

Sometimes in life it's important to hit the pause button and take a moment to reflect and celebrate, whether it's for a birthday, a graduation, a house warming party, or the start of a new job. Throughout the scriptures, God's people took time to regularly celebrate God's goodness and the things he had done for them by hosting special feasts at home and by participating in special times of worship at the temple. This morning we want to do church a little differently. We want to hit the pause button this morning and take some time to celebrate the pursuit and journey of intimacy with God that we have been on together these last number of months. So this morning we are going to take some extended time in worship, a number of people will be coming forward to share a brief story of how God has recently shown up in their life or Home Group. And to conclude our time together, there's going to be an invitation to come and present your heart to God in a fresh way. There will be an invitation to come receive from God in prayer ministry for whatever need or greater desire to know God that you have.

If you have been with us over the past number of months, you know that we have been pressing more deeply into our relationship with God as a church family and as individuals in a couple of significant ways. We began in January by setting aside a Spiritual Emphasis week where we invited pastors Sunder and Shyamala Krishnan to come and teach on how prayer is tied to the way God sovereignly works out his purposes in and through our lives. That Spiritual Emphasis week launched us into a 40 day journey of prayer, where many of you spent additional daily and weekly time with God using one of the daily prayer journals we made available online. Over the 40 days, 12 groups, 58 individuals made use of the prayer room over a period of 171 hours. During those 40 days, we met for corporate prayer for on 7 Thursday evenings, where together, we interceded for our community, our church family, and each of those nights we prayed over anyone wanting a fresh touch from God. We have never taken on a 40 day journey like this before. It's been incredibly encouraging to see the way God has been growing us in the pursuit of intimacy with Him!

Today marks the conclusion of our "Pursuing Intimacy" teaching series. And for me, it has been a delight to see the way God has been touching people's lives and growing our desire to bring ourselves before him as we have moved into a place of increasing freedom. When people are pursuing intimacy with God, church is never boring. God responds to the worship and cries of his people! Coming together like this becomes a catalyst for finding new life in Christ.

Unfortunately, many people have the exact opposite idea of church – that it's for the dead.

There's a story of a young boy named Alex who was staring up at a large plaque that hung in the foyer of his church. It was covered with names and two flags were mounted on either side of it. The boy had been staring at the plaque for sometime, so one of the ushers went up to Alex and greeted him. Young Alex asked the usher what the plaque was about. The usher answered, "Well son, it's a memorial to all the men and women who died in the service." Soberly, the two stood together looking at the plaque. Finally, little Alex took the courage to quietly ask with a tremble in his voice, "Which service? The 9 or 11?"

A gathering of worship is anything but dead. It's a time of finding life, where together we are being made alive to Christ as we give God worship. In Psalm 22 it says that God enthrones himself on the praises of his people.

In the Book of Revelation it says that our prayers are like incense going up before God – he considers them a sweet sacrifice made before him:

Revelation 5:7-8

[Jesus] went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

Let's worship and invite the Spirit to make us fully alive to His presence.