



# RETURN<sup>AND</sup> REFRESH

NEXT STEPS<sup>FOR OUR</sup>  
CHURCH FAMILY<sup>IN 2022</sup>



# RETURN AND REFRESH

## Coming through Covid...

The bible tells us God never wastes a moment of our life, or a season, for that matter. He is the Lord of whom the Psalmist says:

“YOU HAVE SEARCHED ME, LORD, AND YOU KNOW ME. YOU KNOW WHEN I SIT AND WHEN I RISE; YOU PERCEIVE MY THOUGHTS FROM AFAR.”

(PSALM 139:-12)

Coming out of Covid many are reporting the experience of a renewed spiritual searching. The ‘things’ of this world have made way for ‘thoughts’ about the world, and our place in it. McCrindle research tells us that during the pandemic almost half of Australians (47%) thought more about the meaning of life, or their own mortality. A third of Australians (33%) have thought more about God, while three in ten (28%) have prayed more.<sup>1</sup>



The picture in church life has been similar. Churchgoers speak of taking greater responsibility for their own growth in faith and spirituality. There has been increased membership of Small groups. People are reading their bibles more regularly and enjoying a richer prayer life. These blessings have sustained congregations of God’s people through the challenging and changing seasons of the past couple of years. While the most recent lockdown for many carried a heavier burden on our wellbeing (because we’d been through one before) the prayerful perseverance and resilience of God’s people was his presence and power at work in the life of the church.

## Where to from here?

Over recent weeks we’ve been sharing the Road Map for our church life. The pathway representing our **RETURN AND REFRESH** theme can be represented as follows:



<sup>1</sup> ‘Australia’s spiritual climate By Mark McCrindle & Sophie Renton’ is used by permission, McCrindle Research.

## Anticipate, together...

November is a month of **anticipation** in at least two ways:

### 1. **RETURN. Anticipate being together.**

During the Covid season there were many online gains in staying connected as the people of God. We celebrate the resourcefulness of those in our congregations who made livestreams possible, and others who encouraged us in our walk of faith through the mediums of Zoom and the like. We give thanks for the upgrades in our IT & AV and the benefit this has been in constantly changing environments. The outcome has been that those who just won't be able to come to church in person now have an additional means of being blessed in their fellowship that didn't exist before Covid.

As we return to our congregational meetings we are not just coming back to a service, but a gathering. The attitude we bring is as important as the experience we have. Walking into church is as much an act of encouragement as singing (see *How to Walk into Church*, by Tony Payne). We have the words of eternal life. Let them bring blessing to all as we gather together once again.

### 2. **REFRESH. Anticipate the coming year together.**

We know that:

WITH THE LORD A DAY IS LIKE A THOUSAND YEARS, AND A THOUSAND YEARS ARE LIKE A DAY.  
(2 PETER 3:8)

This gives us the ability to plan for and prepare for the next 12 months (or the next 12 years if we wished), all with the perspective that God's sovereign and guiding grace will bring us through the seasons until the day of his Son's return.

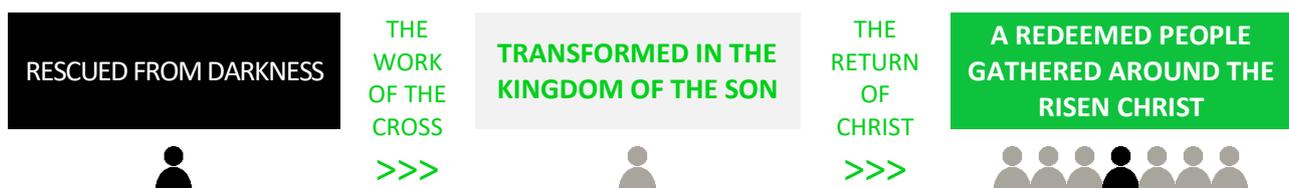
THE LORD IS NOT SLOW IN KEEPING HIS PROMISE, AS SOME UNDERSTAND SLOWNESS. INSTEAD HE IS PATIENT WITH YOU, NOT WANTING ANYONE TO PERISH, BUT EVERYONE TO COME TO REPENTANCE.  
(2 PETER 3:9)

The Apostle Peter will go on to say that holy and godly living will speed on its coming (1 Peter 3:11).

So what does holy and godly living look like?

## Making Disciples, together...

Our chief responsibility, under God, as we **RETURN AND REFRESH** is to be **making and growing disciple making disciples of Jesus**. The gospel reveals this task as taking place through the work of the cross, and being completed at the return of Christ:



Remarkably, by his grace, God calls us to be a part of his disciple making plans, equipping and empowering us to take the words of eternal life to those who don't yet know Jesus as Lord, and to build one another up as Christ transforms us together. **We make disciples because Jesus calls us to (Matthew 28:18-20) as part of God's eternal plan (Revelation 7:9-17).**

## Being transformed, together...

Disciples are made by the persevering proclamation of the word of the God by the people of God, in prayerful dependence on the Spirit of God. As fellow workers we work side by and side step-by-step in the goal of glorifying Jesus Christ. These four realities are a work of God in the life of a healthy church:

**PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD**

**PRAYERFUL DEPENDENCE**

**PEOPLE AS FELLOW WORKERS**

**PERSEVERING STEP BY STEP**

When these activities are the culture of a church, the transformation or growth taking place in its members can be represented by a 'moving to the right' along the following pathway:



THE DISCIPESHIP PATHWAY

The first thing people who do not know Christ need is to meet and **engage** with a Christian. The next step for them is to hear the gospel, to be **evangelised**. For those who have responded to the gospel, being **established** as a Christian and growing in godliness is a walk that will continue for the rest of their lives. They will then benefit from being **equipped** through teaching, encouragement, modelling and prayer, to then encourage others in moving to the right.

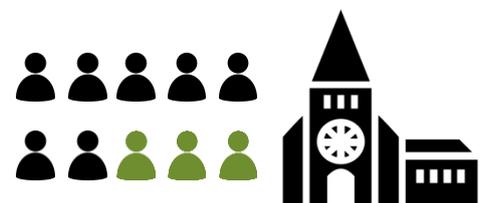
**The outcome of this disciple-making culture is multiply.** Every activity we engage in as a growing family of God's people is oriented toward how we can multiply disciple-making disciples (spiritually and numerically), as we prepare for the coming of Christ and his kingdom.

## RETURN AND REFRESH | NEXT STEPS

### Engage, together...

As we enter 2022 we are going to spend some time thinking more about each of the steps along the discipleship pathway, with a particular focus on the first step of **ENGAGE**.

Three in ten Australians are extremely or very likely to attend a church service online (31%) or in-person (33%) if they were invited by a family member. The percentage is even higher among Gen Z (45%).<sup>2</sup>



Bringing people to church is only part of the picture. Reaching out to our family and friends, others we work with, and to the communities we live in, reminds us that the church needs to go out to the world if it is going to share the hope of the gospel. Australians have been increasingly isolated over these past two years, so our acts of kindness, generosity and compassion to family, friends and neighbours can have a big impact.

<sup>2</sup> McCrindle Research.

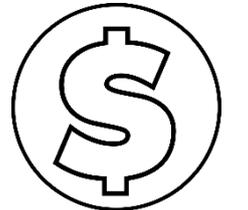
## Prepare, together...

During November we are asking all the households in our church family to take steps to prepare for the coming year.

Firstly, spend time in the word by working through the **two bible studies** that are a part of our **RETURN AND REFRESH** preaching series during November. If you are a part of a Small Group then this can be a shared activity. Or it could be that you just wish to work through it personally, or with a group of friends. Whatever the case, our prayer is that spending this time in the book of Philippians will build a platform for the Kingdom opportunities before us in 2022.

Secondly, commit what you have learnt from the studies to **prayer**. Set some personal goals for the changes you'd like to see take place in your own life (or household, or small group, or congregation) for the coming year. Commit them to the Lord. These could be as simple as inviting someone to church, greeting someone you don't know at a service each week, sitting in a different seat each month, joining a small group, learning 12 memory verses, reading a book on reaching the lost, enrolling in a course on pastoral care, joining a Love Team...

Thirdly, be deliberate about **financially partnering** in the ministry of the church. Make your commitment for 12 months and during November put things in place for 2022. Determine an annual figure and decide on a frequency. Just like you would for your health insurance or electricity, set up regular arrangements for your contributions. Earlier this year the Wardens encouraged us to be **regular, generous and cheerful** in our giving as they encouraged us to think about our habits of supporting gospel ministry. Now is the time to strengthen our commitment to the work of the gospel in the coming year.



# STUDY 1 | RETURN & REFRESH

## Philippians 2:1-11 | Who We Are

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### About Philippians

The central theme of the book may be best expressed in the words of 1:27:

**“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”**

Paul is encouraging the Philippians to stand firm for the gospel in the face of persecution and opposition. Their partnership in the gospel (with God, Paul and one another) is emphasised from the opening verses (1:3-6) and a reminder that the Christian faith is personal but never private.

Alongside the encouragement to Christ-like humility (2:1-11) exemplified in Paul’s fellow-servants Timothy & Epaphroditus (2:18-30), the apostle explains the foundation of his own ministry. He has no confidence in the flesh (3:4), declaring anything he may have achieved in his life is considered as loss for the sake of knowing Christ and being found in him (3:8-10).

As Paul presses on in anticipation of the return of Christ (3:20-21) he pleads for unity (4:2-3), prayerful dependence (4:6-7), contentment (4:11-12) and generosity before the God who meets all our needs (4:19).

In this season of life the ‘Whatever happens’ encouragement of Philippians will be a strength and guide as we seek to stand with Christ and in Christ and shine like stars in the universe, holding on to and holding out the Word of Life (2:16).

### Getting Started...

1. How would you describe the culture of our church?
2. As we look to 2022 what do you think is the most important ‘next thing’ for our church?

### Thinking it through...

Read Philippians 1:3-8

3. A partnership is outlined in these verses. What is its purpose? What is its term? What is the benefit for those in it?
4. If you were part of a new small group (ie bible study group) starting up, how would this partnership shape the aim of your group?
5. As you looked to a new year of belonging to God’s people, how does this partnership help you think about your part in the church?

## Read Philippians 2:1-11

6. What does an authentic experience of church look like in vv 1-4?
  
7. In your experience, what are the obstacles that stand in the way of this?
  
8. If we are to have the same mindset of Christ (v 5), what do you think are the essentials of our church life?
  
9. How does God respond to Jesus' humility in vv 9-11? How should we respond?

## Where to from here?

10. From your look at Philippians, which of the following do you think best describes the culture of our church?
  - Club
  - Service I attend
  - Family
  - Denomination
  - Alliance
  - Fellowship
  - Association
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. Having looked at the book of Philippians, return question 2. Has your answer changed?

12. Pray about the part you can play in the life of our church family in 2022.

## STUDY 2 | RETURN & REFRESH

# Revelation 7:9-17 | Where We're Going

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## About Revelation

The book is actually a very long letter designed to be read aloud to the seven churches (1:3-4). The seven short letters within the long letter suggest John must have felt that each church needed to hear Christ's message to the other churches. The book describes two visions; the first *to the churches* (chs 1-3) the second *to the extraordinary journey God's people must make* (chs 4-20) before the New Jerusalem descends upon them (chs 21-22).

It is to Jesus Christ that the most attention is given in this book. He has been given the honour of ruling history, and is worshipped as the Father is worshipped (3:21; 5:13). He is first and the last, like his Father (1:8 cf. Ex 3:14) and he is the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9). He is the lion of Judah who has brought about victory through his death, through which he has made it possible to enter the Kingdom (5:9). His death, rather than solely his divinity, bring about Jesus' Lordship. The lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered (5:5) through the cross and defeated all enemies and powers once and for all.

There are four episodes within the journey described in chs 4-20. The first describes *tyranny* (chs 6-7); the second chaos in *creation* (chs 8-11); the third *persecution of believers* (chs 12-14); and the fourth *the destruction of the earth* (chs 15-16). These are four overlapping/concurrent strands of history through which Christ's people must live, commencing from his resurrection (1:5-6), and culminating in his return (1:7).

John wrote to first century churches that were under the dominance and influence of the Roman Empire. Much of the letter employs parallelism between the rule of Caesar/Rome and the rule of God/the heavenly Kingdom. The most urgent challenge by John is that his readers worship God and the redeemer Lamb, not the pseudo and pretentious counterpart, the Roman Emperor, who himself was hailed as a god. Worship was the test of true conviction and loyalty. To worship one was to deny the other. If we say "yes" to God and the Lamb, we must also say "no" to every false alternative.

Revelation 7 inserts a vision of comfort and courage for the servant of Christ into the 'this world' cycle of chaos repeated throughout the book. Verses 7-12 record the *praise* given to the Lamb at the centre of the throne. Vv 13-19 outline the *protection* provided to his servants who remain faithful to the end.

## Getting Started...

1. What do you think is the most urgent task of the church?
2. Cast your mind forward to the end of 2022. What would 'good health' look like for our church?

## Thinking it through...

Read Revelation 7:9-17

3. What do you learn about the end towards which God is moving everything?
  
4. What is the place of Jesus Christ in God's plans?
  
5. What is the significance of Jesus' death for God's plans?
  
6. What is the place of humanity in God's plans?
  
7. What implications does the picture of the end have for making disciples of Jesus?
  
8. What habits and patterns in our church support a disciple-making culture? What don't?

## Where to from here?

9. What are the benefits of having a clear picture of the end to which God is moving us? How might this translate into the life of a church?
  
10. How would you finish this sentence? 'We make disciples because...'
  
11. Having looked at Revelation 7, ask question 2 again. Has your answer changed?