

Call to Worship

Romans 12:1-2. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the patterns of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

This is a time set aside for the worship of God the Father, the worship of God the Son, and we can only do this through the Spirit.

This time is holy, a time set aside to speak to God, to listen and hear from God.

It's a time to offer myself as a living sacrifice because this is my true worship.

A time to be transformed by the renewing of my mind, because this is how I know the will of God.

Prayer

Here I am Lord, a living sacrifice. Forgive me for sins committed and unconfessed, for sins of word and deed and omission. I am so sorry for drifting away from you.

Restore me now, transform me now so that I will be aware of your will, your perfect will for me.

Thank you, Lord. By your Spirit, help me to worship you. Amen.

Song: "O For a Thousand Tongues" (by Charles Wesley)

1. O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise
The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace!
2. My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim.
To spread through all the earth abroad the honours of thy name.
3. Jesus! The name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life, and health, and peace.
4. He speaks, and listening to His voice, new life the dead receive,
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe.
5. He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood availed for me.
6. See all your sins on Jesus laid: the Lamb of God was slain,
His soul was once an offering made for every soul of man.

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Prayer of Intercession

Loving Father, I pray for those suffering pain, and name those whom I know before you.

- The pain of physical illness or disability – restore their bodies and their spirits Lord by your comforting touch.

Factory Reset

- The pain of the loss of loved ones, of the capacity to do things as once they could, of a job – comfort them Lord, restore their hope.
- The pain of loneliness through bereavement, through isolation from social interaction – be close to them Lord, restore them to friendships and relationship
- The pain of persecution, those who because of their faith in you are attacked, have their homes, crops and churches burned, who are discriminated against and who are martyred in your name – strengthen their faith Lord, bless them for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

All these names I bring before you, Lord, in the name of Jesus.

Amen

Song: “My God is all I Need” (by Rich Thompson et al)

1. Dark, dark is the valley, faint, the light at my feet,
But whatever may face me, my God is all I need.
Bright, bright are the treasures life may offer me,
But whatever the pleasure, my God is all I need.
*He is my strength when I cannot go on, peace when all my power is gone,
Hope, although the night is long and deep,
He is my song, for He has rescued me, joy now He has set me free.
Praise, praise to my Father be, my God is all I need.*
2. Brief, brief are my days here, soon my journey complete,
But I look to my Saviour where God has met my need.
Yes, He has met my need.
3. My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there’s nothing my God cannot do
The mountains are His, the valleys are His, the stars are His handiwork too
My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there’s nothing my God cannot do.
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Bible Reading:

- Colossians 2:6-12
So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.
See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.
For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hand. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead.

Message: “Factory Reset”

Imagine that you have a car with a suite of electronic gizmos that make it run smoothly, but somehow its computer is not working, and the car won't drive properly. Or perhaps you have an older car where the timing is out, and it's misfiring and lacks power. If this happens, then we take it to a mechanic who does a “factory reset”. The motor is tuned, or the computer is reprogrammed, to get things back to normal.

Now imagine yourself in, say, the 16th century, lying back on a grassy knoll, enjoying the sunshine, watching the passage of the sun from east to west, marvelling at God's creation and giving him the glory that he set the sun in the sky and created day and night. It makes for perfect logic, with some scriptural evidence, to conclude that the Earth is fixed and that the sun has moved across or around it. I mean, you have been there for hours, and you haven't moved, but the sun has! All your scientific observations verify that your conclusions are correct, and that was the doctrine of the church at the time. Then, along comes Galileo and Kepler (a Christian I might add), to tell us that the reverse is true, and the earth actually revolves around the sun. A “factory reset” has just happened.

There are times when we do this with our faith. We sometimes take an isolated verse, from the Bible, and build an edifice on it, making inference upon inference without taking into account other truths. An example would be a church group based in Adelaide that believes, preaches and evangelises on the basis that unless you speak in tongues, you cannot be a Christian. I guess they have based this on the account of the day of Pentecost, and that many people in churches across the Roman Empire were encountering the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. But to make the inference that speaking in tongues is the mark of a Christian ignores the truth of what Jesus did on the cross to bear our sins and this is solely what reconciles us to the Father. And the truth of Jesus' resurrection, which gives us new life in him. I would suggest they need to go back to basics, back to the whole scriptures, back for a “factory reset”.

There may be times when we wonder what we can take for truth in the Bible. If we take seriously that this is the word of God, won't it all be true? Can't we take what Jesus said to be the truth? We are told in the Gospels that many came to Jesus bringing their sick and lame, and he healed them all (Matt 12:15). If it's true that he heals everybody, some may say why aren't I healed? There are whole books written about this issue that speak about this better than I can, but yes, it's true that Jesus heals, and many of us, me included, can testify to the amazing healing power of Jesus. And, there are also many faithful Christians who have not been healed (Paul included – 2 Cor 12:7). Even amongst those not healed, there are amazing testimonies of what God has done, how he has sustained, how he has been sufficient for them (2 Cor 12:9), how they have grown in faith. Jesus no doubt healed all that came on that day that Matthew recorded, but to build a theology of healing on that single verse, that Jesus heals everyone that asks, doesn't take into account other verses where Jesus didn't heal everybody, such as in his own hometown where faith in him was at a low ebb (Mark 6:5). A “factory reset” needed.

Factory Reset

It's a bit like Jesus saying that if we have faith and we tell a mountain to decamp into the sea, it will happen. One might ask, if this is the truth, why can't I think of one example where someone has done that.

This reminds me of a story out of Africa. A hyena was on a hilltop, and he sniffed the westerly breeze, and he could smell a dead antelope. He began to rush eagerly in that direction, but the wind changed to a northerly and he could smell a dead wild wildebeest. Just as he was rushing off, the wind changed to the east, and with it the whiff of dead giraffe. Before he moved, it changed to the south with the enticing aroma of dead zebra. The hyena rushed around in circles in a frenzy of indecision and fell into four pieces on the ground. A Westerner was asked, could this story be true? The reply? "Of course not. That's ridiculous. A hyena can't just fall into pieces." An African was asked if it could be true. And his reply was, "Absolutely. Greed destroys you. It tears you apart." And so it is with Jesus' statement about mountains. He was teaching a truth about faith, not earthmoving! Do we face mountains every day? Yes, and we can all testify that facing them with faith sees us overcome them and they disappear "into the sea". We sometimes need a "factory reset" to discern this truth.

We can be guilty of turning our habits and practices into Biblical truth. How much water should be used to baptise somebody? The Salvos don't use any. (Reminding me of the old quip - for the Baptists, it's a bath, for the Methodists, it's a shower, and for the Salvation Army, it's dry cleaning!) How big should the piece of bread be for Holy Communion? Grape juice or wine? I know of a student at theological college who had no juice when it was his turn to prepare so he used red jelly crystals. When it came to the time to distribute the elements, the jelly had set! Do we stand and sit for the hymns? Extempore prayers or liturgy? Pews or chairs? There so many things that we have done traditionally, that we feel comfortable with, and are unwilling to change even for the sake of sharing the gospel effectively in our community. If any of these decisions or choices become truth for us, we may need to do a "factory reset". We need to worship God in spirit and in truth with no stipulation about the size of the cubes of communion bread!

In my own church we have the joy and challenge of increasing numbers of Chinese people. This means that we often have had muted voices happening in the church as people are translating for others. Now we have some radio receivers so there is only one muted voice translating for all. It has been difficult to give up the silence that we have always expected when someone is preaching. The few kids we have go to a table at the side of the church for their craft activity after the Kids' Talk. There goes our cherished silence again! There are a few cultural things that we have to live with but what a small price to pay for the eagerness with which they hear the gospel.

Perhaps the largest historical "factory reset" was the Reformation. Up to the 16th Century the church had built up all sorts of non- or vaguely scriptural practices. The most abused were indulgences - briefly, payment for God's grace in the forgiveness of sins. Martin Luther made a courageous stand against these practices. The ensuing "factory reset", restored strong scriptural teaching which endures to this day in Protestant churches and triggered a "reset" in the Roman Catholic Church as well.

Factory Reset

So, we should check our practices, enjoying them by all means, but not turning them into law. We should check our faith foundations against God's Word and against the creeds that have stood strong over millennia. And we should check to see that we are not led astray (Colossians 2:8 above), and that our lives are rooted and built up in Christ Jesus is our Lord.

Song: “There is one Gospel” (*by Robinson/Thompson*)

1. There is one gospel on which I stand for all eternity
It is my story, my Father's plan, the Son has rescued me.
Oh what a Gospel, oh what a peace, my highest joy and my deepest need.
Now and forever He is my light. I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. There is one Gospel to which I cling, all else I count but loss,
For there, where justice and mercy meet, He saved me on the cross.
No more I boast in what I can bring, no more I carry the weight of sin,
For He has brought me from death to life. I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. There is one Gospel where hope is found, the empty tomb still speaks,
For death could not keep my Saviour down, He lives and I am free.
Now on my Saviour I fix my eyes, my life is His and His hope is mine!
For He has promised, I too, shall rise. I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. And in this Gospel the church is one, we do not walk alone.
We have His Spirit as we press on to lead us safely home,
And when in glory still I will sing of this old story that rescued me.
Praise to my Saviour, the King of life, I stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Benediction

Lord, as I walk into this week, walk beside me. As I face this week's mountains, give me the faith to cast them into the sea. And as I walk, transform me so that my life will be true worship of you.

In Jesus' name.

Amen

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA