK 4

### WELCOME

Have you ever lied or been lied to? Share the circumstances when this happened, and how it made you feel. What were the results of the lie for you and others involved?

### WORSHIP

Read Psalm 25:1-10 responsively, and then invite the group to pray out loud, in a single sentence or word, one prayer that arises in them from the Psalm.

Sing “*Lord, Reign In Me*” (Christian Band) or some other hymn about God’s truth and how it touches us.



Over all the earth, You reign on high  
Every mountain stream  
Every sunset sky

But my one request, Lord my only aim, Is that you reign in me again

**Chorus: Lord Reign in me, Reign in your power. Over all my dreams,  
In my darkest hour. You are the Lord of all I am  
So won't You reign in me again?**

Over every thought, over every word, may my life reflect the beauty of my Lord  
Cause you mean more to me than any earthly thing  
So won't you reign in me again

**Scripture Reference: Lamentations 3:23**

Spend a few moments in silence inviting God’s spirit to fill you again, and open your mind to the truth of God. Let each member of the group speak out one word that comes to mind for them when they think about the truth of God, and then offer a short prayer giving thanks for God’s truth expressed in all of these different ways. Close with a song that opens your heart to God in preparation for your conversation.



A possibility could be: *Lord, I Give You My Heart* (Michael W Smith):



This is my desire. To honour You. Lord with all my heart. I worship You. All I have within me. I give You praise. All that I adore is in You.

**Chorus: Lord, I give You my heart. I give You my soul. I live for You alone. Every Breath that I take, every moment I'm awake. Lord, have Your way in me.**

Scripture Reference: Psalm 37:4

## WORD & QUESTIONS

Read John 4:21-24 and discuss the following questions together:

1. What do you understand by the words “in spirit and in truth”? Why is it important to worship like this?
2. How comfortable are you with your mind? Do you live in your mind, or do you find it harder to take time to think, reflect and know?
3. Have you ever confused truth with facts? Have you ever been in a situation in which you came to realise that the truth was more than facts? If not, can you imagine what this might be like?
4. In what way is Jesus the truth to you? In what ways would you like to live the truth of Jesus’ way more effectively?
5. When have you experienced being “fed” with the truth of God” in worship? How did that happen for you? How can you make being fed with truth a more regular part of your worship?



## WEEK 5:

# BECOMING BEAUTIFUL

### MAIN SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

### MAIN MESSAGE: BECOMING PEOPLE OF IMAGINATION, CREATIVITY AND BEAUTY.

#### BACKGROUND



Beauty changes us. It has a profound impact on the well-being and growth of individuals and communities. Physically, psychologically, emotionally and relationally, beautiful objects and environments strengthen us, inspire us, challenge us, confront us, heal us and awaken us. Without beauty, our souls shrivel and our lives grow cold and small. But when we are able to find or create beauty, we are given access to our best selves. Beauty, and the act of creating beauty, is a deeply transforming gift. Perhaps this is why the message of the prophets was so often expressed through drama, mime, music, poetry, visions and tableau. The prophets were artists, and, in many historical movements, artists have been the prophets. It should come as no surprise, then, that William Temple notes the power of beauty to change us, and the significance of beauty in our worship life. In the third statement in his definition of worship, he states: ***To worship is to purge the imagination by the beauty of God.***

We must acknowledge that human beings are created by God, and so the capacity to imagine is therefore a God-given gift. At least in part, the divine image within us is manifested through our creative ability. Creativity does not exist without imagination. Without imagination, it would be impossible for us to move beyond the realities that surround us in order to realise the new reality of God's reign. When Jesus chose the creative technique of parable as his primary teaching method, he was relying on the imaginations of his hearers to get the message across.

The imagination is a powerful force that can generate both great evil and great goodness. In order to direct the imagination away from death and toward life, it needs to be purged, refined, made pure. William Temple suggests that the best way to inspire the imagination to nobility and godliness is to fill it with God's beauty. Like the work of any artist, God's creation reveals its Creator, and so it is there – in the material, created world, and in God's action in that world – that we must seek and find God's beauty. Once we recognise this, the world and all of its creatures, formations and inhabitants, are alive with reflections of God's beauty. Every moment, every place and every person we encounter is filled with the beauty of God, as are the works of beauty created by human beings who carry the divine image.

How we think about and experience beauty is a life-directing consideration. When we reduce beauty simply to the 'pretty' or call things that are untrue or lacking in goodness beautiful, our souls grow dry and brittle and our lives manifest a spiritual poverty. When we lose our capacity to discern authentic beauty, we inevitably try to fill our longing with poor, artificial substitutes that demand nothing of us, and that fail to satisfy. Yet, true, authentic beauty is at the heart of the Gospel, and is both a remarkable means of grace and a powerful agent of transformation. As we embrace what is really beautiful and good and true, we are nurtured and inspired in every part of our beings and we encounter, in Paul's words, the "God of peace" and know this God to be with us.

The struggle we face as we search for beauty, though, is that biblical beauty is seldom 'pretty'. It is often deeply disturbing, ruthlessly honest and searching in its questions. The Cross is perhaps the best example of this. Hymn writers and artists through the centuries have celebrated the "wonder" and the "beauty" and the "glory" of the Cross, and rightly so – it is truly a thing of deep and transforming beauty. But, it is the furthest thing from 'pretty'. It is brutal, bloody, shocking, agonising, diabolical and dehumanising, and yet, within all of this 'ugliness' it is ultimately good and absolutely true. It is beauty of this kind that truly purges and refines our imaginations and turns us all into God-reflecting artists that, through beautiful lives, change our world in deep and healing ways. The power of beauty is in its ability to move us beyond words into a deeper, whole-souled knowing. When we encounter the truly beautiful, we know it because it changes us, because we do not merely observe it at a distance, because it stirs within us the desire to reach for our best selves, and to invite others into the encounter. When we encounter the truly beautiful we begin to imagine that we, and our world, can be different from what we currently are. This is one of the most powerful and important functions of our worship. In our worship our desire for this good life is fed so that we begin to live it out in our daily activities and environments.

Worship enables us to experience and 'know' God's beauty in ways that touch and change us. There are a number of considerations we can bring to our gatherings in order to foster this character of worship: When we engage our **whole bodies** in worship, and not just our minds, we open ourselves to encountering God's beauty in ways that touch us deep inside. Movement, processions, different postures and even dancing, allow our bodies to become part of our devotion. **Using all the senses** – by filling the sanctuary with beautiful sights

(images, art), smells (incense, flowers, fragrant candles), tastes (communion, bread, honey, milk), sounds (music, or sound effects like wind, fire or rain) and textures to touch (like nails, thorns or seeds) – can open us to God's beauty in profound ways. When we use **stories, symbols** and **metaphors** in our preaching to communicate our message – we invite people to think more deeply, to use their imaginations and to open to God's beauty.

The worship that purges our imagination is worship that is filled with both God's creativity and the creativity of God's people. The beauty of the God-created world can be brought into the sanctuary by **decorating the sanctuary** with flowers, banners and icons, and for bringing produce into the sanctuary at celebrations like **Harvest Festivals**. God's beauty is also seen through the creativity of God's people. **Music** is the most common way that human creativity is expressed in worship. **Visual art** expressed through banners, paintings and photography, **ritual actions** and liturgical dance, the use of **symbols** and stories for meditation and other elements of décor can all help to create an environment in which we are drawn into an encounter with the beauty of God. A deeply transforming facet of Christian worship is that it is always communal. As bearers of the image of God, **all people** are to be seen as reflections of God's beauty. When our worship enables us to see beyond the marks of wear and tear that life leaves on our bodies and faces, we begin to recognise, and draw out, the beauty of God from each other.

Practices that we commonly adopt that lead us to encounters with God are:

- **Praise** - it opens us up to recognise God's beauty and presence around us.
- **Thanksgiving** - lends itself to a creative noticing and celebration of what God has done.
- The **liturgical calendar** offers opportunities for creativity and the expression of beauty in our worship. The **festivals** of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week and Easter all ask for our most creative energies and offer a variety of resources – from Scripture readings and specific rituals to particular colours and symbols – which can all be woven together in beautiful and transforming ways.
- Some **rites of passage** that we celebrate – baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals – open us to new experiences of our beautiful God.

If we are to envision the world as God desires it, as Jesus pictured it in his teachings of the Kingdom, we need imagination. If we are to embrace the hope that Christ offers us, and live out the faith to which we have been called, we need imagination. But, if we are to use our imaginations as effective instruments of transformation, we need them to be purged – refined and made pure – through encounters with God's beauty. For our worship to be a place of life-changing beauty, though, it needs the best creative energies we can muster, and the willingness to recognise and celebrate the beauty in each worshipper.





## SMALL GROUP SESSION WEEK 5



### WELCOME

What would you consider to be one of the most beautiful things you have ever seen or experienced? What impact did this beauty have on you?

### WORSHIP

Start by reading Job 38:1-18 with each member of the group reading one verse in turn. Respond by singing a hymn of praise like “*How Great Thou Art*” (Carl Boberg). Then spend a moment in open prayer offering words or sentences of praise for god’s beauty and creation.



O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder  
Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed

**Chorus: Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art  
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art**

When through the woods, and forest glades I wander  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees  
When I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur  
And see the brook, and feel the gentle breeze

**Chorus**

And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in  
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing  
He bled and died to take away my sin

**Chorus**

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation  
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart  
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration, And then proclaim  
My God, how great Thou art

**Chorus**

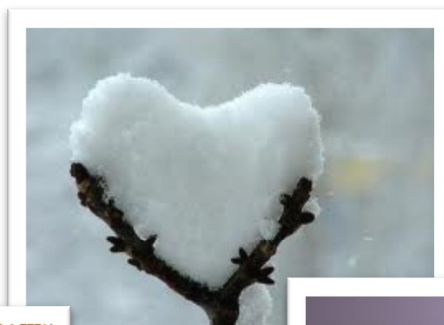
Scripture Reference(s): Psalm 93:1, Psalm 104:1-3

Move into a time of silent reflection on times when your lives have failed to reflect or appreciate God's beauty and offer your confession. Finish this moment by letting one member of the group speak God's words of forgiveness over you. In a moment of reflection play a piece of beautiful music, or, if you have the facilities, a short video or show photographs of great beauty, and invite the group to meditate on the sounds and/or images. Finally offer a few short prayers for places in your community that need to be beautified in some way.

## WORD & QUESTIONS

Read Philippians 4:4-9 and discuss the following questions together:

1. How good are you at thinking about good things, as Paul describes? How can you be better at making good things your focus?
2. Paul promises that God's peace comes to us when we focus on goodness and beauty. How have you experienced this?
3. How comfortable are you with your imagination? Have you ever allowed your imagination to be a significant part of your prayer or worship experience? What was the result?
4. What is your response to the "three transcendents" of the ancient Greeks (the good the true and the beautiful). How does each one help you to understand the other two?
5. In what ways does worship help you to be more aware of beauty, and God's presence in what is beautiful? In what ways does worship help you to be a more beautiful person?



## WEEK 6:

# BECOMING LOVING

MAIN SCRIPTURE: DEUTERONOMY 6: 4-9, 1 JOHN 4:7-12

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*

MAIN MESSAGE: LOVE TRANSFORMS

### BACKGROUND



In the face of oppression and political or military dominance, in the face of power struggles and abuses, in the face of economic struggles and disparities, in the face of our sexuality and the question of gender roles and equality, we are called to one task –to love God and our neighbours and ourselves. This commandment summarises the entire Bible. The essential guiding principle as we face all of life's big questions is love. To love the way Jesus did – the way he calls us to love – takes both work and a wide open heart. William Temple says it is worship that challenges us to experience, to embrace and to embody this love. As he states in the fourth part of his definition: **To worship is to open the heart to the love of God.**

In worship, God's love reaches out to us, coaxing us to release our self-protectiveness and closed-heartedness, and to gently open our hearts. In worship we hear the whisper of God's Spirit telling us over and over that we are deeply, passionately loved, that nothing we have done or could do could stop us from being loved. And in this reassurance lies an unavoidable challenge. When we know we are truly and deeply loved, we are required to

respond, to make a choice – to decide whether we will open our hearts to this love or retreat into ourselves and close our hearts. The word “heart” in the Scriptures speaks of our entire inner self, the deepest part of us: the spiritual centre. In Christ we see not only what God’s love looks like, and how God’s love acts toward us as it seeks us and woos us, but also what it looks like to open the heart to this love. For Jesus, every moment, every decision and every interaction is an opportunity to open the heart, and to welcome the other in. Jesus did not only teach love, he lived it, with all of its unpredictable challenges. When faced with Jesus as the example of the open heart, the call to love can be seen as the primary task of following Jesus, the heart of the Gospel message, and the definitive mark of the Christian life.

**God is love.** God’s very being is defined and expressed in love. The original Greek of the New Testament has four different words: *Storge* (affection – as in a parent for a child), *Philia* (friendship), *Eros* (intimately united with another), and *Agape* (“Godkind of love”). All these loves flow from God and must be embodied in our human existence, or we end up being neither loving nor truly human. God’s love is wholly and purely a gift given for our benefit. Our love for God, on the other hand, arises from our need for God. *Agape*, by definition, is love that is given freely, unconditionally, and without any desire for personal gain – it is “gift-love”. *Agape* is considered to be the love most appropriately ascribed to God. The essential quality of *agape* – its selfless, unconditional self-giving – must be expressed in all loves. When our hearts open to this selfless love of God, we find our own ability to love is changed. As we open our hearts, we find that love is not something we do so much as something we become. And as love becomes our central nature, we find that our behaviour, our relationships and our ethics are all transformed. Love becomes our only law, and it is one that is followed as a natural outworking of our being.

Worship leads us into love and transforms us into lovers. Worship that opens our hearts to God’s love will always reflect sharing of life. The Greek word *koinonia* is used in the New Testament to refer to the shared life, the fellowship, the deep community of the early believers. We can create this *koinoniac* experience. We need to be churches where all people are welcomed, and given a space – which includes being given a **voice**. If people are in any way silenced or marginalised, then they are not truly a part of the *koinonia*, and we all suffer from a reduced experience of God’s love. We need to make space in our services for different theological views, musical preferences, and dress codes. We send the message to one another, and to the world, that we are learning to be a people who love indiscriminately. We quickly discover that the entire activity of worship is designed to facilitate this process. In the **liturgical calendar** we encounter the story of God’s self-giving love in Christ. In the **sacraments** we enact God’s unconditional welcome and proclaim God’s gift of love made available in Jesus. In our **prayers** we take God’s gift of God’s presence seriously and dare to believe that we can enter a real relationship with God. In our **reading and preaching of the Scriptures** we hear again and again the love song of God for the humanity that is created in God’s image. There are two particular ways that the worship service calls us into open-hearted, love-embodying living. The **words** that we regularly use in worship – praise, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, dedication – are

the same kinds of words that, when spoken to another, bring grace, healing, comfort and connection. In the sanctuary we address these words to God, but as we live our daily lives, allowing these words to teach us how to speak to one another, our worship continues because whatever we have done to the least, we have done to Christ. As we allow our speech to be transformed by our worship, we discover that we become people who readily and easily affirm (praise) others, who quickly and genuinely apologise when we offend or hurt another (confession), who gladly ask for, and offer, assistance when help is needed (intercession), who constantly give thanks for the good that we enjoy (thanksgiving) and who vulnerably express our affection for, and commitment to, others (dedication). The **actions** we perform in worship teach us to act in Christ-like, loving ways. In worship we regularly serve one another (whether making tea or playing an instrument or welcoming those coming into the church), we give (through the offering) sharing the abundance that we enjoy, we weep with those who grieve and celebrate with those who are joyful (especially at funerals, weddings and baptisms), we eat together (especially in Holy Communion). All of these actions teach us what embodied love looks like.

There are a few particular worship practices that are especially good at opening our hearts: The practice of **Christian greeting** or “**Passing the Peace**” is a simple but profound ritual that calls us to acknowledge and recognise the others who are part of our community. There is the prayer of **intercession**. In our quest to love and be loved, there can be few acts as powerful as praying for others – especially those with whom we disagree or with whom we are in conflict. And the practice of gathering around the Lord’s Table in **Holy Communion** is profoundly effective at opening our hearts. We come to the Table deeply aware of God’s undeserved, unconditional love, which alone makes it possible for us to be there. Then, the humility and gratitude that naturally arise can only lead us to welcome other “unworthy” ones to find their place alongside us, acknowledging our common need and our common humanity. We leave the Table changed; with hearts open to every opportunity to love that may arise in our daily living.

It is in our worship, as we are embraced by God’s unconditional love, that we find the safety we need to risk this open-heartedness. If we are willing to allow worship to change us, if we desire love enough, we will discover in ourselves the capacity to become self-giving lovers of God, of our neighbours and of ourselves.





## SMALL GROUP SESSION WEEK 6

### WELCOME

If someone asked you what love is, how would you describe it? Share a story about a time when you felt deeply loved. How did this experience change you?

### WORSHIP

Begin your worship by passing the peace. Then offer prayers of thanksgiving for one another and for the love you are learning to share in your group (you can do this in pairs or small sub-groups if that would work better for your group). Sing together a hymn or two of thanksgiving like *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*:



Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not  
As thou has been, Thou forever will be

**Chorus: Great is Thy faithfulness**

**Great is Thy faithfulness**

**Morning by morning new mercies I see**

**All I have needed Thy hand hath provided**

**Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me**

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest

Sun, moon and stars in their courses above

Join with all nature in manifold witness

To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love

**Chorus**

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth

Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide

Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow

Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside

Read I Corinthians 13:4-8a responsively, and then spend a few minutes thinking over the last week. Bring to mind any times when you have behaved in a less than a loving way to others. Offer your confession, giving thanks for God's forgiveness and grace.



Share any needs of people or situations you know of where God's love is needed and then move into a time of open prayer as you lift these needs to God. Finish the prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer together. Close the worship time with a hymn celebrating God's love like "I Could Sing Of Your Love"



Over the mountains and the sea. Your river runs with love for me  
And I will open up my heart. And let the Healer set me free  
I'm happy to be in the truth. And I will daily lift my hands  
For I will always sing of. Of when your love came down

**Chorus: I could sing of your love forever x 4**

Bridge: Oh I feel like dancing. It's foolishness I know  
But when the world has seen the light. They will dance with joy  
Like they're dancing now

**I could sing of your love forever x5**

Scripture Reference(s): Psalms 89:1, John 14:6

## WORD & QUESTIONS

Read 1 John 4:7-12 and discuss the following questions together:

1. How do you respond to John's assertion that when we know love we know God, but if we don't know love, we don't know God? When have you experienced this to be the case in your own life?
2. What is your response to the assertion in this chapter that love is the only commandment we have been given as Christians? What are the implications of this for your life, your faith and your worship?
3. How would you describe a closed heart and an open heart? What tempts you to close your heart? What helps you to open it?
4. If loving God's way is about moving from "need love" to "gift love" in all the different loves of our lives, how can you practice doing this with your family, your friends and your companions in church?
5. How does worship help you to receive and give love more freely?



## WEEK 7:

# BECOMING PURPOSEFUL

MAIN SCRIPTURE: LUKE 4:18-19

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

MAIN MESSAGE: GOD’S CALL ON OUR LIVES

### BACKGROUND



When life loses its sense of purpose, it ceases to be life at all. When we feel that our lives have purpose and meaning we have a sense of fulfilment, even though our circumstances may not always be optimal. On the other hand, when we feel that our lives have no direction or purpose, we grow depressed and despondent, no matter how outwardly good our circumstances may appear. We need a sense of purpose for the sake of our wellbeing. The nature of that purpose is a significant factor in the impact we have on our world. In the final phrase of his definition of worship, William Temple addresses the issue of purpose: ***To worship is to devote the will to the purpose of God.***

Worship confronts us with God’s purpose for our lives. If we are to be people of purpose whose sense of calling leads us to creativity and not destruction, to contribution and compassion and not to coldness and judgment, then we need to be very clear on what the purpose of God for our lives really is. Jesus understood his purpose as proclaiming and demonstrating the Kingdom or reign of God, and calling others into a kingdom way of being. It was God-given. It was not self-enriching, it was not exclusive and it was not about domination, coercion or exploitation in any form. Whenever we claim that God has given us a purpose, it must be tested against this benevolent purpose of Christ. If it contains the same characteristics, then we can continue to explore the truth and the implementation of this call. Whatever our jobs may be, whatever gifts and abilities we may have, whatever environment or circumstance we find ourselves in, the purpose of God for our lives is to follow Christ’s way, and reflect Christ’s purpose and character in our daily lives. Living like this is quite simply a choice – a decision that is made by the will.

An essential aspect of our worship is to devote our will to the purpose of God. Our worship must continually draw us into a detailed and practical vision of God’s purpose, and strengthen our will and our devotion so that we embrace this vision not just as an idea, but

as the centre of gravity for every facet of our lives. The will is our capacity to make and implement decisions and choices, and yet we all know the crises of “willpower” that often accompany our attempts to develop a consistent exercise regime or stick to a weight loss program. If we want to live ‘better’ lives, our will has to play a significant role. Essentially our will finds its strength and transforming power when it is captured by God’s purpose and inspired by God’s Spirit. As followers of Christ our wills should be surrendered and devoted to the purpose of God, as it is manifested in Christ, living out this purpose in every moment and every situation.

Worship impresses upon us the vision and implications of God’s Kingdom purpose and where we are called to participate in this purpose. In worship we surrender our wills that we become devoted, not just to the God of heaven, but also to bringing God’s heaven to earth. Worship opens us up to the Spirit of God that strengthens and inspires our will so that it can be consistently and completely devoted to God’s purpose. In this sense our worship can be thought of as *kerygmatic*. In worship the *kerygma* – the Gospel message of God’s reign among us – is proclaimed through music, prayer, silence, sacrament, Scripture, preaching and symbol, and we, the worshippers, are captivated by God’s call to proclaim the Good News through word and action in the routines and relationships of our daily lives. It is important that we proclaim, in word and action both the **invitation** of the Gospel – to find life and salvation in Jesus – and the **confrontation** of the Gospel – challenging injustice and accepting God’s call to a higher standard. This means that in our worship gatherings we ensure that we do not tolerate injustice in any form.

There are a number of worship practices that we repeat each week which are particularly effective at captivating our wills and leading us into devotion to God’s purpose:

- At the start and end of every worship service are the often-overlooked elements of the **call to worship** and the **benediction** and **dismissal**. A call to worship immediately gives a sense of God’s presence and activity among us, we are reminded that the time we spend in the sanctuary is not an **escape** from life, but a **re-orientation** of our lives to God’s purpose. It sets the tone for the rest of the act of worship, and can mean the difference between a heartfelt act of worship and a heartless observance of religious habit. The manner in which a service is ended can determine whether we connect our worship with the realities of our lives, or enter the rest of the week unchanged.. We go as people who are **sent** as God’s messengers to proclaim the Good News in lives of compassion, service, forgiveness, inclusivity and peace-making.
- The **notices** or **announcements** and the **offering**. When we take the time to inform people of the activities and interests of our particular community, this is a *kerygmatic* – aproclamatory act. I often like to refer to the bulletin that most churches hand out to worshippers as the appendix to the Bible. While the Bible tells us of God’s work for all of humanity through all time, the bulletin, and the announcements that highlight important features of it, tells us of God’s work in a specific community in a particular time. If we want to know what God is doing in a church, we must listen carefully to the announcements. As the offering is received,

we do not give only the bit of money we place in the bag. Rather, we use the symbol of money – the means by which we feed, clothe and house ourselves – to represent **everything** we have and **everything** we are. The act of giving, then, places our entire lives into God's hand, and devotes our entire being to God's purposes. It is a radical act of obedience, and a dangerous prayer of commitment.

- **Preaching** is a practice that orients us to God's purpose and the power of preaching needs to be re-affirmed. The spoken word remains a powerful and effective way to communicate. Preachers need to use every tool they can – technology, story-telling, props, images, video – in creative and surprising ways. When we feel listened to and understood by a preacher, we are drawn into the Gospel message, and when we listen with a desire to be touched and changed by God, a sermon can be a life-changing even.
- The sacrament of **baptism**. At its heart, baptism is an affirmation of our identity and our vocation as children of God and messengers of the Gospel. Baptism never influences only the one baptised (whether infant or adult). It is always a communal event: a welcoming of people into the community, and a reminder, for all of us, of what the identity and purpose of the community are. Methodists make a vow where we recognise that our communal task is to be a people who know, live and share God's grace and love. And it is out of this shared identity – proclaimed every time we practice baptism – that we each find our own unique sense of identity and calling.

Through these, and other, regular practices of worship, we are given a vision of God's purpose for us and our world, we are called to experience the benefits of this purpose for ourselves, and to commit ourselves to participate in bringing this Kingdom vision into being in our world. Then, knowing that our commitments often reflect a desire of our hearts that our wills are unable to fulfil, we open ourselves to God's Spirit who captures us and strengthens us so that we become wholly devoted to this purpose of God in every facet of our lives. God's invitation to a purpose-filled life is offered every time we gather for worship. The resources we need to live this life of purpose are, likewise, available to us every time we worship. All that is required is for us to offer ourselves back to God, and allow our worship to remind us that we are people with purpose, and that our purpose is connected – intimately and completely – with God's saving, restoring activity in the world. As this reality begins to take hold of us we cannot deny the truth that our worship, truly and amazingly, holds the key to our healing and transformation, and that of every person and circumstance we encounter.



## SMALL GROUP SESSION WEEK 7



### WELCOME

What do you think of the idea that God has a purpose for your life? In what ways are you cooperating with this purpose already?

### WORSHIP

Begin with a time of silent preparation and thanksgiving. Ask someone in the group to read Psalm 139:1-18, and respond with prayers of thanksgiving and praise. Then sing celebrating God's purpose and calling like *Be Thou My Vision*.



Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art  
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night  
Walking or sleeping, They presence my light  
Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word  
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord  
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son  
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one  
Be Thou my battle Shield, Sword for the fight  
Be thou my Dignity, Thou my delight  
Thou my soul'd shelter, Thou my high Tower  
Raise Thou me heaven ward O Power of my Power  
Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise  
Thou my inheritance, now and always  
Thou and thou only, first in my heart  
High King of Heaven, my treasure Thou art  
High King of Heaven, my victory won  
May I reach Heaven't joys, O bight Heaven Sun  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall  
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all

Scripture Reference: Romans 8:35-39

Spend some time in intercession for others and for the world. Finish by committing to one small thing you can each do to help to answer your own prayers. Share it with the group.

Now move into the love feast, breaking bread together (page 30 in the Small Group Facilitators Guide). Serve each other as you do, and give thanks for the way Christ has served us in his life, death and resurrection. Invite God's spirit to fill you and empower you as you seek to follow Christ in your life to come. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving, and a hymn like *Take My Life And Let It Be*:



Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise x2

Take my hands, and let them move  
At the impulse of Thy love;  
Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee x2

Take my voice, and let me sing  
Always, only for my King;  
Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages from Thee x2

Take my silver and my gold  
Not a mite would I withhold;  
Take my intellect, and use  
Every power as Thou shalt choose x2

Take my will, and make it Thine;  
It shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart; it is Thine own;  
It shall be Thy royal throne x2

Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
At Thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee x2

**Scripture Reference(s): Psalms 16:9**



---

## WORD & QUESTIONS

Read Luke 4:14-21 and discuss the following questions together:

1. Identify all the different elements of Jesus' purpose as found in this passage (good news to the poor etc.). Share what each one means to you.
2. In what parts of your life do you feel that you have a clear sense of purpose? Are there any areas where you feel you lack purpose? What is the impact of this on your life?
3. In what way can you co-operate with Jesus' purpose of "bringing heaven to earth"? How can worship teach you to do this more?
4. How strong is your will? Do you easily make and keep your decisions and commitments, or do you often have crises of "willpower"? Are you willing for God to work on your will?
5. How has worship helped you to become a more purposeful person? How can you allow it to do this work more in your life?

---

## MINISTRY TO EACH OTHER & REACHING OUT

We live in a world that faces some huge challenges and the systems that we have created are breaking under the strain. It is not sustainable that a small percentage of the world lives in extravagant wealth while the rest struggle to feed their families and keep a roof over their heads. It is not possible that our addiction to power and violence as a means to address our conflicts and protect our interests can lead us to peace and co-existence.

We need to be woken up, as human inhabitants of a radically connected planet, and recognise that we have a part to play in our own healing and that of our world. We need a radical re-organisation of how we relate to one another and the earth. We need to take responsibility for our own contribution to the world's sickness or healing.

We believe that worship has a significant role to play in bringing about these changes. Worship can be more than a weekly emotional fix to carry us through our days. It can be more than a spiritual waiting room where we indulge in a pleasing vision of the life that waits for us after death. It can be more than dry ritual and religious duty.

The act of worship, understood and whole-heartedly practiced, can change everything. It can give us a new vision of ourselves and our world. Worship can lead us to becoming reflections of God's whole-ness. If we will commit ourselves to worship that truly confronts us with God's presence and activity, we will find ourselves becoming very different people. And it is when we commit to being changed ourselves that we are most likely to be an agent for positive change in the world.

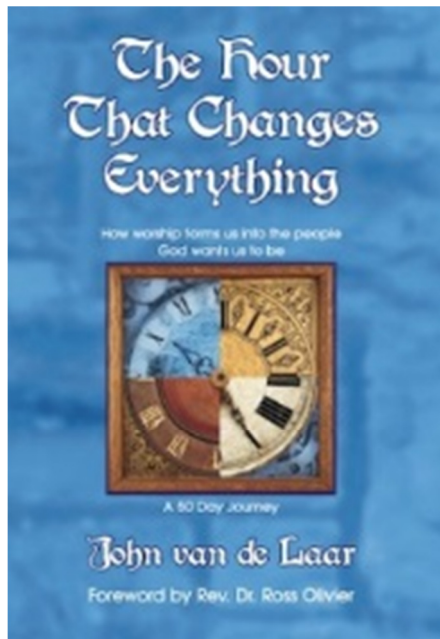
But in the deep places within us, where we know truths that we have not yet thought, and where we hold our deepest desires and hopes, we recognise that **we** are the miracle. That everything the world needs is already ours – held in trust in our own bodies and minds, in our own relationships and networks. We know that God is not just with us, but within us, and that together we really can make a difference for future generations, and turn the world around. More than that, we know that God believes in us, that God has placed God's work in our hands.

**We know that all we really need to do is make our connection with God as real and strong and transforming as we can. It is when we enter the sanctuary with this knowledge, and with the readiness for what we know, to become how we live, that worship becomes the hour that really does change everything.**

*Your challenge is: will people know that they have met a true worshipper, because their lives will be more whole, truer, more beautiful, more loving and more purposeful as a result of meeting you?*



## RESOURCES USED IN THIS BOOKLET:



Thanks so much to John van der Laar for giving his permission to use  
this amazing book for this Series!

*MetroLyrics , Lyrics.astraweb.com, Elyrics.net, Worshiptogether.com*

This book was produced and printed by the **Grace of God** and with contributions from:  
Neil Oosthuizen, Dalene Jordaan, Festus Marumo, Kerry Wetton, Carol Roodt and Shakes  
Mashinini.

**Thank you!**

Nadja Atkinson

*Facilitator Small Groups & Devotional Material*  
BMC

NOTES:

This image shows a full page of a document template designed for handwriting practice. It features a series of evenly spaced, horizontal black dashed lines across the entire width of the page. The background is plain white, providing a clear contrast for the lines. There are no margins, text, or other markings present on the page.

