

Call to Worship

The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you. (Ps 9:9-10)

Worship in song *by C Wesley*

1. Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down;
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling; all Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, Thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation; enter every trembling heart.
2. Come, Almighty to deliver, let us all Thy grace receive;
Suddenly return, and never, nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing, serve Thee as Thy host above,
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing, glory in Thy perfect love.
3. Finish, then, Thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation perfectly restored in Thee:
Changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
'Till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Reading from the Psalms

- Psalm 6

Prayer of confession

Loving Father, we worship you for we are the product of your hands.

You have made us in such a way that we can never be satisfied until we respond with love to your love.

You have made us in such a way that we can never be satisfied until we find our freedom in obedience to you.

You have made us in such a way that we cannot hope without the knowledge of your forgiveness.

We therefore ask:

Forgive our criticism of others that inflates us to the position of judge.

Forgive our exploitation of others for emotional or material gain.

Forgive us for ignoring others in our desire to live untroubled lives.

In your grace, forgive us. Dress us in Christ's righteousness and let us become like him in character, courage and compassion.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (Jn 3:16-17)

Prayer of thanksgiving

For the miracle of life, its rich variety and its ability to sustain us,
"We give you thanks, O God"

For the privilege of sharing with you in tending and shaping your creation as faithful stewards,
"We give you thanks, O God"

For the ability to understand and unlock the workings of your universe and appreciate its wonder,
"We give you thanks, O God"

For the seasons, the stirring of life, the joy of harvest, the gentling of autumn and the cool of winter,
"We give you thanks, O God"

For the sharing and caring between us that allows us to enjoy your blessings as a community,
"We give you thanks, O God"

For the wisdom we learn from your creation, its patience, its delicacy and its grandeur,
"We give you thanks, O God"

For faithful leaders of your church who embody Christ and who lead us into truth,
"We give you thanks, O God"

Holy Communion

During the Bronze Age in the Middle East, the strongest bond that could exist between two people occurred when they agreed to enter into a blood covenant with each other. The ceremony associated with this covenant involved both people cutting their wrists and letting their blood mingle together. The end of the ceremony typically concluded with a covenant meal.

When Jesus ate his last supper with his disciples, he deliberately turned the meal into a covenant meal, a meal that represented the strongest bond possible between two people. However, in this case, it was a covenant between God and humankind. Jesus took a cup of wine and asked them all to drink it. He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28).

God chooses to commit himself to us in covenant. This covenant commitment is so strong that God was prepared to sacrifice himself as Jesus to die to take the blame for

our sins so we could be made worthy of life with God. On the cross, Jesus exchanged our sinfulness for his holiness so we could be made right with God.

(Give thanks for the bread and the wine which represents the body and blood of Jesus sacrificed in order to rescue us back to God. Then share the bread and wine together.)

The Bible Reading

- Isaiah 33:5-6

The Message: HOW CAN WE BOTH FEAR AND LOVE GOD?

It is sometimes said that the Old Testament is a book of fear; the New Testament a book of love – the Old Testament a book of legalistic law; the New Testament a book of grace.

There is some truth in this. The Old Testament does feature God's standards for holiness, whilst the New Testament features the grace of God shown in Jesus dying for our sins because we could never live up to that holiness. However, both Old and New Testaments are important. As the Apostle Paul says, unless the Old Testament had shown us what sin was, we wouldn't know (Rom 7:7). However, whilst Old Testament law showed us what sin was, it did nothing to help us get rid of it (Rom 8:3). For that, we had to wait for Jesus who, in love, took those sins on himself to pay the price for them on our behalf.

Whilst there is a difference in emphasis between the two testaments, we should not overstate it. The greatest commandment taught by Jesus to love God with all your heart, soul and strength was first introduced in the Old Testament, not the New Testament (Deut 6:5).

However, the Jewish people's love for God did not mean they were not also to fear God. Unlike us, they had no difficulty in allowing their love of God and fear of God to coexist together fruitfully. They had a sense of delight in loving God, together with a sense of holy awe, respect and fear of God's righteous anger and holiness. For God's people, godly fear was, and is, a good thing. Listen to what the Old Testament says:

- *Fear the Lord your God* (Deut 6:13)
- *Learn to fear the Lord your God* (Deut 31:12)
- *Now fear the Lord and serve him* (Deut 24:14)
- *Be sure to fear the Lord* (1 Sam 12:24)
- *Let the fear of the Lord be upon you* (2 Chron 19:7)
- *The fear of the Lord is pure* (Ps 19:9)
- *Fear the Lord, you his saints* (Ps 34:9)
- *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom* (Ps 111:10)
- *The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life* (Prov 14:27)
- *He will delight in the fear of the Lord* (Is 11:3)

It is quite appropriate, in fact vital, that a healthy fear of God should exist alongside our love for God.

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Both love and fear are great motivators. One motivates with a carrot, the other with a stick. The truth is, in our humanity, we need both.

If you have fear of God and no love, you risk lapsing into a fearful, relationally sterile, legalistic relationship with God.

On the other hand, if you have love for God and no fear, you risk having a spirituality that is mere sentimentality. It will result in you failing to respect the awe of God and purposes of God.

Both love and fear have always needed to coexist in the Old Testament and the New.

It is significant that the following verses about the fear of God are not found in the Old Testament, but the New, so fear is not an outmoded concept:

- Jesus said: *I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who ... has power to throw you into hell* (Lk 12:5)
- Paul said: *we know what it is to fear the Lord* (2 Cor 5:11)
- Paul also said: *work out your salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil 2:12)

It is therefore quite appropriate to fear (in a healthy respectful way that motivates us) God. In the final book in the Bible, we read: *Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgement has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water* (Rev 14:7).

I am concerned by the lack of care Christians can show in how we live for God. I am concerned that we don't get so caught up with sentimental Western ideas of love, and view holiness and faithfulness as optional – depending on our feelings.

Psalm 111:10 says: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* If you don't fear God, you don't care much whether you obey God or not. If you don't fear God, you are not going to be motivated to get your life sorted out with God. The great American Protestant preacher A.W. Tozer said: *When men no longer fear God, they transgress his laws without hesitation.*¹

The Anglican academic Tom Wright, (who was once Bishop of Durham) has written saying that in our rush to embrace the New Testament truth that we are 'justified by faith in Christ', not deeds we do, we risk downplaying our obligation to live appropriately. In fact, he suggest that if we don't change the way we live radically, our faith is 'still born' and we do not belong to God. He says the whilst, *We aren't saved BY good works but we are saved FOR good works.*²

It is sobering to remember that when Jesus told the parable of the sheep and the goats, he was not talking about Christians and non-Christians, he was talking to the church. In other words, there will be those in our churches to whom God will say, *"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Mt 25:41). Likewise, the picture of Jesus standing outside of the door your life, knocking to come in (Rev 2:20), was not an invitation to non-Christians, it was an invitation to the church.

1 A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (Milton Keynes: UK, Authentic Media, 2005), p.86. (A.W. Tozer, 1897 - 1963)

2 N.T. Wright, "Start by Understanding Salvation" *On Faith* (website).

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It is sobering to read that Paul speaks of those in the church who have “*shipwrecked their faith*” (1 Tim 1:19).

We need to be careful here, because the Bible also makes it clear that those who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour have their eternal future assured. However, too many have accepted Jesus as their Saviour, but not their Lord. If this is you, please be very careful. Grow a holy fear of God. Whilst fear should not exist without love, don't ignore the importance of healthy, appropriate fear.

Appropriate godly fear can be a very good motivational force. We read that the governor of Jerusalem, Nehemiah, put very specific people in charge of Jerusalem after he had rebuilt it. His criteria was that the men in charge had to have integrity, an integrity motivated by the fear of God.

I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do. (Neh 7:2)

We, with our sentimental view of love in the West, have isolated love from fear. I am saying we need to put them back together again.

The fear of God begins the motivation to get right with God and do the things of God. It is the beginning of wisdom – an essential beginning. However, like a second stage booster on a rocket, fear may get you going, but then love completes the boost necessary for us to live God's purposes. So much so that Jesus taught clearly that the extent of our love for God is measured by the extent of our obedience to God (Jn 14:21). To love, cannot mean that we are less motivated to obey. Rather, love takes over as the main motivation for obedience. To stay simply with fear is to have an immature faith. John writes:

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgement, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love (1 Jn 4:16-18).

It was never God's intention that obedience be motivated entirely and solely by fear. Even in the Old Testament, love was also seen to be central. However, it is not a sloppy, ‘anything-goes’ sort of love, it is a love that motivates obedience. It is love against a background of holy awe and fear of God's righteousness and authority to judge our eternal destiny.

How can we get fear to work for us? Let's look at Isaiah 33:5-6.

The passage begins: *The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high.* This statement declares God's sovereignty, majesty and authority in the face of all the anxieties and appalling situations of life. In fact, this passage was originally written to the cream of Jewish society who had been carried off as captives to Babylon. In the face of the horrors of life, they needed to be reminded, as we do, that God is still over all.

The next phrase says: *he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness.* This continues the theme of God's sovereignty by stating that God will have the last

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word regarding what is right and what is just. God will have the last word and will ensure that justice and righteousness will characterise his kingdom – despite the terrible things that may now exist.

A beautiful sentence follows that give great assurance in the uncertain times we live in. Isaiah says that God, *will be the sure foundation for your times*. How we long for God's sure foundation in our time. At a time when our society doesn't want to be rescued from sinfulness; at a time when wisdom is passed over in favour of image and self-obsession; at a time when society despairs of what is true, Isaiah says that that God will be, *a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge*.

Now we come to the crunch statement. What is it that will unlock all these things for you? Isaiah tells us: *the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure* (Is 33:5-6).

The fear of the Lord is the key. It is fear that motivates you to get right with God and live for God. Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Fear of God is beginning to get things right. It means you understand that your eternal destiny is in God's hands. You are beginning to appreciate God's authority to judge your eternal destiny... and you've allowed this to motivate you to live for God's purposes.

However, it is my prayer that your faith matures beyond fear to also embrace love. Let love also motivate you to obey God. But never doubt, obedience matters – for the fear of God will get your obedience happening.

Will you allow God's word to instil in you a holy fear, awe and respect of God? Will you allow it to dance with love for God, and motivate you to be all that God invites you to be and do?

Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forever.

This service was provided by Nick Hawkes for HopeNet SA

God washes away sin – big-time!

Genesis 6-8

Say to the children:

Do you like to hear stories? Maybe Mum or Dad tells you stories sometimes. Everyone loves stories and sometimes stories are told to teach us things that are important. Guess what, even God tells us stories to teach us things that are important. In the first book of the Bible, God tells us a story about a terrible flood.

Leader's note: You might like to show a few pictures of floods. These are easily found with a web-search.

When people first heard this story, they would have remembered hearing about the terrible floods that occurred in the low, flat lands where two of the largest rivers on earth joined together. These rivers are called the Euphrates and the Tigris and they join together just before they empty into the Persian Gulf. Sometimes, these rivers flooded so badly that it seemed as if the whole earth was under water.

Leader's note: Older children might like to see these rivers on a map.

This is the story that God tells about a flood that did cover the whole earth. It comes from the first book of the Bible.

Once upon a time, the people who lived on the earth were very evil. They were selfish, greedy and cruel ...and did not love God. God could not bear the pain of their evil ways and so he decided to wipe them out with a giant flood.

However, not everyone was evil. God found one family who were kind, generous and who loved God. It was the family of Noah, his wife and his three sons. God therefore told Noah to build a giant boat from cypress wood. It had to be 140 meters long and 26 meters wide. (You might like to pace it out to see how big it was.) It was huge.

It had to be huge because God had told Noah to fill the boat with a male and a female of every type of animal on earth. God wanted to rescue the animals as well as Noah's family from the flood that was to come.

Then God made it rain and rain and rain. It rained heavily for 40 days non-stop and everything was flooded. Every evil person on earth died in the flood. However, Noah and his family, together with a pair of every animal that had lived on earth were safe in the Noah's boat. Noah's boat was called the "Ark". It floated on the floodwaters for many days until it came to shore on the gentle slope of a mountain, Mt Ararat.

It took ages for the flood waters to subside. Noah tested whether there was enough dry land outside to leave the Ark by letting a dove fly out of the ark. When the dove flew back, Noah knew there was not enough ground and trees for the dove to land

on. *The next time the dove flew back; he had a leaf from an olive tree in its beak. This told Noah that the trees were beginning to appear above water. Only when the dove did not fly back to the Ark did Noah know that a lot of dry ground had appeared at last. However, Noah waited until God told him it was completely safe before he left the Ark.*

God then told Noah's family and the all the animals to produce lots of children so that the land could be filled with animals and people again. God also made three important promises to them:

First, he declared he would love and care for all the new animals and people. (He said he would bless them.)

Second, he promised that never again would a flood kill everyone on earth.

Thirdly, God promised that there would always be a summer and winter and a time to sow and harvest crops from the field which would feed everyone.

As a sign of this promise, God made something that would always remind people of his promise. He made the rainbow.

Leaders note: Ask who has seen a rainbow and share rainbow stories.

So, whenever you look at a rainbow, you know that God loves you.

Leader's note: You might like to ask what the children can learn from this story. Key points include:

- 1) God hates selfishness, greed and cruelty and grieves when people do not love him
- 2) God will always ensure that life continue on earth for animals and human beings.
God will make sure that the world is always able to support life in some way
- 3) God wants to bless you.

You can finish by making all sorts of rainbows. You can shine a torch through a prism, flash the shiny side of CD so that it shows all the colours of a rainbow; or paint or draw.