

Living Freedom Through Recession

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

October 2020 (4 - 31 October)



During the month of October there are four key stories that can help to shape our thinking and reflections at this time of great uncertainty when many are looking for comfort and security. These stories cover a 40 year period and highlight four seminal moments in the salvation history of the people of Israel as they struggled with identity, hardship, and hope for a brighter future.

They are also stories that can be used to teach us about the nature and purpose of the church today, especially as we seek a new kind of freedom and understanding. Coming out of lockdown we are faced with an unprecedented recession and an uncertainty about how public worship should continue and develop.

The first story opens up a discussion about our attitude to worship and its essential role in maintaining our wellbeing. The second story engages with the temptation to worship false gods and how that eventually affects the health and wellbeing of those around us. The third and fourth story open up our thinking about leadership. How do you know when it is time to depart to make room for a new approach? We will learn from scripture about a leadership that models a godly way of living for the community.

These reflection are written to help us as Christians to be relevant and effective beacons of hope in our communities at a time when so many within the next few months will find themselves unemployed, fearful of illness, and facing financial hardships. This must be the moment for the church to re-engage with the meaning and significance of worship and good leadership so that it is meaningful and engaging for all.

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We are unable go back to church as we knew it. Yet surely we are being called to make a new journey, to free ourselves from past traditions and buildings and structures that are no longer relevant to God's mission for his church. The time has come for us to move into a new place of transition and commitment, embarking on a new and exciting faith journey. We hope that the readings this month will open our minds to go on the journey with the hope and assurance that we never travel alone.

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the adapt the monthly theme material (see [The Living Freedom Through Recession Resource Pack](#)) for small group work. They are divided into 4 parts to correspond with the 4 weeks of the Daily Worship theme.

These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests your group.

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Part 1: Worship is the key to freedom

Read Exodus 20: 1-6

What does worship mean to you? We often use the word 'worship' as a shorthand for church services in general or singing hymns in particular — but there are many ways of praising God.

How do you worship God? What helps you to connect and tune in? Quiet and calm or noise and vividness? Continuity or spontaneity? Music? Nature? Art? Reading? Journalling?

And however it is we worship — how do we ensure that these methods stay as useful tools and stop them becoming idols we worship instead of God?

Read Psalm 19

Calvin in his *Institutes of Christian Religion* speaks of how knowledge of God is first drawn from creation itself declaring the Glory of God. Creation draws us to the play of wonder and enquiry. This enquiry is the beginning of worship.

What do you see in the natural world that makes you want to worship God? It might be a category of thing (such as trees or being out in the mountains) or it might be very specific places or moments that have helped you worship God.

Read Philippians 3

Paul's words here are an evocative encouragement for us to strive together. How can we use our shared worship to help us press on to the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus? How can our shared life of worship with one another remind us that we are citizens of heaven?

And how can that knowledge affect how we live as everyday citizens in our communities here and now? We are facing difficult and unprecedented times, how can our shared worship help equip us to navigate them?

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Part 2: When distraction is temptation in recession

Read Exodus 32: 1-8

What are the 'golden calves' that we worship today? The things in our churches, our communities, and our societies that we idolise and invest our hopes in even though (shiny as they may be) they are ultimately hollow and unfulfilling?

Read Philippians 4: 1-9

It is absolutely understandable to seek distractions and escapism in the midst of bleak times — to try and numb ourselves to the dread and frustration of uncertainty. But Paul, instead of advocating distraction techniques, is inviting us to have a whole new blessed mindset. An attitude that doesn't ignore the world, but pays attention enough to spot the true, honourable, just and pleasing — even when things are difficult.

What are some 'lovely, or 'pleasing things' (see verse 8) that we can focus on as communities of faith? Not to help people escape their problems but rather to help them respond to the real issues they face with grace and compassion?

Read Isaiah 25: 1-9

Worship gives us an understanding and expectation of God's plans and in doing so helps us become hopeful.

Part of our heritage as followers of Jesus is an expectation of hope that has been passed down through the generations. Our faith doesn't tell us we won't suffer. It doesn't always fully explain (at least in this lifetime...) *why* we suffer. But it does tell us that our suffering is finite. It will end. There **is** hope.

And it also tells us that those who suffer are not worthless, or forgotten, or written off. Every tear will be wiped from every face.

In the midst of difficult times of upheaval when it is tempting to give up, how can we use our shared worship to help our wider communities see that there **is** hope?

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Part 3: Focused leadership in recession

Read Exodus 33: 12-23

Moses finds himself faced with his own vulnerable thoughts and feelings. He realises that he needs to be aware of God's presence in his life if he is going to lead effectively.

Do we ever say to God: "Now show me your glory."

What would happen if we did?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10

The early church was fragmented, uncertain, dynamic, fluid and so is the contemporary church in this time of pandemic. Encouraging one another was crucial then and it's crucial now that we take time to recognise what one another are doing.

What can we do to lead by example and encourage others in all the different communities we are a part of?

Read Matthew 22: 15-22

This passage reminds us that leadership requires insight and wisdom. This is an interesting passage to begin to reflect upon the role of Christian leaders in the midst of a recession and the role of the state. How can we complement each other?

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Part 4: After Recession — What? Leadership that plans ahead

Read Deuteronomy 34: 1-12

How do you think Moses felt — getting to glimpse but not cross over in to the promised land?

How do we feel when it comes to passing the reins on to others in our own lives?

Read Psalm 90

Taken as a body, the psalms contain a broad spectrum of human emotions from plummeting lows to soaring highs. This one psalm covers an enormous amount of territory — amazement, gratitude, fear, sadness, frustration, shame, anguish, delight, hope and most of all longing. The longing of the human soul for recognition, affirmation and belonging.

From the vantage point of this strange year we are living through, as we look back and forward to the year ahead, which verses stand out for you?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8

The leadership modelled here is humble and openhearted. The language in verses 7-8 is very tender.

As society and indeed churches are restructured in the face of pandemic and recession can communities of faith inspire our wider culture in gentler and more sensitive forms of leadership?